

The Novels and Novellas of Joseph Conrad - Part 2

Joseph Conrad

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Under Western Eyes

This 1911 novel takes place in St. Petersburg, Russia and Geneva, Switzerland and is viewed as Conrad's reply to the themes explored in *Crime and Punishment*, as Conrad was reputed to have detested Dostoyevsky. This novel is considered to be one of Conrad's major works and is close in subject matter to *The Secret Agent*. It is full of cynicism and conflict about the historical failures of revolutionary movements and ideals.

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Part 1

To begin with I wish to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself, after the Russian custom, Cyril son of Isidor — Kirylo Sidorovitch — Razumov.

If I have ever had these gifts in any sort of living form they have been smothered out of existence a long time ago under a wilderness of words. Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality. I have been for many years a teacher of languages. It is an occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation, and insight an ordinary person may be heir to. To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot.

This being so, I could not have observed Mr. Razumov or guessed at his reality by the force of insight, much less have imagined him as he was. Even to invent the mere bald facts of his life would have been utterly beyond my powers. But I think that without this declaration the readers of these pages will be able to detect in the story the marks of documentary evidence. And that is perfectly correct. It is based on a document; all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language, which is sufficient for what is attempted here. The document, of course, is something in the nature of a journal, a diary, yet not exactly that in its actual form. For instance, most of it was not written up from day to day, though all the entries are dated. Some of these entries cover months of time and extend over dozens of pages. All the earlier part is a retrospect, in a narrative form, relating to an event which took place about a year before.

I must mention that I have lived for a long time in Geneva. A whole quarter of that town, on account of many Russians residing there, is called La Petite Russie — Little Russia. I had a rather extensive connexion in Little Russia at that time. Yet I confess that I have no comprehension of the Russian character. The illogicality of their attitude, the arbitrariness of their conclusions, the frequency of the exceptional, should present no difficulty to a student of many grammars; but there must be something else in the way, some special human trait — one of those subtle differences that are beyond the ken of mere professors. What must remain striking to a teacher of languages is the Russians' extraordinary love of words. They gather them up; they cherish them, but they don't hoard them in their breasts; on the contrary, they are always ready to pour them out by the hour or by the night with an enthusiasm, a sweeping abundance, with such an aptness of application sometimes that, as in the case of very accomplished

parrots, one can't defend oneself from the suspicion that they really understand what they say. There is a generosity in their ardour of speech which removes it as far as possible from common loquacity; and it is ever too disconnected to be classed as eloquence... But I must apologize for this digression.

It would be idle to inquire why Mr. Razumov has left this record behind him. It is inconceivable that he should have wished any human eye to see it. A mysterious impulse of human nature comes into play here. Putting aside Samuel Pepys, who has forced in this way the door of immortality, innumerable people, criminals, saints, philosophers, young girls, statesmen, and simple imbeciles, have kept self-revealing records from vanity no doubt, but also from other more inscrutable motives. There must be a wonderful soothing power in mere words since so many men have used them for self-communion. Being myself a quiet individual I take it that what all men are really after is some form or perhaps only some formula of peace. Certainly they are crying loud enough for it at the present day. What sort of peace Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov expected to find in the writing up of his record it passeth my understanding to guess.

The fact remains that he has written it.

Mr. Razumov was a tall, well-proportioned young man, quite unusually dark for a Russian from the Central Provinces. His good looks would have been unquestionable if it had not been for a peculiar lack of fineness in the features. It was as if a face modelled vigorously in wax (with some approach even to a classical correctness of type) had been held close to a fire till all sharpness of line had been lost in the softening of the material. But even thus he was sufficiently good-looking. His manner, too, was good. In discussion he was easily swayed by argument and authority. With his younger compatriots he took the attitude of an inscrutable listener, a listener of the kind that hears you out intelligently and then — just changes the subject.

This sort of trick, which may arise either from intellectual insufficiency or from an imperfect trust in one's own convictions, procured for Mr. Razumov a reputation of profundity. Amongst a lot of exuberant talkers, in the habit of exhausting themselves daily by ardent discussion, a comparatively taciturn personality is naturally credited with reserve power. By his comrades at the St. Petersburg University, Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov, third year's student in philosophy, was looked upon as a strong nature — an altogether trustworthy man. This, in a country where an opinion may be a legal crime visited by death or sometimes by a fate worse than mere death, meant that he was worthy of being trusted with forbidden opinions. He was liked also for his amiability and for his quiet readiness to oblige his comrades even at the cost of personal inconvenience.

Mr. Razumov was supposed to be the son of an Archpriest and to be protected by a distinguished nobleman — perhaps of his own distant province. But his outward appearance accorded badly with such humble origin. Such a descent was not credible. It was, indeed, suggested that Mr. Razumov was the son of an Archpriest's pretty daughter — which, of course, would put a different complexion on the matter. This

theory also rendered intelligible the protection of the distinguished nobleman. All this, however, had never been investigated maliciously or otherwise. No one knew or cared who the nobleman in question was. Razumov received a modest but very sufficient allowance from the hands of an obscure attorney, who seemed to act as his guardian in some measure. Now and then he appeared at some professor's informal reception. Apart from that Razumov was not known to have any social relations in the town. He attended the obligatory lectures regularly and was considered by the authorities as a very promising student. He worked at home in the manner of a man who means to get on, but did not shut himself up severely for that purpose. He was always accessible, and there was nothing secret or reserved in his life.

Chapter 1

The origin of Mr. Razumov's record is connected with an event characteristic of modern Russia in the actual fact: the assassination of a prominent statesman — and still more characteristic of the moral corruption of an oppressed society where the noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companions of an uneasy despotism.

The fact alluded to above is the successful attempt on the life of Mr. de P — , the President of the notorious Repressive Commission of some years ago, the Minister of State invested with extraordinary powers. The newspapers made noise enough about that fanatical, narrow-chested figure in gold-laced uniform, with a face of crumpled parchment, insipid, bespectacled eyes, and the cross of the Order of St. Procopius hung under the skinny throat. For a time, it may be remembered, not a month passed without his portrait appearing in some one of the illustrated papers of Europe. He served the monarchy by imprisoning, exiling, or sending to the gallows men and women, young and old, with an equable, unwearied industry. In his mystic acceptance of the principle of autocracy he was bent on extirpating from the land every vestige of anything that resembled freedom in public institutions; and in his ruthless persecution of the rising generation he seemed to aim at the destruction of the very hope of liberty itself.

It is said that this execrated personality had not enough imagination to be aware of the hate he inspired. It is hardly credible; but it is a fact that he took very few precautions for his safety. In the preamble of a certain famous State paper he had declared once that "the thought of liberty has never existed in the Act of the Creator. From the multitude of men's counsel nothing could come but revolt and disorder; and revolt and disorder in a world created for obedience and stability is sin. It was not Reason but Authority which expressed the Divine Intention. God was the Autocrat of the Universe..." It may be that the man who made this declaration believed that heaven itself was bound to protect him in his remorseless defence of Autocracy on this earth.

No doubt the vigilance of the police saved him many times; but, as a matter of fact, when his appointed fate overtook him, the competent authorities could not have given him any warning. They had no knowledge of any conspiracy against the Minister's life, had no hint of any plot through their usual channels of information, had seen no signs, were aware of no suspicious movements or dangerous persons.

Mr. de P — - was being driven towards the railway station in a two-horse uncovered sleigh with footman and coachman on the box. Snow had been falling all night, making the roadway, uncleared as yet at this early hour, very heavy for the horses. It was still falling thickly. But the sleigh must have been observed and marked down. As it drew over to the left before taking a turn, the footman noticed a peasant walking slowly on the edge of the pavement with his hands in the pockets of his sheepskin coat and his shoulders hunched up to his ears under the falling snow. On being overtaken this peasant suddenly faced about and swung his arm. In an instant there was a terrible shock, a detonation muffled in the multitude of snowflakes; both horses lay dead and mangled on the ground and the coachman, with a shrill cry, had fallen off the box mortally wounded. The footman (who survived) had no time to see the face of the man in the sheepskin coat. After throwing the bomb this last got away, but it is supposed that, seeing a lot of people surging up on all sides of him in the falling snow, and all running towards the scene of the explosion, he thought it safer to turn back with them.

In an incredibly short time an excited crowd assembled round the sledge. The Minister-President, getting out unhurt into the deep snow, stood near the groaning coachman and addressed the people repeatedly in his weak, colourless voice: "I beg of you to keep off: For the love of God, I beg of you good people to keep off."

It was then that a tall young man who had remained standing perfectly still within a carriage gateway, two houses lower down, stepped out into the street and walking up rapidly flung another bomb over the heads of the crowd. It actually struck the Minister-President on the shoulder as he stooped over his dying servant, then falling between his feet exploded with a terrific concentrated violence, striking him dead to the ground, finishing the wounded man and practically annihilating the empty sledge in the twinkling of an eye. With a yell of horror the crowd broke up and fled in all directions, except for those who fell dead or dying where they stood nearest to the Minister-President, and one or two others who did not fall till they had run a little way.

The first explosion had brought together a crowd as if by enchantment, the second made as swiftly a solitude in the street for hundreds of yards in each direction. Through the falling snow people looked from afar at the small heap of dead bodies lying upon each other near the carcasses of the two horses. Nobody dared to approach till some Cossacks of a street-patrol galloped up and, dismounting, began to turn over the dead. Amongst the innocent victims of the second explosion laid out on the pavement there was a body dressed in a peasant's sheepskin coat; but the face was unrecognisable,

there was absolutely nothing found in the pockets of its poor clothing, and it was the only one whose identity was never established.

That day Mr. Razumov got up at his usual hour and spent the morning within the University buildings listening to the lectures and working for some time in the library. He heard the first vague rumour of something in the way of bomb-throwing at the table of the students' ordinary, where he was accustomed to eat his two o'clock dinner. But this rumour was made up of mere whispers, and this was Russia, where it was not always safe, for a student especially, to appear too much interested in certain kinds of whispers. Razumov was one of those men who, living in a period of mental and political unrest, keep an instinctive hold on normal, practical, everyday life. He was aware of the emotional tension of his time; he even responded to it in an indefinite way. But his main concern was with his work, his studies, and with his own future.

Officially and in fact without a family (for the daughter of the Archpriest had long been dead), no home influences had shaped his opinions or his feelings. He was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality. There were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere. His closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was a Russian. Whatever good he expected from life would be given to or withheld from his hopes by that connexion alone. This immense parentage suffered from the throes of internal dissensions, and he shrank mentally from the fray as a good-natured man may shrink from taking definite sides in a violent family quarrel.

Razumov, going home, reflected that having prepared all the matters of the forthcoming examination, he could now devote his time to the subject of the prize essay. He hankered after the silver medal. The prize was offered by the Ministry of Education; the names of the competitors would be submitted to the Minister himself. The mere fact of trying would be considered meritorious in the higher quarters; and the possessor of the prize would have a claim to an administrative appointment of the better sort after he had taken his degree. The student Razumov in an access of elation forgot the dangers menacing the stability of the institutions which give rewards and appointments. But remembering the medallist of the year before, Razumov, the young man of no parentage, was sobered. He and some others happened to be assembled in their comrade's rooms at the very time when that last received the official advice of his success. He was a quiet, unassuming young man: "Forgive me," he had said with a faint apologetic smile and taking up his cap, "I am going out to order up some wine. But I must first send a telegram to my folk at home. I say! Won't the old people make it a festive time for the neighbours for twenty miles around our place."

Razumov thought there was nothing of that sort for him in the world. His success would matter to no one. But he felt no bitterness against the nobleman his protector, who was not a provincial magnate as was generally supposed. He was in fact nobody less than Prince K — —, once a great and splendid figure in the world and now, his day being over, a Senator and a gouty invalid, living in a still splendid but more domestic manner. He had some young children and a wife as aristocratic and proud as himself.

In all his life Razumov was allowed only once to come into personal contact with the Prince.

It had the air of a chance meeting in the little attorney's office. One day Razumov, coming in by appointment, found a stranger standing there — a tall, aristocratic-looking Personage with silky, grey sidewhiskers. The bald-headed, sly little lawyer-fellow called out, "Come in — come in, Mr. Razumov," with a sort of ironic heartiness. Then turning deferentially to the stranger with the grand air, "A ward of mine, your Excellency. One of the most promising students of his faculty in the St. Petersburg University."

To his intense surprise Razumov saw a white shapely hand extended to him. He took it in great confusion (it was soft and passive) and heard at the same time a condescending murmur in which he caught only the words "Satisfactory" and "Persevere." But the most amazing thing of all was to feel suddenly a distinct pressure of the white shapely hand just before it was withdrawn: a light pressure like a secret sign. The emotion of it was terrible. Razumov's heart seemed to leap into his throat. When he raised his eyes the aristocratic personage, motioning the little lawyer aside, had opened the door and was going out.

The attorney rummaged amongst the papers on his desk for a time. "Do you know who that was?" he asked suddenly.

Razumov, whose heart was thumping hard yet, shook his head in silence.

"That was Prince K — -. You wonder what he could be doing in the hole of a poor legal rat like myself — eh? These awfully great people have their sentimental curiosities like common sinners. But if I were you, Kirylo Sidorovitch," he continued, leering and laying a peculiar emphasis on the patronymic, "I wouldn't boast at large of the introduction. It would not be prudent, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Oh dear no! It would be in fact dangerous for your future."

The young man's ears burned like fire; his sight was dim. "That man!" Razumov was saying to himself. "He!"

Henceforth it was by this monosyllable that Mr. Razumov got into the habit of referring mentally to the stranger with grey silky side-whiskers. From that time too, when walking in the more fashionable quarters, he noted with interest the magnificent horses and carriages with Prince K — -'s liveries on the box. Once he saw the Princess get out — she was shopping — followed by two girls, of which one was nearly a head taller than the other. Their fair hair hung loose down their backs in the English style; they had merry eyes, their coats, muffs, and little fur caps were exactly alike, and their cheeks and noses were tinged a cheerful pink by the frost. They crossed the pavement in front of him, and Razumov went on his way smiling shyly to himself. "His" daughters. They resembled "Him." The young man felt a glow of warm friendliness towards these girls who would never know of his existence. Presently they would marry Generals or Kammerherrns and have girls and boys of their own, who perhaps would be aware of him as a celebrated old professor, decorated, possibly a Privy Councillor, one of the glories of Russia — nothing more!

But a celebrated professor was a somebody. Distinction would convert the label Razumov into an honoured name. There was nothing strange in the student Razumov's wish for distinction. A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love. Returning home on the day of the attempt on Mr. de P — -'s life Razumov resolved to have a good try for the silver medal.

Climbing slowly the four flights of the dark, dirty staircase in the house where he had his lodgings, he felt confident of success. The winner's name would be published in the papers on New Year's Day. And at the thought that "He" would most probably read it there, Razumov stopped short on the stairs for an instant, then went on smiling faintly at his own emotion. "This is but a shadow," he said to himself, "but the medal is a solid beginning."

With those ideas of industry in his head the warmth of his room was agreeable and encouraging. "I shall put in four hours of good work," he thought. But no sooner had he closed the door than he was horribly startled. All black against the usual tall stove of white tiles gleaming in the dusk, stood a strange figure, wearing a skirted, close-fitting, brown cloth coat strapped round the waist, in long boots, and with a little Astrakhan cap on its head. It loomed lithe and martial. Razumov was utterly confounded. It was only when the figure advancing two paces asked in an untroubled, grave voice if the outer door was closed that he regained his power of speech.

"Haldin!... Victor Victorovitch!... Is that you?... Yes. The outer door is shut all right. But this is indeed unexpected."

Victor Haldin, a student older than most of his contemporaries at the University, was not one of the industrious set. He was hardly ever seen at lectures; the authorities had marked him as "restless" and "unsound" — very bad notes. But he had a great personal prestige with his comrades and influenced their thoughts. Razumov had never been intimate with him. They had met from time to time at gatherings in other students' houses. They had even had a discussion together — one of those discussions on first principles dear to the sanguine minds of youth.

Razumov wished the man had chosen some other time to come for a chat. He felt in good trim to tackle the prize essay. But as Haldin could not be slightly dismissed Razumov adopted the tone of hospitality, asking him to sit down and smoke.

"Kirylo Sidorovitch," said the other, flinging off his cap, "we are not perhaps in exactly the same camp. Your judgment is more philosophical. You are a man of few words, but I haven't met anybody who dared to doubt the generosity of your sentiments. There is a solidity about your character which cannot exist without courage."

Razumov felt flattered and began to murmur shyly something about being very glad of his good opinion, when Haldin raised his hand.

"That is what I was saying to myself," he continued, "as I dodged in the woodyard down by the river-side. 'He has a strong character this young man,' I said to myself. 'He does not throw his soul to the winds.' Your reserve has always fascinated me, Kirylo Sidorovitch. So I tried to remember your address. But look here — it was a piece of luck. Your dvornik was away from the gate talking to a sleigh-driver on the other side

of the street. I met no one on the stairs, not a soul. As I came up to your floor I caught sight of your landlady coming out of your rooms. But she did not see me. She crossed the landing to her own side, and then I slipped in. I have been here two hours expecting you to come in every moment.”

Razumov had listened in astonishment; but before he could open his mouth Haldin added, speaking deliberately, “It was I who removed de P — - this morning.” Razumov kept down a cry of dismay. The sentiment of his life being utterly ruined by this contact with such a crime expressed itself quaintly by a sort of half-derisive mental exclamation, “There goes my silver medal!”

Haldin continued after waiting a while —

“You say nothing, Kirylo Sidorovitch! I understand your silence. To be sure, I cannot expect you with your frigid English manner to embrace me. But never mind your manners. You have enough heart to have heard the sound of weeping and gnashing of teeth this man raised in the land. That would be enough to get over any philosophical hopes. He was uprooting the tender plant. He had to be stopped. He was a dangerous man — a convinced man. Three more years of his work would have put us back fifty years into bondage — and look at all the lives wasted, at all the souls lost in that time.”

His curt, self-confident voice suddenly lost its ring and it was in a dull tone that he added, “Yes, brother, I have killed him. It’s weary work.”

Razumov had sunk into a chair. Every moment he expected a crowd of policemen to rush in. There must have been thousands of them out looking for that man walking up and down in his room. Haldin was talking again in a restrained, steady voice. Now and then he flourished an arm, slowly, without excitement.

He told Razumov how he had brooded for a year; how he had not slept properly for weeks. He and “Another” had a warning of the Minister’s movements from “a certain person” late the evening before. He and that “Another” prepared their “engines” and resolved to have no sleep till “the deed” was done. They walked the streets under the falling snow with the “engines” on them, exchanging not a word the livelong night. When they happened to meet a police patrol they took each other by the arm and pretended to be a couple of peasants on the spree. They reeled and talked in drunken hoarse voices. Except for these strange outbreaks they kept silence, moving on ceaselessly. Their plans had been previously arranged. At daybreak they made their way to the spot which they knew the sledge must pass. When it appeared in sight they exchanged a muttered good-bye and separated. The “other” remained at the corner, Haldin took up a position a little farther up the street...

After throwing his “engine” he ran off and in a moment was overtaken by the panic-struck people flying away from the spot after the second explosion. They were wild with terror. He was jostled once or twice. He slowed down for the rush to pass him and then turned to the left into a narrow street. There he was alone.

He marvelled at this immediate escape. The work was done. He could hardly believe it. He fought with an almost irresistible longing to lie down on the pavement and sleep.

But this sort of faintness — a drowsy faintness — passed off quickly. He walked faster, making his way to one of the poorer parts of the town in order to look up Ziemianitch.

This Ziemianitch, Razumov understood, was a sort of town-peasant who had got on; owner of a small number of sledges and horses for hire. Haldin paused in his narrative to exclaim —

“A bright spirit! A hardy soul! The best driver in St. Petersburg. He has a team of three horses there... Ah! He’s a fellow!”

This man had declared himself willing to take out safely, at any time, one or two persons to the second or third railway station on one of the southern lines. But there had been no time to warn him the night before. His usual haunt seemed to be a low-class eating-house on the outskirts of the town. When Haldin got there the man was not to be found. He was not expected to turn up again till the evening. Haldin wandered away restlessly.

He saw the gate of a woodyard open and went in to get out of the wind which swept the bleak broad thoroughfare. The great rectangular piles of cut wood loaded with snow resembled the huts of a village. At first the watchman who discovered him crouching amongst them talked in a friendly manner. He was a dried-up old man wearing two ragged army coats one over the other; his wizened little face, tied up under the jaw and over the ears in a dirty red handkerchief, looked comical. Presently he grew sulky, and then all at once without rhyme or reason began to shout furiously.

“Aren’t you ever going to clear out of this, you loafer? We know all about factory hands of your sort. A big, strong, young chap! You aren’t even drunk. What do you want here? You don’t frighten us. Take yourself and your ugly eyes away.”

Haldin stopped before the sitting Razumov. His supple figure, with the white forehead above which the fair hair stood straight up, had an aspect of lofty daring.

“He did not like my eyes,” he said. “And so...here I am.”

Razumov made an effort to speak calmly.

“But pardon me, Victor Victorovitch. We know each other so little... I don’t see why you...”

“Confidence,” said Haldin.

This word sealed Razumov’s lips as if a hand had been clapped on his mouth. His brain seethed with arguments.

“And so — here you are,” he muttered through his teeth.

The other did not detect the tone of anger. Never suspected it.

“Yes. And nobody knows I am here. You are the last person that could be suspected — should I get caught. That’s an advantage, you see. And then — speaking to a superior mind like yours I can well say all the truth. It occurred to me that you — you have no one belonging to you — no ties, no one to suffer for it if this came out by some means. There have been enough ruined Russian homes as it is. But I don’t see how my passage through your rooms can be ever known. If I should be got hold of, I’ll know how to keep silent — no matter what they may be pleased to do to me,” he added grimly.

He began to walk again while Razumov sat still appalled.

“You thought that — ” he faltered out almost sick with indignation.

“Yes, Razumov. Yes, brother. Some day you shall help to build. You suppose that I am a terrorist, now — a destructor of what is, But consider that the true destroyers are they who destroy the spirit of progress and truth, not the avengers who merely kill the bodies of the persecutors of human dignity. Men like me are necessary to make room for self-contained, thinking men like you. Well, we have made the sacrifice of our lives, but all the same I want to escape if it can be done. It is not my life I want to save, but my power to do. I won't live idle. Oh no! Don't make any mistake, Razumov. Men like me are rare. And, besides, an example like this is more awful to oppressors when the perpetrator vanishes without a trace. They sit in their offices and palaces and quake. All I want you to do is to help me to vanish. No great matter that. Only to go by and by and see Ziemianitch for me at that place where I went this morning. Just tell him, ‘He whom you know wants a well-horsed sledge to pull up half an hour after midnight at the seventh lamp-post on the left counting from the upper end of Karabelnaya. If nobody gets in, the sledge is to run round a block or two, so as to come back past the same spot in ten minutes’ time.”

Razumov wondered why he had not cut short that talk and told this man to go away long before. Was it weakness or what?

He concluded that it was a sound instinct. Haldin must have been seen. It was impossible that some people should not have noticed the face and appearance of the man who threw the second bomb. Haldin was a noticeable person. The police in their thousands must have had his description within the hour. With every moment the danger grew. Sent out to wander in the streets he could not escape being caught in the end.

The police would very soon find out all about him. They would set about discovering a conspiracy. Everybody Haldin had ever known would be in the greatest danger. Unguarded expressions, little facts in themselves innocent would be counted for crimes. Razumov remembered certain words he said, the speeches he had listened to, the harmless gatherings he had attended — it was almost impossible for a student to keep out of that sort of thing, without becoming suspect to his comrades.

Razumov saw himself shut up in a fortress, worried, badgered, perhaps ill-used. He saw himself deported by an administrative order, his life broken, ruined, and robbed of all hope. He saw himself — at best — leading a miserable existence under police supervision, in some small, faraway provincial town, without friends to assist his necessities or even take any steps to alleviate his lot — as others had. Others had fathers, mothers, brothers, relations, connexions, to move heaven and earth on their behalf — he had no one. The very officials that sentenced him some morning would forget his existence before sunset.

He saw his youth pass away from him in misery and half starvation — his strength give way, his mind become an abject thing. He saw himself creeping, broken down and shabby, about the streets — dying unattended in some filthy hole of a room, or on the sordid bed of a Government hospital.

He shuddered. Then the peace of bitter calmness came over him. It was best to keep this man out of the streets till he could be got rid of with some chance of escaping. That was the best that could be done. Razumov, of course, felt the safety of his lonely existence to be permanently endangered. This evening's doings could turn up against him at any time as long as this man lived and the present institutions endured. They appeared to him rational and indestructible at that moment. They had a force of harmony — in contrast with the horrible discord of this man's presence. He hated the man. He said quietly —

“Yes, of course, I will go. ‘You must give me precise directions, and for the rest — depend on me.’”

“Ah! You are a fellow! Collected — cool as a cucumber. A regular Englishman. Where did you get your soul from? There aren't many like you. Look here, brother! Men like me leave no posterity, but their souls are not lost. No man's soul is ever lost. It works for itself — or else where would be the sense of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, of conviction, of faith — the labours of the soul? What will become of my soul when I die in the way I must die — soon — very soon perhaps? It shall not perish. Don't make a mistake, Razumov. This is not murder — it is war, war. My spirit shall go on warring in some Russian body till all falsehood is swept out of the world. The modern civilization is false, but a new revelation shall come out of Russia. Ha! you say nothing. You are a sceptic. I respect your philosophical scepticism, Razumov, but don't touch the soul. The Russian soul that lives in all of us. It has a future. It has a mission, I tell you, or else why should I have been moved to do this — reckless — like a butcher — in the middle of all these innocent people — scattering death — I! I!... I wouldn't hurt a fly!”

“Not so loud,” warned Razumov harshly.

Haldin sat down abruptly, and leaning his head on his folded arms burst into tears. He wept for a long time. The dusk had deepened in the room. Razumov, motionless in sombre wonder, listened to the sobs.

The other raised his head, got up and with an effort mastered his voice.

“Yes. Men like me leave no posterity,” he repeated in a subdued tone, “I have a sister though. She's with my old mother — I persuaded them to go abroad this year — thank God. Not a bad little girl my sister. She has the most trustful eyes of any human being that ever walked this earth. She will marry well, I hope. She may have children — sons perhaps. Look at me. My father was a Government official in the provinces, He had a little land too. A simple servant of God — a true Russian in his way. His was the soul of obedience. But I am not like him. They say I resemble my mother's eldest brother, an officer. They shot him in '28. Under Nicholas, you know. Haven't I told you that this is war, war... But God of Justice! This is weary work.”

Razumov, in his chair, leaning his head on his hand, spoke as if from the bottom of an abyss.

“You believe in God, Haldin?”

“There you go catching at words that are wrung from one. What does it matter? What was it the Englishman said: ‘There is a divine soul in things...’ Devil take him — I don’t remember now. But he spoke the truth. When the day of you thinkers comes don’t you forget what’s divine in the Russian soul — and that’s resignation. Respect that in your intellectual restlessness and don’t let your arrogant wisdom spoil its message to the world. I am speaking to you now like a man with a rope round his neck. What do you imagine I am? A being in revolt? No. It’s you thinkers who are in everlasting revolt. I am one of the resigned. When the necessity of this heavy work came to me and I understood that it had to be done — what did I do? Did I exult? Did I take pride in my purpose? Did I try to weigh its worth and consequences? No! I was resigned. I thought ‘God’s will be done.’”

He threw himself full length on Razumov’s bed and putting the backs of his hands over his eyes remained perfectly motionless and silent. Not even the sound of his breathing could be heard. The dead stillness of the room remained undisturbed till in the darkness Razumov said gloomily —

“Haldin.”

“Yes,” answered the other readily, quite invisible now on the bed and without the slightest stir.

“Isn’t it time for me to start?”

“Yes, brother.” The other was heard, lying still in the darkness as though he were talking in his sleep. “The time has come to put fate to the test.”

He paused, then gave a few lucid directions in the quiet impersonal voice of a man in a trance. Razumov made ready without a word of answer. As he was leaving the room the voice on the bed said after him —

“Go with God, thou silent soul.”

On the landing, moving softly, Razumov locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

Chapter 2

The words and events of that evening must have been graven as if with a steel tool on Mr. Razumov’s brain since he was able to write his relation with such fullness and precision a good many months afterwards.

The record of the thoughts which assailed him in the street is even more minute and abundant. They seem to have rushed upon him with the greater freedom because his thinking powers were no longer crushed by Haldin’s presence — the appalling presence of a great crime and the stunning force of a great fanaticism. On looking through the pages of Mr. Razumov’s diary I own that a “rush of thoughts” is not an adequate image.

The more adequate description would be a tumult of thoughts — the faithful reflection of the state of his feelings. The thoughts in themselves were not numerous — they were like the thoughts of most human beings, few and simple — but they cannot be

reproduced here in all their exclamatory repetitions which went on in an endless and weary turmoil — for the walk was long.

If to the Western reader they appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper, it must be remembered that as to the first this may be the effect of my crude statement. For the rest I will only remark here that this is not a story of the West of Europe.

Nations it may be have fashioned their Governments, but the Governments have paid them back in the same coin. It is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov's situation. This being so it would be a vain enterprise to imagine what he would think. The only safe surmise to make is that he would not think as Mr. Razumov thought at this crisis of his fate. He would not have an hereditary and personal knowledge or the means by which historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence. By an act of mental extravagance he might imagine himself arbitrarily thrown into prison, but it would never occur to him unless he were delirious (and perhaps not even then) that he could be beaten with whips as a practical measure either of investigation or of punishment.

This is but a crude and obvious example of the different conditions of Western thought. I don't know that this danger occurred, specially, to Mr. Razumov. No doubt it entered unconsciously into the general dread and the general appallingness of this crisis. Razumov, as has been seen, was aware of more subtle ways in which an individual may be undone by the proceedings of a despotic Government. A simple expulsion from the University (the very least that could happen to him), with an impossibility to continue his studies anywhere, was enough to ruin utterly a young man depending entirely upon the development of his natural abilities for his place in the world. He was a Russian: and for him to be implicated meant simply sinking into the lowest social depths amongst the hopeless and the destitute — the night birds of the city.

The peculiar circumstances of Razumov's parentage, or rather of his lack of parentage, should be taken into the account of his thoughts. And he remembered them too. He had been lately reminded of them in a peculiarly atrocious way by this fatal Haldin. "Because I haven't that, must everything else be taken away from me?" he thought.

He nerved himself for another effort to go on. Along the roadway sledges glided phantom-like and jingling through a fluttering whiteness on the black face of the night. "For it is a crime," he was saying to himself. "A murder is a murder. Though, of course, some sort of liberal institutions..."

A feeling of horrible sickness came over him. "I must be courageous," he exhorted himself mentally. All his strength was suddenly gone as if taken out by a hand. Then by a mighty effort of will it came back because he was afraid of fainting in the street and being picked up by the police with the key of his lodgings in his pocket. They would find Haldin there, and then, indeed, he would be undone.

Strangely enough it was this fear which seems to have kept him up to the end. The passers-by were rare. They came upon him suddenly, looming up black in the snowflakes close by, then vanishing all at once-without footfalls.

It was the quarter of the very poor. Razumov noticed an elderly woman tied up in ragged shawls. Under the street lamp she seemed a beggar off duty. She walked leisurely in the blizzard as though she had no home to hurry to, she hugged under one arm a round loaf of black bread with an air of guarding a priceless booty: and Razumov averting his glance envied her the peace of her mind and the serenity of her fate.

To one reading Mr. Razumov's narrative it is really a wonder how he managed to keep going as he did along one interminable street after another on pavements that were gradually becoming blocked with snow. It was the thought of Haldin locked up in his rooms and the desperate desire to get rid of his presence which drove him forward. No rational determination had any part in his exertions. Thus, when on arriving at the low eating-house he heard that the man of horses, Ziemianitch, was not there, he could only stare stupidly.

The waiter, a wild-haired youth in tarred boots and a pink shirt, exclaimed, uncovering his pale gums in a silly grin, that Ziemianitch had got his skinful early in the afternoon and had gone away with a bottle under each arm to keep it up amongst the horses — he supposed.

The owner of the vile den, a bony short man in a dirty cloth caftan coming down to his heels, stood by, his hands tucked into his belt, and nodded confirmation.

The reek of spirits, the greasy rancid steam of food got Razumov by the throat. He struck a table with his clenched hand and shouted violently —

“You lie.”

Bleary unwashed faces were turned to his direction. A mild-eyed ragged tramp drinking tea at the next table moved farther away. A murmur of wonder arose with an undertone of uneasiness. A laugh was heard too, and an exclamation, “There! there!” jeeringly soothing. The waiter looked all round and announced to the room —

“The gentleman won't believe that Ziemianitch is drunk.”

From a distant corner a hoarse voice belonging to a horrible, nondescript, shaggy being with a black face like the muzzle of a bear grunted angrily —

“The cursed driver of thieves. What do we want with his gentlemen here? We are all honest folk in this place.”

Razumov, biting his lip till blood came to keep himself from bursting into imprecations, followed the owner of the den, who, whispering “Come along, little father,” led him into a tiny hole of a place behind the wooden counter, whence proceeded a sound of splashing. A wet and bedraggled creature, a sort of sexless and shivering scarecrow, washed glasses in there, bending over a wooden tub by the light of a tallow dip.

“Yes, little father,” the man in the long caftan said plaintively. He had a brown, cunning little face, a thin greyish beard. Trying to light a tin lantern he hugged it to his breast and talked garrulously the while.

He would show Ziemianitch to the gentleman to prove there were no lies told. And he would show him drunk. His woman, it seems, ran away from him last night. “Such a hag she was! Thin! Pfui!” He spat. They were always running away from that driver

of the devil — and he sixty years old too; could never get used to it. But each heart knows sorrow after its own kind and Ziemianitch was a born fool all his days. And then he would fly to the bottle. “‘Who could bear life in our land without the bottle?’ he says. A proper Russian man — the little pig... Be pleased to follow me.”

Razumov crossed a quadrangle of deep snow enclosed between high walls with innumerable windows. Here and there a dim yellow light hung within the four-square mass of darkness. The house was an enormous slum, a hive of human vermin, a monumental abode of misery towering on the verge of starvation and despair.

In a corner the ground sloped sharply down, and Razumov followed the light of the lantern through a small doorway into a long cavernous place like a neglected subterranean byre. Deep within, three shaggy little horses tied up to rings hung their heads together, motionless and shadowy in the dim light of the lantern. It must have been the famous team of Haldin’s escape. Razumov peered fearfully into the gloom. His guide pawed in the straw with his foot.

“Here he is. Ah! the little pigeon. A true Russian man. ‘No heavy hearts for me,’ he says. ‘Bring out the bottle and take your ugly mug out of my sight.’ Ha! ha! ha! That’s the fellow he is.”

He held the lantern over a prone form of a man, apparently fully dressed for outdoors. His head was lost in a pointed cloth hood. On the other side of a heap of straw protruded a pair of feet in monstrous thick boots.

“Always ready to drive,” commented the keeper of the eating-house. “A proper Russian driver that. Saint or devil, night or day is all one to Ziemianitch when his heart is free from sorrow. ‘I don’t ask who you are, but where you want to go,’ he says. He would drive Satan himself to his own abode and come back chirruping to his horses. Many a one he has driven who is clanking his chains in the Nertchinsk mines by this time.”

Razumov shuddered.

“Call him, wake him up,” he faltered out.

The other set down his light, stepped back and launched a kick at the prostrate sleeper. The man shook at the impact but did not move. At the third kick he grunted but remained inert as before.

The eating-house keeper desisted and fetched a deep sigh.

“You see for yourself how it is. We have done what we can for you.”

He picked up the lantern. The intense black spokes of shadow swung about in the circle of light. A terrible fury — the blind rage of self-preservation — possessed Razumov.

“Ah! The vile beast,” he bellowed out in an unearthly tone which made the lantern jump and tremble! “I shall wake you! Give me...give me...”

He looked round wildly, seized the handle of a stablefork and rushing forward struck at the prostrate body with inarticulate cries. After a time his cries ceased, and the rain of blows fell in the stillness and shadows of the cellar-like stable. Razumov belaboured Ziemianitch with an insatiable fury, in great volleys of sounding thwacks. Except for

the violent movements of Razumov nothing stirred, neither the beaten man nor the spoke-like shadows on the walls. And only the sound of blows was heard. It was a weird scene.

Suddenly there was a sharp crack. The stick broke and half of it flew far away into the gloom beyond the light. At the same time Ziemianitch sat up. At this Razumov became as motionless as the man with the lantern — only his breast heaved for air as if ready to burst.

Some dull sensation of pain must have penetrated at last the consoling night of drunkenness enwrapping the “bright Russian soul” of Haldin’s enthusiastic praise. But Ziemianitch evidently saw nothing. His eyeballs blinked all white in the light once, twice — then the gleam went out. For a moment he sat in the straw with closed eyes with a strange air of weary meditation, then fell over slowly on his side without making the slightest sound. Only the straw rustled a little. Razumov stared wildly, fighting for his breath. After a second or two he heard a light snore.

He flung from him the piece of stick remaining in his grasp, and went off with great hasty strides without looking back once.

After going heedlessly for some fifty yards along the street he walked into a snowdrift and was up to his knees before he stopped.

This recalled him to himself; and glancing about he discovered he had been going in the wrong direction. He retraced his steps, but now at a more moderate pace. When passing before the house he had just left he flourished his fist at the sombre refuge of misery and crime rearing its sinister bulk on the white ground. It had an air of brooding. He let his arm fall by his side — discouraged.

Ziemianitch’s passionate surrender to sorrow and consolation had baffled him. That was the people. A true Russian man! Razumov was glad he had beaten that brute — the “bright soul” of the other. Here they were: the people and the enthusiast.

Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and the true character of men. It was a sort of terrible childishness. But children had their masters. “Ah! the stick, the stick, the stern hand,” thought Razumov, longing for power to hurt and destroy.

He was glad he had thrashed that brute. The physical exertion had left his body in a comfortable glow. His mental agitation too was clarified as if all the feverishness had gone out of him in a fit of outward violence. Together with the persisting sense of terrible danger he was conscious now of a tranquil, unquenchable hate.

He walked slower and slower. And indeed, considering the guest he had in his rooms, it was no wonder he lingered on the way. It was like harbouring a pestilential disease that would not perhaps take your life, but would take from you all that made life worth living — a subtle pest that would convert earth into a hell.

What was he doing now? Lying on the bed as if dead, with the back of his hands over his eyes? Razumov had a morbidly vivid vision of Haldin on his bed — the white pillow hollowed by the head, the legs in long boots, the upturned feet. And in his

abhorrence he said to himself, "I'll kill him when I get home." But he knew very well that that was of no use. The corpse hanging round his neck would be nearly as fatal as the living man. Nothing short of complete annihilation would do. And that was impossible. What then? Must one kill oneself to escape this visitation?

Razumov's despair was too profoundly tinged with hate to accept that issue.

And yet it was despair — nothing less — at the thought of having to live with Haldin for an indefinite number of days in mortal alarm at every sound. But perhaps when he heard that this "bright soul" of Ziemianitch suffered from a drunken eclipse the fellow would take his infernal resignation somewhere else. And that was not likely on the face of it.

Razumov thought: "I am being crushed — and I can't even run away." Other men had somewhere a corner of the earth — some little house in the provinces where they had a right to take their troubles. A material refuge. He had nothing. He had not even a moral refuge — the refuge of confidence. To whom could he go with this tale — in all this great, great land?

Razumov stamped his foot — and under the soft carpet of snow felt the hard ground of Russia, inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic mother hiding her face under a winding-sheet — his native soil! — his very own — without a fireside, without a heart!

He cast his eyes upwards and stood amazed. The snow had ceased to fall, and now, as if by a miracle, he saw above his head the clear black sky of the northern winter, decorated with the sumptuous fires of the stars. It was a canopy fit for the resplendent purity of the snows.

Razumov received an almost physical impression of endless space and of countless millions.

He responded to it with the readiness of a Russian who is born to an inheritance of space and numbers. Under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, levelling everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history. It covered the passive land with its lives of countless people like Ziemianitch and its handful of agitators like this Haldin — murdering foolishly.

It was a sort of sacred inertia. Razumov felt a respect for it. A voice seemed to cry within him, "Don't touch it." It was a guarantee of duration, of safety, while the travail of maturing destiny went on — a work not of revolutions with their passionate levity of action and their shifting impulses — but of peace. What it needed was not the conflicting aspirations of a people, but a will strong and one: it wanted not the babble of many voices, but a man — strong and one!

Razumov stood on the point of conversion. He was fascinated by its approach, by its overpowering logic. For a train of thought is never false. The falsehood lies deep in the necessities of existence, in secret fears and half-formed ambitions, in the secret

confidence combined with a secret mistrust of ourselves, in the love of hope and the dread of uncertain days.

In Russia, the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations, many brave minds have turned away at last from the vain and endless conflict to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience as a weary unbeliever, touched by grace, turns to the faith of his fathers for the blessing of spiritual rest. Like other Russians before him, Razumov, in conflict with himself, felt the touch of grace upon his forehead.

“Haldin means disruption,” he thought to himself, beginning to walk again. “What is he with his indignation, with his talk of bondage — with his talk of God’s justice? All that means disruption. Better that thousands should suffer than that a people should become a disintegrated mass, helpless like dust in the wind. Obscurantism is better than the light of incendiary torches. The seed germinates in the night. Out of the dark soil springs the perfect plant. But a volcanic eruption is sterile, the ruin of the fertile ground. And am I, who love my country — who have nothing but that to love and put my faith in — am I to have my future, perhaps my usefulness, ruined by this sanguinary fanatic?”

The grace entered into Razumov. He believed now in the man who would come at the appointed time.

What is a throne? A few pieces of wood upholstered in velvet. But a throne is a seat of power too. The form of government is the shape of a tool — an instrument. But twenty thousand bladders inflated by the noblest sentiments and jostling against each other in the air are a miserable incumbrance of space, holding no power, possessing no will, having nothing to give.

He went on thus, heedless of the way, holding a discourse with himself with extraordinary abundance and facility. Generally his phrases came to him slowly, after a conscious and painstaking wooing. Some superior power had inspired him with a flow of masterly argument as certain converted sinners become overwhelmingly loquacious.

He felt an austere exultation.

“What are the luridly smoky lucubrations of that fellow to the clear grasp of my intellect?” he thought. “Is not this my country? Have I not got forty million brothers?” he asked himself, unanswerably victorious in the silence of his breast. And the fearful thrashing he had given the inanimate Ziemianitch seemed to him a sign of intimate union, a pathetically severe necessity of brotherly love. “No! If I must suffer let me at least suffer for my convictions, not for a crime my reason — my cool superior reason — rejects.”

He ceased to think for a moment. The silence in his breast was complete. But he felt a suspicious uneasiness, such as we may experience when we enter an unlighted strange place — the irrational feeling that something may jump upon us in the dark — the absurd dread of the unseen.

Of course he was far from being a moss-grown reactionary. Everything was not for the best. Despotic bureaucracy... abuses... corruption... and so on. Capable men

were wanted. Enlightened intelligences. Devoted hearts. But absolute power should be preserved — the tool ready for the man — for the great autocrat of the future. Razumov believed in him. The logic of history made him unavoidable. The state of the people demanded him, “What else?” he asked himself ardently, “could move all that mass in one direction? Nothing could. Nothing but a single will.”

He was persuaded that he was sacrificing his personal longings of liberalism — rejecting the attractive error for the stern Russian truth. “That’s patriotism,” he observed mentally, and added, “There’s no stopping midway on that road,” and then remarked to himself, “I am not a coward.”

And again there was a dead silence in Razumov’s breast. He walked with lowered head, making room for no one. He walked slowly and his thoughts returning spoke within him with solemn slowness.

“What is this Haldin? And what am I? Only two grains of sand. But a great mountain is made up of just such insignificant grains. And the death of a man or of many men is an insignificant thing. Yet we combat a contagious pestilence. Do I want his death? No! I would save him if I could — but no one can do that — he is the withered member which must be cut off. If I must perish through him, let me at least not perish with him, and associated against my will with his sombre folly that understands nothing either of men or things. Why should I leave a false memory?”

It passed through his mind that there was no one in the world who cared what sort of memory he left behind him. He exclaimed to himself instantly, “Perish vainly for a falsehood!... What a miserable fate!”

He was now in a more animated part of the town. He did not remark the crash of two colliding sledges close to the curb. The driver of one bellowed tearfully at his fellow —

“Oh, thou vile wretch!”

This hoarse yell, let out nearly in his ear, disturbed Razumov. He shook his head impatiently and went on looking straight before him. Suddenly on the snow, stretched on his back right across his path, he saw Haldin, solid, distinct, real, with his inverted hands over his eyes, clad in a brown close-fitting coat and long boots. He was lying out of the way a little, as though he had selected that place on purpose. The snow round him was untrodden.

This hallucination had such a solidity of aspect that the first movement of Razumov was to reach for his pocket to assure himself that the key of his rooms was there. But he checked the impulse with a disdainful curve of his lips. He understood. His thought, concentrated intensely on the figure left lying on his bed, had culminated in this extraordinary illusion of the sight. Razumov tackled the phenomenon calmly. With a stern face, without a check and gazing far beyond the vision, he walked on, experiencing nothing but a slight tightening of the chest. After passing he turned his head for a glance, and saw only the unbroken track of his footsteps over the place where the breast of the phantom had been lying.

Razumov walked on and after a little time whispered his wonder to himself.

“Exactly as if alive! Seemed to breathe! And right in my way too! I have had an extraordinary experience.”

He made a few steps and muttered through his set teeth —

“I shall give him up.”

Then for some twenty yards or more all was blank. He wrapped his cloak closer round him. He pulled his cap well forward over his eyes.

“Betray. A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience. And how is my conscience engaged here; by what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him? On the contrary — every obligation of true courage is the other way.”

Razumov looked round from under his cap.

“What can the prejudice of the world reproach me with? Have I provoked his confidence? No! Have I by a single word, look, or gesture given him reason to suppose that I accepted his trust in me? No! It is true that I consented to go and see his Ziemianitch. Well, I have been to see him. And I broke a stick on his back too — the brute.”

Something seemed to turn over in his head bringing uppermost a singularly hard, clear facet of his brain.

“It would be better, however,” he reflected with a quite different mental accent, “to keep that circumstance altogether to myself.”

He had passed beyond the turn leading to his lodgings, and had reached a wide and fashionable street. Some shops were still open, and all the restaurants. Lights fell on the pavement where men in expensive fur coats, with here and there the elegant figure of a woman, walked with an air of leisure. Razumov looked at them with the contempt of an austere believer for the frivolous crowd. It was the world — those officers, dignitaries, men of fashion, officials, members of the Yacht Club. The event of the morning affected them all. What would they say if they knew what this student in a cloak was going to do?

“Not one of them is capable of feeling and thinking as deeply as I can. How many of them could accomplish an act of conscience?”

Razumov lingered in the well-lighted street. He was firmly decided. Indeed, it could hardly be called a decision. He had simply discovered what he had meant to do all along. And yet he felt the need of some other mind’s sanction.

With something resembling anguish he said to himself —

“I want to be understood.” The universal aspiration with all its profound and melancholy meaning assailed heavily Razumov, who, amongst eighty millions of his kith and kin, had no heart to which he could open himself.

The attorney was not to be thought of. He despised the little agent of chicane too much. One could not go and lay one’s conscience before the policeman at the corner. Neither was Razumov anxious to go to the chief of his district’s police — a common-looking person whom he used to see sometimes in the street in a shabby uniform and with a smouldering cigarette stuck to his lower lip. “He would begin by locking me up

most probably. At any rate, he is certain to get excited and create an awful commotion," thought Razumov practically.

An act of conscience must be done with outward dignity.

Razumov longed desperately for a word of advice, for moral support. Who knows what true loneliness is — not the conventional word, but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion. Now and then a fatal conjunction of events may lift the veil for an instant. For an instant only. No human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad.

Razumov had reached that point of vision. To escape from it he embraced for a whole minute the delirious purpose of rushing to his lodgings and flinging himself on his knees by the side of the bed with the dark figure stretched on it; to pour out a full confession in passionate words that would stir the whole being of that man to its innermost depths; that would end in embraces and tears; in an incredible fellowship of souls — such as the world had never seen. It was sublime!

Inwardly he wept and trembled already. But to the casual eyes that were cast upon him he was aware that he appeared as a tranquil student in a cloak, out for a leisurely stroll. He noted, too, the sidelong, brilliant glance of a pretty woman — with a delicate head, and covered in the hairy skins of wild beasts down to her feet, like a frail and beautiful savage — which rested for a moment with a sort of mocking tenderness on the deep abstraction of that good-looking young man.

Suddenly Razumov stood still. The glimpse of a passing grey whisker, caught and lost in the same instant, had evoked the complete image of Prince K — -, the man who once had pressed his hand as no other man had pressed it — a faint but lingering pressure like a secret sign, like a half-unwilling caress.

And Razumov marvelled at himself. Why did he not think of him before!

"A senator, a dignitary, a great personage, the very man — He!"

A strange softening emotion came over Razumov — made his knees shake a little. He repressed it with a new-born austerity. All that sentiment was pernicious nonsense. He couldn't be quick enough; and when he got into a sledge he shouted to the driver — "to the K — - Palace. Get on — you! Fly!" The startled moujik, bearded up to the very whites of his eyes, answered obsequiously —

"I hear, your high Nobility."

It was lucky for Razumov that Prince K — - was not a man of timid character. On the day of Mr. de P — -'s murder an extreme alarm and despondency prevailed in the high official spheres.

Prince K — -, sitting sadly alone in his study, was told by his alarmed servants that a mysterious young man had forced his way into the hall, refused to tell his name and the nature of his business, and would not move from there till he had seen his Excellency in private. Instead of locking himself up and telephoning for the police, as nine out of ten high personages would have done that evening, the Prince gave way to curiosity and came quietly to the door of his study.

In the hall, the front door standing wide open, he recognised at once Razumov, pale as death, his eyes blazing, and surrounded by perplexed lackeys.

The Prince was vexed beyond measure, and even indignant. But his humane instincts and a subtle sense of self-respect could not allow him to let this young man be thrown out into the street by base menials. He retreated unseen into his room, and after a little rang his bell. Razumov heard in the hall an ominously raised harsh voice saying somewhere far away —

“Show the gentleman in here.”

Razumov walked in without a tremor. He felt himself invulnerable — raised far above the shallowness of common judgment. Though he saw the Prince looking at him with black displeasure, the lucidity of his mind, of which he was very conscious, gave him an extraordinary assurance. He was not asked to sit down.

Half an hour later they appeared in the hall together. The lackeys stood up, and the Prince, moving with difficulty on his gouty feet, was helped into his furs. The carriage had been ordered before. When the great double door was flung open with a crash, Razumov, who had been standing silent with a lost gaze but with every faculty intensely on the alert, heard the Prince’s voice —

“Your arm, young man.”

The mobile, superficial mind of the ex-Guards officer, man of showy missions, experienced in nothing but the arts of gallant intrigue and worldly success, had been equally impressed by the more obvious difficulties of such a situation and by Razumov’s quiet dignity in stating them.

He had said, “No. Upon the whole I can’t condemn the step you ventured to take by coming to me with your story. It is not an affair for police understrappers. The greatest importance is attached to... Set your mind at rest. I shall see you through this most extraordinary and difficult situation.”

Then the Prince rose to ring the bell, and Razumov, making a short bow, had said with deference —

“I have trusted my instinct. A young man having no claim upon anybody in the world has in an hour of trial involving his deepest political convictions turned to an illustrious Russian — that’s all.”

The Prince had exclaimed hastily —

“You have done well.”

In the carriage — it was a small brougham on sleigh runners — Razumov broke the silence in a voice that trembled slightly.

“My gratitude surpasses the greatness of my presumption.”

He gasped, feeling unexpectedly in the dark a momentary pressure on his arm.

“You have done well,” repeated the Prince.

When the carriage stopped the Prince murmured to Razumov, who had never ventured a single question —

“The house of General T — -.”

In the middle of the snow-covered roadway blazed a great bonfire. Some Cossacks, the bridles of their horses over the arm, were warming themselves around. Two sentries stood at the door, several gendarmes lounged under the great carriage gateway, and on the first-floor landing two orderlies rose and stood at attention. Razumov walked at the Prince's elbow.

A surprising quantity of hot-house plants in pots cumbered the floor of the ante-room. Servants came forward. A young man in civilian clothes arrived hurriedly, was whispered to, bowed low, and exclaiming zealously, "Certainly — this minute," fled within somewhere. The Prince signed to Razumov.

They passed through a suite of reception-rooms all barely lit and one of them prepared for dancing. The wife of the General had put off her party. An atmosphere of consternation pervaded the place. But the General's own room, with heavy sombre hangings, two massive desks, and deep armchairs, had all the lights turned on. The footman shut the door behind them and they waited.

There was a coal fire in an English grate; Razumov had never before seen such a fire; and the silence of the room was like the silence of the grave; perfect, measureless, for even the clock on the mantelpiece made no sound. Filling a corner, on a black pedestal, stood a quarter-life-size smooth-limbed bronze of an adolescent figure, running. The Prince observed in an undertone —

"Spontini's. 'Flight of Youth.' Exquisite."

"Admirable," assented Razumov faintly.

They said nothing more after this, the Prince silent with his grand air, Razumov staring at the statue. He was worried by a sensation resembling the gnawing of hunger.

He did not turn when he heard an inner door fly open, and a quick footstep, muffled on the carpet.

The Prince's voice immediately exclaimed, thick with excitement —

"We have got him — ce miserable. A worthy young man came to me — No! It's incredible..."

Razumov held his breath before the bronze as if expecting a crash. Behind his back a voice he had never heard before insisted politely —

"Asseyez-vous donc."

The Prince almost shrieked, "Mais comprenez-vous, mon cher! L'assassin! the murderer — we have got him..."

Razumov spun round. The General's smooth big cheeks rested on the stiff collar of his uniform. He must have been already looking at Razumov, because that last saw the pale blue eyes fastened on him coldly.

The Prince from a chair waved an impressive hand.

"This is a most honourable young man whom Providence itself... Mr. Razumov."

The General acknowledged the introduction by frowning at Razumov, who did not make the slightest movement.

Sitting down before his desk the General listened with compressed lips. It was impossible to detect any sign of emotion on his face.

Razumov watched the immobility of the fleshy profile. But it lasted only a moment, till the Prince had finished; and when the General turned to the providential young man, his florid complexion, the blue, unbelieving eyes and the bright white flash of an automatic smile had an air of jovial, careless cruelty. He expressed no wonder at the extraordinary story — no pleasure or excitement — no incredulity either. He betrayed no sentiment whatever. Only with a politeness almost deferential suggested that “the bird might have flown while Mr. — Mr. Razumov was running about the streets.”

Razumov advanced to the middle of the room and said, “The door is locked and I have the key in my pocket.”

His loathing for the man was intense. It had come upon him so unawares that he felt he had not kept it out of his voice. The General looked up at him thoughtfully, and Razumov grinned.

All this went over the head of Prince K — - seated in a deep armchair, very tired and impatient.

“A student called Haldin,” said the General thoughtfully.

Razumov ceased to grin.

“That is his name,” he said unnecessarily loud. “Victor Victorovitch Haldin — a student.”

The General shifted his position a little.

“How is he dressed? Would you have the goodness to tell me?”

Razumov angrily described Haldin’s clothing in a few jerky words. The General stared all the time, then addressing the Prince —

“We were not without some indications,” he said in French. “A good woman who was in the street described to us somebody wearing a dress of the sort as the thrower of the second bomb. We have detained her at the Secretariat, and every one in a Tcherkess coat we could lay our hands on has been brought to her to look at. She kept on crossing herself and shaking her head at them. It was exasperating...” He turned to Razumov, and in Russian, with friendly reproach —

“Take a chair, Mr. Razumov — do. Why are you standing?”

Razumov sat down carelessly and looked at the General.

“This goggle-eyed imbecile understands nothing,” he thought.

The Prince began to speak loftily.

“Mr. Razumov is a young man of conspicuous abilities. I have it at heart that his future should not...”

“Certainly,” interrupted the General, with a movement of the hand. “Has he any weapons on him, do you think, Mr. Razumov?”

The General employed a gentle musical voice. Razumov answered with suppressed irritation —

“No. But my razors are lying about — you understand.”

The General lowered his head approvingly.

“Precisely.”

Then to the Prince, explaining courteously —

“We want that bird alive. It will be the devil if we can’t make him sing a little before we are done with him.”

The grave-like silence of the room with its mute clock fell upon the polite modulations of this terrible phrase. The Prince, hidden in the chair, made no sound.

The General unexpectedly developed a thought.

“Fidelity to menaced institutions on which depend the safety of a throne and of a people is no child’s play. We know that, mon Prince, and — tenez — ” he went on with a sort of flattering harshness, “Mr. Razumov here begins to understand that too.”

His eyes which he turned upon Razumov seemed to be starting out of his head. This grotesqueness of aspect no longer shocked Razumov. He said with gloomy conviction

—
“Haldin will never speak.”

“That remains to be seen,” muttered the General.

“I am certain,” insisted Razumov. “A man like this never speaks... Do you imagine that I am here from fear?” he added violently. He felt ready to stand by his opinion of Haldin to the last extremity.

“Certainly not,” protested the General, with great simplicity of tone. “And I don’t mind telling you, Mr. Razumov, that if he had not come with his tale to such a staunch and loyal Russian as you, he would have disappeared like a stone in the water... which would have had a detestable effect,” he added, with a bright, cruel smile under his stony stare. “So you see, there can be no suspicion of any fear here.”

The Prince intervened, looking at Razumov round the back of the armchair.

“Nobody doubts the moral soundness of your action. Be at ease in that respect, pray.”

He turned to the General uneasily.

“That’s why I am here. You may be surprised why I should...”

The General hastened to interrupt.

“Not at all. Extremely natural. You saw the importance...”

“Yes,” broke in the Prince. “And I venture to ask insistently that mine and Mr. Razumov’s intervention should not become public. He is a young man of promise — of remarkable aptitudes.”

“I haven’t a doubt of it,” murmured the General. “He inspires confidence.”

“All sorts of pernicious views are so widespread nowadays — they taint such unexpected quarters — that, monstrous as it seems, he might suffer ...his studies...his...”

The General, with his elbows on the desk, took his head between his hands.

“Yes. Yes. I am thinking it out... How long is it since you left him at your rooms, Mr. Razumov?”

Razumov mentioned the hour which nearly corresponded with the time of his distracted flight from the big slum house. He had made up his mind to keep Ziemianitch out of the affair completely. To mention him at all would mean imprisonment for the “bright soul,” perhaps cruel floggings, and in the end a journey to Siberia in chains.

Razumov, who had beaten Ziemianitch, felt for him now a vague, remorseful tenderness.

The General, giving way for the first time to his secret sentiments, exclaimed contemptuously —

“And you say he came in to make you this confidence like this — for nothing — a propos des bottes.”

Razumov felt danger in the air. The merciless suspicion of despotism had spoken openly at last. Sudden fear sealed Razumov’s lips. The silence of the room resembled now the silence of a deep dungeon, where time does not count, and a suspect person is sometimes forgotten for ever. But the Prince came to the rescue.

“Providence itself has led the wretch in a moment of mental aberration to seek Mr. Razumov on the strength of some old, utterly misinterpreted exchange of ideas — some sort of idle speculative conversation — months ago — I am told — and completely forgotten till now by Mr. Razumov.”

“Mr. Razumov,” queried the General meditatively, after a short silence, “do you often indulge in speculative conversation?”

“No, Excellency,” answered Razumov, coolly, in a sudden access of self-confidence. “I am a man of deep convictions. Crude opinions are in the air. They are not always worth combating. But even the silent contempt of a serious mind may be misinterpreted by headlong utopists.”

The General stared from between his hands. Prince K — - murmured —

“A serious young man. Un esprit superieur.”

“I see that, mon cher Prince,” said the General. “Mr. Razumov is quite safe with me. I am interested in him. He has, it seems, the great and useful quality of inspiring confidence. What I was wondering at is why the other should mention anything at all — I mean even the bare fact alone — if his object was only to obtain temporary shelter for a few hours. For, after all, nothing was easier than to say nothing about it unless, indeed, he were trying, under a crazy misapprehension of your true sentiments, to enlist your assistance — eh, Mr. Razumov?”

It seemed to Razumov that the floor was moving slightly. This grotesque man in a tight uniform was terrible. It was right that he should be terrible.

“I can see what your Excellency has in your mind. But I can only answer that I don’t know why.”

“I have nothing in my mind,” murmured the General, with gentle surprise.

“I am his prey — his helpless prey,” thought Razumov. The fatigues and the disgusts of that afternoon, the need to forget, the fear which he could not keep off, reawakened his hate for Haldin.

“Then I can’t help your Excellency. I don’t know what he meant. I only know there was a moment when I wished to kill him. There was also a moment when I wished myself dead. I said nothing. I was overcome. I provoked no confidence — I asked for no explanations — ”

Razumov seemed beside himself; but his mind was lucid. It was really a calculated outburst.

"It is rather a pity," the General said, "that you did not. Don't you know at all what he means to do?" Razumov calmed down and saw an opening there.

"He told me he was in hopes that a sledge would meet him about half an hour after midnight at the seventh lamp-post on the left from the upper end of Karabelnaya. At any rate, he meant to be there at that time. He did not even ask me for a change of clothes."

"Ah voila!" said the General, turning to Prince K with an air of satisfaction. "There is a way to keep your protege, Mr. Razumov, quite clear of any connexion with the actual arrest. We shall be ready for that gentleman in Karabelnaya."

The Prince expressed his gratitude. There was real emotion in his voice. Razumov, motionless, silent, sat staring at the carpet. The General turned to him.

"Half an hour after midnight. Till then we have to depend on you, Mr. Razumov. You don't think he is likely to change his purpose?"

"How can I tell?" said Razumov. "Those men are not of the sort that ever changes its purpose."

"What men do you mean?"

"Fanatical lovers of liberty in general. Liberty with a capital L, Excellency. Liberty that means nothing precise. Liberty in whose name crimes are committed."

The General murmured —

"I detest rebels of every kind. I can't help it. It's my nature!"

He clenched a fist and shook it, drawing back his arm. "They shall be destroyed, then."

"They have made a sacrifice of their lives beforehand," said Razumov with malicious pleasure and looking the General straight in the face. "If Haldin does change his purpose to-night, you may depend on it that it will not be to save his life by flight in some other way. He would have thought then of something else to attempt. But that is not likely."

The General repeated as if to himself, "They shall be destroyed."

Razumov assumed an impenetrable expression.

The Prince exclaimed —

"What a terrible necessity!"

The General's arm was lowered slowly.

"One comfort there is. That brood leaves no posterity. I've always said it, one effort, pitiless, persistent, steady — and we are done with them for ever."

Razumov thought to himself that this man entrusted with so much arbitrary power must have believed what he said or else he could not have gone on bearing the responsibility.

"I detest rebels. These subversive minds! These intellectual debauches! My existence has been built on fidelity. It's a feeling. To defend it I am ready to lay down my life — and even my honour — if that were needed. But pray tell me what honour can there

be as against rebels — against people that deny God Himself — perfect unbelievers! Brutes. It is horrible to think of.”

During this tirade Razumov, facing the General, had nodded slightly twice. Prince K — -, standing on one side with his grand air, murmured, casting up his eyes —

“Helas!”

Then lowering his glance and with great decision declared —

“This young man, General, is perfectly fit to apprehend the bearing of your memorable words.”

The General’s whole expression changed from dull resentment to perfect urbanity.

“I would ask now, Mr. Razumov,” he said, “to return to his home. Note that I don’t ask Mr. Razumov whether he has justified his absence to his guest. No doubt he did this sufficiently. But I don’t ask. Mr. Razumov inspires confidence. It is a great gift. I only suggest that a more prolonged absence might awaken the criminal’s suspicions and induce him perhaps to change his plans.”

He rose and with a scrupulous courtesy escorted his visitors to the ante-room encumbered with flower-pots.

Razumov parted with the Prince at the corner of a street. In the carriage he had listened to speeches where natural sentiment struggled with caution. Evidently the Prince was afraid of encouraging any hopes of future intercourse. But there was a touch of tenderness in the voice uttering in the dark the guarded general phrases of goodwill. And the Prince too said —

“I have perfect confidence in you, Mr. Razumov.”

“They all, it seems, have confidence in me,” thought Razumov dully. He had an indulgent contempt for the man sitting shoulder to shoulder with him in the confined space. Probably he was afraid of scenes with his wife. She was said to be proud and violent.

It seemed to him bizarre that secrecy should play such a large part in the comfort and safety of lives. But he wanted to put the Prince’s mind at ease; and with a proper amount of emphasis he said that, being conscious of some small abilities and confident in his power of work, he trusted his future to his own exertions. He expressed his gratitude for the helping hand. Such dangerous situations did not occur twice in the course of one life — he added.

“And you have met this one with a firmness of mind and correctness of feeling which give me a high idea of your worth,” the Prince said solemnly. “You have now only to persevere — to persevere.”

On getting out on the pavement Razumov saw an ungloved hand extended to him through the lowered window of the brougham. It detained his own in its grasp for a moment, while the light of a street lamp fell upon the Prince’s long face and old-fashioned grey whiskers.

“I hope you are perfectly reassured now as to the consequences...”

“After what your Excellency has condescended to do for me, I can only rely on my conscience.”

“Adieu,” said the whiskered head with feeling.

Razumov bowed. The brougham glided away with a slight swish in the snow — he was alone on the edge of the pavement.

He said to himself that there was nothing to think about, and began walking towards his home.

He walked quietly. It was a common experience to walk thus home to bed after an evening spent somewhere with his fellows or in the cheaper seats of a theatre. After he had gone a little way the familiarity of things got hold of him. Nothing was changed. There was the familiar corner; and when he turned it he saw the familiar dim light of the provision shop kept by a German woman. There were loaves of stale bread, bunches of onions and strings of sausages behind the small window-panes. They were closing it. The sickly lame fellow whom he knew so well by sight staggered out into the snow embracing a large shutter.

Nothing would change. There was the familiar gateway yawning black with feeble glimmers marking the arches of the different staircases.

The sense of life’s continuity depended on trifling bodily impressions. The trivialities of daily existence were an armour for the soul. And this thought reinforced the inward quietness of Razumov as he began to climb the stairs familiar to his feet in the dark, with his hand on the familiar clammy banister. The exceptional could not prevail against the material contacts which make one day resemble another. To-morrow would be like yesterday.

It was only on the stage that the unusual was outwardly acknowledged.

“I suppose,” thought Razumov, “that if I had made up my mind to blow out my brains on the landing I would be going up these stairs as quietly as I am doing it now. What’s a man to do? What must be must be. Extraordinary things do happen. But when they have happened they are done with. Thus, too, when the mind is made up. That question is done with. And the daily concerns, the familiarities of our thought swallow it up — and the life goes on as before with its mysterious and secret sides quite out of sight, as they should be. Life is a public thing.”

Razumov unlocked his door and took the key out; entered very quietly and bolted the door behind him carefully.

He thought, “He hears me,” and after bolting the door he stood still holding his breath. There was not a sound. He crossed the bare outer room, stepping deliberately in the darkness. Entering the other, he felt all over his table for the matchbox. The silence, but for the groping of his hand, was profound. Could the fellow be sleeping so soundly?

He struck a light and looked at the bed. Haldin was lying on his back as before, only both his hands were under his head. His eyes were open. He stared at the ceiling.

Razumov held the match up. He saw the clear-cut features, the firm chin, the white forehead and the topknot of fair hair against the white pillow. There he was, lying flat on his back. Razumov thought suddenly, “I have walked over his chest.”

He continued to stare till the match burnt itself out; then struck another and lit the lamp in silence without looking towards the bed any more. He had turned his back on it and was hanging his coat on a peg when he heard Haldin sigh profoundly, then ask in a tired voice —

“Well! And what have you arranged?”

The emotion was so great that Razumov was glad to put his hands against the wall. A diabolical impulse to say, “I have given you up to the police,” frightened him exceedingly. But he did not say that. He said, without turning round, in a muffled voice —

“It’s done.”

Again he heard Haldin sigh. He walked to the table, sat down with the lamp before him, and only then looked towards the bed.

In the distant corner of the large room far away from the lamp, which was small and provided with a very thick china shade, Haldin appeared like a dark and elongated shape — rigid with the immobility of death. This body seemed to have less substance than its own phantom walked over by Razumov in the street white with snow. It was more alarming in its shadowy, persistent reality than the distinct but vanishing illusion.

Haldin was heard again.

“You must have had a walk — such a walk,…” he murmured deprecatingly. “This weather…”

Razumov answered with energy —

“Horrible walk... A nightmare of a walk.”

He shuddered audibly. Haldin sighed once more, then —

“And so you have seen Ziemianitch — brother?”

“I’ve seen him.”

Razumov, remembering the time he had spent with the Prince, thought it prudent to add, “I had to wait some time.”

“A character — eh? It’s extraordinary what a sense of the necessity of freedom there is in that man. And he has sayings too — simple, to the point, such as only the people can invent in their rough sagacity. A character that…”

“I, you understand, haven’t had much opportunity…” Razumov muttered through his teeth.

Haldin continued to stare at the ceiling.

“You see, brother, I have been a good deal in that house of late. I used to take there books — leaflets. Not a few of the poor people who live there can read. And, you see, the guests for the feast of freedom must be sought for in byways and hedges. The truth is, I have almost lived in that house of late. I slept sometimes in the stable. There is a stable…”

“That’s where I had my interview with Ziemianitch,” interrupted Razumov gently. A mocking spirit entered into him and he added, “It was satisfactory in a sense. I came away from it much relieved.”

“Ah! he’s a fellow,” went on Haldin, talking slowly at the ceiling. “I came to know him in that way, you see. For some weeks now, ever since I resigned myself to do what had to be done, I tried to isolate myself. I gave up my rooms. What was the good of exposing a decent widow woman to the risk of being worried out of her mind by the police? I gave up seeing any of our comrades...”

Razumov drew to himself a half-sheet of paper and began to trace lines on it with a pencil.

“Upon my word,” he thought angrily, “he seems to have thought of everybody’s safety but mine.”

Haldin was talking on.

“This morning — ah! this morning — that was different. How can I explain to you? Before the deed was done I wandered at night and lay hid in the day, thinking it out, and I felt restful. Sleepless but restful. What was there for me to torment myself about? But this morning — after! Then it was that I became restless. I could not have stopped in that big house full of misery. The miserable of this world can’t give you peace. Then when that silly caretaker began to shout, I said to myself, ‘There is a young man in this town head and shoulders above common prejudices.’”

“Is he laughing at me?” Razumov asked himself, going on with his aimless drawing of triangles and squares. And suddenly he thought: “My behaviour must appear to him strange. Should he take fright at my manner and rush off somewhere I shall be undone completely. That infernal General...”

He dropped the pencil and turned abruptly towards the bed with the shadowy figure extended full length on it — so much more indistinct than the one over whose breast he had walked without faltering. Was this, too, a phantom?

The silence had lasted a long time. “He is no longer here,” was the thought against which Razumov struggled desperately, quite frightened at its absurdity. “He is already gone and this...only...”

He could resist no longer. He sprang to his feet, saying aloud, “I am intolerably anxious,” and in a few headlong strides stood by the side of the bed. His hand fell lightly on Haldin’s shoulder, and directly he felt its reality he was beset by an insane temptation to grip that exposed throat and squeeze the breath out of that body, lest it should escape his custody, leaving only a phantom behind.

Haldin did not stir a limb, but his overshadowed eyes moving a little gazed upwards at Razumov with wistful gratitude for this manifestation of feeling.

Razumov turned away and strode up and down the room. “It would have been possibly a kindness,” he muttered to himself, and was appalled by the nature of that apology for a murderous intention his mind had found somewhere within him. And all the same he could not give it up. He became lucid about it. “What can he expect?” he thought. “The halter — in the end. And I...”

This argument was interrupted by Haldin’s voice.

“Why be anxious for me? They can kill my body, but they cannot exile my soul from this world. I tell you what — I believe in this world so much that I cannot conceive

eternity otherwise than as a very long life. That is perhaps the reason I am so ready to die.”

“H’m,” muttered Razumov, and biting his lower lip he continued to walk up and down and to carry on his strange argument.

Yes, to a man in such a situation — of course it would be an act of kindness. The question, however, was not how to be kind, but how to be firm. He was a slippery customer.

“I too, Victor Victorovitch, believe in this world of ours,” he said with force. “I too, while I live... But you seem determined to haunt it. You can’t seriously...mean...”

The voice of the motionless Haldin began —

“Haunt it! Truly, the oppressors of thought which quickens the world, the destroyers of souls which aspire to perfection of human dignity, they shall be haunted. As to the destroyers of my mere body, I have forgiven them beforehand.”

Razumov had stopped apparently to listen, but at the same time he was observing his own sensations. He was vexed with himself for attaching so much importance to what Haldin said.

“The fellow’s mad,” he thought firmly, but this opinion did not mollify him towards Haldin. It was a particularly impudent form of lunacy — and when it got loose in the sphere of public life of a country, it was obviously the duty of every good citizen...

This train of thought broke off short there and was succeeded by a paroxysm of silent hatred towards Haldin, so intense that Razumov hastened to speak at random.

“Yes. Eternity, of course. I, too, can’t very well represent it to myself... I imagine it, however, as something quiet and dull. There would be nothing unexpected — don’t you see? The element of time would be wanting.”

He pulled out his watch and gazed at it. Haldin turned over on his side and looked on intently.

Razumov got frightened at this movement. A slippery customer this fellow with a phantom. It was not midnight yet. He hastened on —

“And unfathomable mysteries! Can you conceive secret places in Eternity? Impossible. Whereas life is full of them. There are secrets of birth, for instance. One carries them on to the grave. There is something comical...but never mind. And there are secret motives of conduct. A man’s most open actions have a secret side to them. That is interesting and so unfathomable! For instance, a man goes out of a room for a walk. Nothing more trivial in appearance. And yet it may be momentous. He comes back — he has seen perhaps a drunken brute, taken particular notice of the snow on the ground — and behold he is no longer the same man. The most unlikely things have a secret power over one’s thoughts — the grey whiskers of a particular person — the goggle eyes of another.”

Razumov’s forehead was moist. He took a turn or two in the room, his head low and smiling to himself viciously.

“Have you ever reflected on the power of goggle eyes and grey whiskers? Excuse me. You seem to think I must be crazy to talk in this vein at such a time. But I am not

talking lightly. I have seen instances. It has happened to me once to be talking to a man whose fate was affected by physical facts of that kind. And the man did not know it. Of course, it was a case of conscience, but the material facts such as these brought about the solution... And you tell me, Victor Victorovitch, not to be anxious! Why! I am responsible for you," Razumov almost shrieked.

He avoided with difficulty a burst of Mephistophelian laughter. Haldin, very pale, raised himself on his elbow.

"And the surprises of life," went on Razumov, after glancing at the other uneasily. "Just consider their astonishing nature. A mysterious impulse induces you to come here. I don't say you have done wrong. Indeed, from a certain point of view you could not have done better. You might have gone to a man with affections and family ties. You have such ties yourself. As to me, you know I have been brought up in an educational institute where they did not give us enough to eat. To talk of affection in such a connexion — you perceive yourself... As to ties, the only ties I have in the world are social. I must get acknowledged in some way before I can act at all. I sit here working... And don't you think I am working for progress too? I've got to find my own ideas of the true way... Pardon me," continued Razumov, after drawing breath and with a short, throaty laugh, "but I haven't inherited a revolutionary inspiration together with a resemblance from an uncle."

He looked again at his watch and noticed with sickening disgust that there were yet a good many minutes to midnight. He tore watch and chain off his waistcoat and laid them on the table well in the circle of bright lamplight. Haldin, reclining on his elbow, did not stir. Razumov was made uneasy by this attitude. "What move is he meditating over so quietly?" he thought. "He must be prevented. I must keep on talking to him."

He raised his voice.

"You are a son, a brother, a nephew, a cousin — I don't know what — to no end of people. I am just a man. Here I stand before you. A man with a mind. Did it ever occur to you how a man who had never heard a word of warm affection or praise in his life would think on matters on which you would think first with or against your class, your domestic tradition — your fireside prejudices?... Did you ever consider how a man like that would feel? I have no domestic tradition. I have nothing to think against. My tradition is historical. What have I to look back to but that national past from which you gentlemen want to wrench away your future? Am I to let my intelligence, my aspirations towards a better lot, be robbed of the only thing it has to go upon at the will of violent enthusiasts? You come from your province, but all this land is mine — or I have nothing. No doubt you shall be looked upon as a martyr some day — a sort of hero — a political saint. But I beg to be excused. I am content in fitting myself to be a worker. And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow? On this Immensity. On this unhappy Immensity! I tell you," he cried, in a vibrating, subdued voice, and advancing one step nearer the bed, "that what it needs is not a lot of haunting phantoms that I could walk through — but a man!"

Haldin threw his arms forward as if to keep him off in horror.

“I understand it all now,” he exclaimed, with awestruck dismay. “I understand — at last.”

Razumov staggered back against the table. His forehead broke out in perspiration while a cold shudder ran down his spine.

“What have I been saying?” he asked himself. “Have I let him slip through my fingers after all?”

“He felt his lips go stiff like buckram, and instead of a reassuring smile only achieved an uncertain grimace.

“What will you have?” he began in a conciliating voice which got steady after the first trembling word or two. “What will you have? Consider — a man of studious, retired habits — and suddenly like this... I am not practised in talking delicately. But...”

He felt anger, a wicked anger, get hold of him again.

“What were we to do together till midnight? Sit here opposite each other and think of your — your — shambles?”

Haldin had a subdued, heartbroken attitude. He bowed his head; his hands hung between his knees. His voice was low and pained but calm.

“I see now how it is, Razumov — brother. You are a magnanimous soul, but my action is abhorrent to you — alas...”

Razumov stared. From fright he had set his teeth so hard that his whole face ached. It was impossible for him to make a sound.

“And even my person, too, is loathsome to you perhaps,” Haldin added mournfully, after a short pause, looking up for a moment, then fixing his gaze on the floor. “For indeed, unless one...”

He broke off evidently waiting for a word. Razumov remained silent. Haldin nodded his head dejectedly twice.

“Of course. Of course,” he murmured... “Ah! weary work!”

He remained perfectly still for a moment, then made Razumov’s leaden heart strike a ponderous blow by springing up briskly.

“So be it,” he cried sadly in a low, distinct tone. “Farewell then.”

Razumov started forward, but the sight of Haldin’s raised hand checked him before he could get away from the table. He leaned on it heavily, listening to the faint sounds of some town clock tolling the hour. Haldin, already at the door, tall and straight as an arrow, with his pale face and a hand raised attentively, might have posed for the statue of a daring youth listening to an inner voice. Razumov mechanically glanced down at his watch. When he looked towards the door again Haldin had vanished. There was a faint rustling in the outer room, the feeble click of a bolt drawn back lightly. He was gone — almost as noiseless as a vision.

Razumov ran forward unsteadily, with parted, voiceless lips. The outer door stood open. Staggering out on the landing, he leaned far over the banister. Gazing down into the deep black shaft with a tiny glimmering flame at the bottom, he traced by ear the rapid spiral descent of somebody running down the stairs on tiptoe. It was a light,

swift, pattering sound, which sank away from him into the depths: a fleeting shadow passed over the glimmer — a wink of the tiny flame. Then stillness.

Razumov hung over, breathing the cold raw air tainted by the evil smells of the unclean staircase. All quiet.

He went back into his room slowly, shutting the doors after him. The peaceful steady light of his reading-lamp shone on the watch. Razumov stood looking down at the little white dial. It wanted yet three minutes to midnight. He took the watch into his hand fumblingly.

“Slow,” he muttered, and a strange fit of nervelessness came over him. His knees shook, the watch and chain slipped through his fingers in an instant and fell on the floor. He was so startled that he nearly fell himself. When at last he regained enough confidence in his limbs to stoop for it he held it to his ear at once. After a while he growled —

“Stopped,” and paused for quite a long time before he muttered sourly —

“It’s done... And now to work.”

He sat down, reached haphazard for a book, opened it in middle and began to read; but after going conscientiously over two lines he lost his hold on the print completely and did not try to regain it. He thought —

“There was to a certainty a police agent of some sort watching the house across the street.”

He imagined him lurking in a dark gateway, goggle-eyed, muffled up in a cloak to the nose and with a General’s plumed, cocked hat on his head. This absurdity made him start in the chair convulsively. He literally had to shake his head violently to get rid of it. The man would be disguised perhaps as a peasant... a beggar... Perhaps he would be just buttoned up in a dark overcoat and carrying a loaded stick — a shifty-eyed rascal, smelling of raw onions and spirits.

This evocation brought on positive nausea. “Why do I want to bother about this?” thought Razumov with disgust. “Am I a gendarme? Moreover, it is done.”

He got up in great agitation. It was not done. Not yet. Not till half-past twelve. And the watch had stopped. This reduced him to despair. Impossible to know the time! The landlady and all the people across the landing were asleep. How could he go and... God knows what they would imagine, or how much they would guess. He dared not go into the streets to find out. “I am a suspect now. There’s no use shirking that fact,” he said to himself bitterly. If Haldin from some cause or another gave them the slip and failed to turn up in the Karabelnaya the police would be invading his lodging. And if he were not in he could never clear himself. Never. Razumov looked wildly about as if for some means of seizing upon time which seemed to have escaped him altogether. He had never, as far as he could remember, heard the striking of that town clock in his rooms before this night. And he was not even sure now whether he had heard it really on this night.

He went to the window and stood there with slightly bent head on the watch for the faint sound. “I will stay here till I hear something,” he said to himself. He stood

still, his ear turned to the panes. An atrocious aching numbness with shooting pains in his back and legs tortured him. He did not budge. His mind hovered on the borders of delirium. He heard himself suddenly saying, "I confess," as a person might do on the rack. "I am on the rack," he thought. He felt ready to swoon. The faint deep boom of the distant clock seemed to explode in his head — he heard it so clearly... One!

If Haldin had not turned up the police would have been already here ransacking the house. No sound reached him. This time it was done.

He dragged himself painfully to the table and dropped into the chair. He flung the book away and took a square sheet of paper. It was like the pile of sheets covered with his neat minute handwriting, only blank. He took a pen brusquely and dipped it with a vague notion of going on with the writing of his essay — but his pen remained poised over the sheet. It hung there for some time before it came down and formed long scrawly letters.

Still-faced and his lips set hard, Razumov began to write. When he wrote a large hand his neat writing lost its character altogether — became unsteady, almost childish. He wrote five lines one under the other. History not Theory. Patriotism not Internationalism. Evolution not Revolution. Direction not Destruction. Unity not Disruption.

He gazed at them dully. Then his eyes strayed to the bed and remained fixed there for a good many minutes, while his right hand groped all over the table for the penknife.

He rose at last, and walking up with measured steps stabbed the paper with the penknife to the lath and plaster wall at the head of the bed. This done he stepped back a pace and flourished his hand with a glance round the room.

After that he never looked again at the bed. He took his big cloak down from its peg and, wrapping himself up closely, went to lie down on the hard horse-hair sofa at the other side of his room. A leaden sleep closed his eyelids at once. Several times that night he woke up shivering from a dream of walking through drifts of snow in a Russia where he was as completely alone as any betrayed autocrat could be; an immense, wintry Russia which, somehow, his view could embrace in all its enormous expanse as if it were a map. But after each shuddering start his heavy eyelids fell over his glazed eyes and he slept again.

Chapter 3

Approaching this part of Mr. Razumov's story, my mind, the decent mind of an old teacher of languages, feels more and more the difficulty of the task.

The task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form a precis of a strange human document, but the rendering — I perceive it now clearly — of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface; conditions not easily to be understood, much less discovered in the limits of a story, till some key-word is found; a word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the pages; a word which, if not truth

itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale.

I turn over for the hundredth time the leaves of Mr. Razumov's record, I lay it aside, I take up the pen — and the pen being ready for its office of setting down black on white I hesitate. For the word that persists in creeping under its point is no other word than "cynicism."

For that is the mark of Russian autocracy and of Russian revolt. In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism. It informs the declarations of her statesmen, the theories of her revolutionists, and the mystic vaticinations of prophets to the point of making freedom look like a form of debauch, and the Christian virtues themselves appear actually indecent... But I must apologize for the digression. It proceeds from the consideration of the course taken by the story of Mr. Razumov after his conservative convictions, diluted in a vague liberalism natural to the ardour of his age, had become crystallized by the shock of his contact with Haldin.

Razumov woke up for the tenth time perhaps with a heavy shiver. Seeing the light of day in his window, he resisted the inclination to lay himself down again. He did not remember anything, but he did not think it strange to find himself on the sofa in his cloak and chilled to the bone. The light coming through the window seemed strangely cheerless, containing no promise as the light of each new day should for a young man. It was the awakening of a man mortally ill, or of a man ninety years old. He looked at the lamp which had burnt itself out. It stood there, the extinguished beacon of his labours, a cold object of brass and porcelain, amongst the scattered pages of his notes and small piles of books — a mere litter of blackened paper — dead matter — without significance or interest.

He got on his feet, and divesting himself of his cloak hung it on the peg, going through all the motions mechanically. An incredible dullness, a ditch-water stagnation was sensible to his perceptions as though life had withdrawn itself from all things and even from his own thoughts. There was not a sound in the house.

Turning away from the peg, he thought in that same lifeless manner that it must be very early yet; but when he looked at the watch on his table he saw both hands arrested at twelve o'clock.

"Ah! yes," he mumbled to himself, and as if beginning to get roused a little he took a survey of his room. The paper stabbed to the wall arrested his attention. He eyed it from the distance without approval or perplexity; but when he heard the servant-girl beginning to bustle about in the outer room with the samovar for his morning tea, he walked up to it and took it down with an air of profound indifference.

While doing this he glanced down at the bed on which he had not slept that night. The hollow in the pillow made by the weight of Haldin's head was very noticeable.

Even his anger at this sign of the man's passage was dull. He did not try to nurse it into life. He did nothing all that day; he neglected even to brush his hair. The idea of

going out never occurred to him — and if he did not start a connected train of thought it was not because he was unable to think. It was because he was not interested enough.

He yawned frequently. He drank large quantities of tea, he walked about aimlessly, and when he sat down he did not budge for a long time. He spent some time drumming on the window with his finger-tips quietly. In his listless wanderings round about the table he caught sight of his own face in the looking-glass and that arrested him. The eyes which returned his stare were the most unhappy eyes he had ever seen. And this was the first thing which disturbed the mental stagnation of that day.

He was not affected personally. He merely thought that life without happiness is impossible. What was happiness? He yawned and went on shuffling about and about between the walls of his room. Looking forward was happiness — that's all — nothing more. To look forward to the gratification of some desire, to the gratification of some passion, love, ambition, hate — hate too indubitably. Love and hate. And to escape the dangers of existence, to live without fear, was also happiness. There was nothing else. Absence of fear — looking forward. "Oh! the miserable lot of humanity!" he exclaimed mentally; and added at once in his thought, "I ought to be happy enough as far as that goes." But he was not excited by that assurance. On the contrary, he yawned again as he had been yawning all day. He was mildly surprised to discover himself being overtaken by night. The room grew dark swiftly though time had seemed to stand still. How was it that he had not noticed the passing of that day? Of course, it was the watch being stopped...

He did not light his lamp, but went over to the bed and threw himself on it without any hesitation. Lying on his back, he put his hands under his head and stared upward. After a moment he thought, "I am lying here like that man. I wonder if he slept while I was struggling with the blizzard in the streets. No, he did not sleep. But why should I not sleep?" and he felt the silence of the night press upon all his limbs like a weight.

In the calm of the hard frost outside, the clear-cut strokes of the town clock counting off midnight penetrated the quietness of his suspended animation.

Again he began to think. It was twenty-four hours since that man left his room. Razumov had a distinct feeling that Haldin in the fortress was sleeping that night. It was a certitude which made him angry because he did not want to think of Haldin, but he justified it to himself by physiological and psychological reasons. The fellow had hardly slept for weeks on his own confession, and now every incertitude was at an end for him. No doubt he was looking forward to the consummation of his martyrdom. A man who resigns himself to kill need not go very far for resignation to die. Haldin slept perhaps more soundly than General T — -, whose task — weary work too — was not done, and over whose head hung the sword of revolutionary vengeance.

Razumov, remembering the thick-set man with his heavy jowl resting on the collar of his uniform, the champion of autocracy, who had let no sign of surprise, incredulity, or joy escape him, but whose goggle eyes could express a mortal hatred of all rebellion — Razumov moved uneasily on the bed.

“He suspected me,” he thought. “I suppose he must suspect everybody. He would be capable of suspecting his own wife, if Haldin had gone to her boudoir with his confession.”

Razumov sat up in anguish. Was he to remain a political suspect all his days? Was he to go through life as a man not wholly to be trusted — with a bad secret police note tacked on to his record? What sort of future could he look forward to?

“I am now a suspect,” he thought again; but the habit of reflection and that desire of safety, of an ordered life, which was so strong in him came to his assistance as the night wore on. His quiet, steady, and laborious existence would vouch at length for his loyalty. There were many permitted ways to serve one’s country. There was an activity that made for progress without being revolutionary. The field of influence was great and infinitely varied — once one had conquered a name.

His thought like a circling bird reverted after four-and-twenty hours to the silver medal, and as it were poised itself there.

When the day broke he had not slept, not for a moment, but he got up not very tired and quite sufficiently self-possessed for all practical purposes.

He went out and attended three lectures in the morning. But the work in the library was a mere dumb show of research. He sat with many volumes open before him trying to make notes and extracts. His new tranquillity was like a flimsy garment, and seemed to float at the mercy of a casual word. Betrayal! Why! the fellow had done all that was necessary to betray himself. Precious little had been needed to deceive him.

“I have said no word to him that was not strictly true. Not one word,” Razumov argued with himself.

Once engaged on this line of thought there could be no question of doing useful work. The same ideas went on passing through his mind, and he pronounced mentally the same words over and over again. He shut up all the books and rammed all his papers into his pocket with convulsive movements, raging inwardly against Haldin.

As he was leaving the library a long bony student in a threadbare overcoat joined him, stepping moodily by his side. Razumov answered his mumbled greeting without looking at him at all.

“What does he want with me?” he thought with a strange dread of the unexpected which he tried to shake off lest it should fasten itself upon his life for good and all. And the other, muttering cautiously with downcast eyes, supposed that his comrade had seen the news of de P — -’s executioner — that was the expression he used — having been arrested the night before last...

“I’ve been ill — shut up in my rooms,” Razumov mumbled through his teeth.

The tall student, raising his shoulders, shoved his hands deep into his pockets. He had a hairless, square, tallowy chin which trembled slightly as he spoke, and his nose nipped bright red by the sharp air looked like a false nose of painted cardboard between the sallow cheeks. His whole appearance was stamped with the mark of cold and hunger. He stalked deliberately at Razumov’s elbow with his eyes on the ground.

"It's an official statement," he continued in the same cautious mutter. "It may be a lie. But there was somebody arrested between midnight and one in the morning on Tuesday. This is certain."

And talking rapidly under the cover of his downcast air, he told Razumov that this was known through an inferior Government clerk employed at the Central Secretariat. That man belonged to one of the revolutionary circles. "The same, in fact, I am affiliated to," remarked the student.

They were crossing a wide quadrangle. An infinite distress possessed Razumov, annihilated his energy, and before his eyes everything appeared confused and as if evanescent. He dared not leave the fellow there. "He may be affiliated to the police," was the thought that passed through his mind. "Who could tell?" But eyeing the miserable frost-nipped, famine-struck figure of his companion he perceived the absurdity of his suspicion.

"But I — you know — I don't belong to any circle. I..."

He dared not say any more. Neither dared he mend his pace. The other, raising and setting down his lamentably shod feet with exact deliberation, protested in a low tone that it was not necessary for everybody to belong to an organization. The most valuable personalities remained outside. Some of the best work was done outside the organization. Then very fast, with whispering, feverish lips —

"The man arrested in the street was Haldin."

And accepting Razumov's dismayed silence as natural enough, he assured him that there was no mistake. That Government clerk was on night duty at the Secretariat. Hearing a great noise of footsteps in the hall and aware that political prisoners were brought over sometimes at night from the fortress, he opened the door of the room in which he was working, suddenly. Before the gendarme on duty could push him back and slam the door in his face, he had seen a prisoner being partly carried, partly dragged along the hall by a lot of policemen. He was being used very brutally. And the clerk had recognized Haldin perfectly. Less than half an hour afterwards General T — - arrived at the Secretariat to examine that prisoner personally.

"Aren't you astonished?" concluded the gaunt student.

"No," said Razumov roughly — and at once regretted his answer.

"Everybody supposed Haldin was in the provinces — with his people. Didn't you?"

The student turned his big hollow eyes upon Razumov, who said unguardedly —

"His people are abroad."

He could have bitten his tongue out with vexation. The student pronounced in a tone of profound meaning —

"So! You alone were aware,..." and stopped.

"They have sworn my ruin," thought Razumov. "Have you spoken of this to anyone else?" he asked with bitter curiosity.

The other shook his head.

"No, only to you. Our circle thought that as Haldin had been often heard expressing a warm appreciation of your character..."

Razumov could not restrain a gesture of angry despair which the other must have misunderstood in some way, because he ceased speaking and turned away his black, lack-lustre eyes.

They moved side by side in silence. Then the gaunt student began to whisper again, with averted gaze —

“As we have at present no one affiliated inside the fortress so as to make it possible to furnish him with a packet of poison, we have considered already some sort of retaliatory action — to follow very soon...”

Razumov trudging on interrupted —

“Were you acquainted with Haldin? Did he know where you live?”

“I had the happiness to hear him speak twice,” his companion answered in the feverish whisper contrasting with the gloomy apathy of his face and bearing. “He did not know where I live... I am lodging poorly with an artisan family... I have just a corner in a room. It is not very practicable to see me there, but if you should need me for anything I am ready...”

Razumov trembled with rage and fear. He was beside himself, but kept his voice low.

“You are not to come near me. You are not to speak to me. Never address a single word to me. I forbid you.”

“Very well,” said the other submissively, showing no surprise whatever at this abrupt prohibition. “You don’t wish for secret reasons... perfectly... I understand.”

He edged away at once, not looking up even; and Razumov saw his gaunt, shabby, famine-stricken figure cross the street obliquely with lowered head and that peculiar exact motion of the feet.

He watched him as one would watch a vision out of a nightmare, then he continued on his way, trying not to think. On his landing the landlady seemed to be waiting for him. She was a short, thick, shapeless woman with a large yellow face wrapped up everlastingly in a black woollen shawl. When she saw him come up the last flight of stairs she flung both her arms up excitedly, then clasped her hands before her face.

“Kirylo Sidorovitch — little father — what have you been doing? And such a quiet young man, too! The police are just gone this moment after searching your rooms.”

Razumov gazed down at her with silent, scrutinizing attention. Her puffy yellow countenance was working with emotion. She screwed up her eyes at him entreatingly.

“Such a sensible young man! Anybody can see you are sensible. And now — like this — all at once... What is the good of mixing yourself up with these Nihilists? Do give over, little father. They are unlucky people.”

Razumov moved his shoulders slightly.

“Or is it that some secret enemy has been calumniating you, Kirylo Sidorovitch? The world is full of black hearts and false denunciations nowadays. There is much fear about.”

“Have you heard that I have been denounced by some one?” asked Razumov, without taking his eyes off her quivering face.

But she had not heard anything. She had tried to find out by asking the police captain while his men were turning the room upside down. The police captain of the district had known her for the last eleven years and was a humane person. But he said to her on the landing, looking very black and vexed —

“My good woman, do not ask questions. I don’t know anything myself. The order comes from higher quarters.”

And indeed there had appeared, shortly after the arrival of the policemen of the district, a very superior gentleman in a fur coat and a shiny hat, who sat down in the room and looked through all the papers himself. He came alone and went away by himself, taking nothing with him. She had been trying to put things straight a little since they left.

Razumov turned away brusquely and entered his rooms.

All his books had been shaken and thrown on the floor. His landlady followed him, and stooping painfully began to pick them up into her apron. His papers and notes which were kept always neatly sorted (they all related to his studies) had been shuffled up and heaped together into a ragged pile in the middle of the table.

This disorder affected him profoundly, unreasonably. He sat down and stared. He had a distinct sensation of his very existence being undermined in some mysterious manner, of his moral supports falling away from him one by one. He even experienced a slight physical giddiness and made a movement as if to reach for something to steady himself with.

The old woman, rising to her feet with a low groan, shot all the books she had collected in her apron on to the sofa and left the room muttering and sighing.

It was only then that he noticed that the sheet of paper which for one night had remained stabbed to the wall above his empty bed was lying on top of the pile.

When he had taken it down the day before he had folded it in four, absent-mindedly, before dropping it on the table. And now he saw it lying uppermost, spread out, smoothed out even and covering all the confused pile of pages, the record of his intellectual life for the last three years. It had not been flung there. It had been placed there — smoothed out, too! He guessed in that an intention of profound meaning — or perhaps some inexplicable mockery.

He sat staring at the piece of paper till his eyes began to smart. He did not attempt to put his papers in order, either that evening or the next day — which he spent at home in a state of peculiar irresolution. This irresolution bore upon the question whether he should continue to live — neither more nor less. But its nature was very far removed from the hesitation of a man contemplating suicide. The idea of laying violent hands upon his body did not occur to Razumov. The unrelated organism bearing that label, walking, breathing, wearing these clothes, was of no importance to anyone, unless maybe to the landlady. The true Razumov had his being in the willed, in the determined future — in that future menaced by the lawlessness of autocracy — for autocracy knows no law — and the lawlessness of revolution. The feeling that his moral personality was at the mercy of these lawless forces was so strong that he asked himself

seriously if it were worth while to go on accomplishing the mental functions of that existence which seemed no longer his own.

“What is the good of exerting my intelligence, of pursuing the systematic development of my faculties and all my plans of work?” he asked himself. “I want to guide my conduct by reasonable convictions, but what security have I against something — some destructive horror — walking in upon me as I sit here?...”

Razumov looked apprehensively towards the door of the outer room as if expecting some shape of evil to turn the handle and appear before him silently.

“A common thief,” he said to himself, “finds more guarantees in the law he is breaking, and even a brute like Ziemianitch has his consolation.” Razumov envied the materialism of the thief and the passion of the incorrigible lover. The consequences of their actions were always clear and their lives remained their own.

But he slept as soundly that night as though he had been consoling himself in the manner of Ziemianitch. He dropped off suddenly, lay like a log, remembered no dream on waking. But it was as if his soul had gone out in the night to gather the flowers of wrathful wisdom. He got up in a mood of grim determination and as if with a new knowledge of his own nature. He looked mockingly on the heap of papers on his table; and left his room to attend the lectures, muttering to himself, “We shall see.”

He was in no humour to talk to anybody or hear himself questioned as to his absence from lectures the day before. But it was difficult to repulse rudely a very good comrade with a smooth pink face and fair hair, bearing the nickname amongst his fellow-students of “Madcap Kostia.” He was the idolized only son of a very wealthy and illiterate Government contractor, and attended the lectures only during the periodical fits of contrition following upon tearful paternal remonstrances. Noisily blundering like a retriever puppy, his elated voice and great gestures filled the bare academy corridors with the joy of thoughtless animal life, provoking indulgent smiles at a great distance. His usual discourses treated of trotting horses, wine-parties in expensive restaurants, and the merits of persons of easy virtue, with a disarming artlessness of outlook. He pounced upon Razumov about midday, somewhat less uproariously than his habit was, and led him aside.

“Just a moment, Kirylo Sidorovitch. A few words here in this quiet corner.”

He felt Razumov’s reluctance, and insinuated his hand under his arm caressingly.

“No — pray do. I don’t want to talk to you about any of my silly scrapes. What are my scrapes? Absolutely nothing. Mere childishness. The other night I flung a fellow out of a certain place where I was having a fairly good time. A tyrannical little beast of a quill-driver from the Treasury department. He was bullying the people of the house. I rebuked him. ‘You are not behaving humanely to God’s creatures that are a jolly sight more estimable than yourself,’ I said. I can’t bear to see any tyranny, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Upon my word I can’t. He didn’t take it in good part at all. ‘Who’s that impudent puppy?’ he begins to shout. I was in excellent form as it happened, and he went through the closed window very suddenly. He flew quite a long way into the yard. I raged like — like a — minotaur. The women clung to me and screamed, the

fiddlers got under the table... Such fun! My dad had to put his hand pretty deep into his pocket, I can tell you." He chuckled.

"My dad is a very useful man. Jolly good thing it is for me, too. I do get into unholy scrapes."

His elation fell. That was just it. What was his life? Insignificant; no good to anyone; a mere festivity. It would end some fine day in his getting his skull split with a champagne bottle in a drunken brawl. At such times, too, when men were sacrificing themselves to ideas. But he could never get any ideas into his head. His head wasn't worth anything better than to be split by a champagne bottle.

Razumov, protesting that he had no time, made an attempt to get away. The other's tone changed to confidential earnestness.

"For God's sake, Kirylo, my dear soul, let me make some sort of sacrifice. It would not be a sacrifice really. I have my rich dad behind me. There's positively no getting to the bottom of his pocket."

And rejecting indignantly Razumov's suggestion that this was drunken raving, he offered to lend him some money to escape abroad with. He could always get money from his dad. He had only to say that he had lost it at cards or something of that sort, and at the same time promise solemnly not to miss a single lecture for three months on end. That would fetch the old man; and he, Kostia, was quite equal to the sacrifice. Though he really did not see what was the good for him to attend the lectures. It was perfectly hopeless.

"Won't you let me be of some use?" he pleaded to the silent Razumov, who with his eyes on the ground and utterly unable to penetrate the real drift of the other's intention, felt a strange reluctance to clear up the point.

"What makes you think I want to go abroad?" he asked at last very quietly.

Kostia lowered his voice.

"You had the police in your rooms yesterday. There are three or four of us who have heard of that. Never mind how we know. It is sufficient that we do. So we have been consulting together."

"Ah! You got to know that so soon," muttered Razumov negligently.

"Yes. We did. And it struck us that a man like you..."

"What sort of a man do you take me to be?" Razumov interrupted him.

"A man of ideas — and a man of action too. But you are very deep, Kirylo. There's no getting to the bottom of your mind. Not for fellows like me. But we all agreed that you must be preserved for our country. Of that we have no doubt whatever — I mean all of us who have heard Haldin speak of you on certain occasions. A man doesn't get the police ransacking his rooms without there being some devilry hanging over his head... And so if you think that it would be better for you to bolt at once..."

Razumov tore himself away and walked down the corridor, leaving the other motionless with his mouth open. But almost at once he returned and stood before the amazed Kostia, who shut his mouth slowly. Razumov looked him straight in the eyes, before saying with marked deliberation and separating his words —

“I thank — you — very — much.”

He went away again rapidly. Kostia, recovering from his surprise at these manoeuvres, ran up behind him pressingly.

“No! Wait! Listen. I really mean it. It would be like giving your compassion to a starving fellow. Do you hear, Kirylo? And any disguise you may think of, that too I could procure from a costumier, a Jew I know. Let a fool be made serviceable according to his folly. Perhaps also a false beard or something of that kind may be needed.

“Razumov turned at bay.

“There are no false beards needed in this business, Kostia — you good-hearted lunatic, you. What do you know of my ideas? My ideas may be poison to you.” The other began to shake his head in energetic protest.

“What have you got to do with ideas? Some of them would make an end of your dad’s money-bags. Leave off meddling with what you don’t understand. Go back to your trotting horses and your girls, and then you’ll be sure at least of doing no harm to anybody, and hardly any to yourself.”

The enthusiastic youth was overcome by this disdain.

“You’re sending me back to my pig’s trough, Kirylo. That settles it. I am an unlucky beast — and I shall die like a beast too. But mind — it’s your contempt that has done for me.”

Razumov went off with long strides. That this simple and grossly festive soul should have fallen too under the revolutionary curse affected him as an ominous symptom of the time. He reproached himself for feeling troubled. Personally he ought to have felt reassured. There was an obvious advantage in this conspiracy of mistaken judgment taking him for what he was not. But was it not strange?

Again he experienced that sensation of his conduct being taken out of his hands by Haldin’s revolutionary tyranny. His solitary and laborious existence had been destroyed — the only thing he could call his own on this earth. By what right? he asked himself furiously. In what name?

What infuriated him most was to feel that the “thinkers” of the University were evidently connecting him with Haldin — as a sort of confidant in the background apparently. A mysterious connexion! Ha ha! ...He had been made a personage without knowing anything about it. How that wretch Haldin must have talked about him! Yet it was likely that Haldin had said very little. The fellow’s casual utterances were caught up and treasured and pondered over by all these imbeciles. And was not all secret revolutionary action based upon folly, self-deception, and lies?

“Impossible to think of anything else,” muttered Razumov to himself. “I’ll become an idiot if this goes on. The scoundrels and the fools are murdering my intelligence.”

He lost all hope of saving his future, which depended on the free use of his intelligence.

He reached the doorway of his house in a state of mental discouragement which enabled him to receive with apparent indifference an official-looking envelope from the dirty hand of the dvornik.

“A gendarme brought it,” said the man. “He asked if you were at home. I told him ‘No, he’s not at home.’ So he left it. ‘Give it into his own hands,’ says he. Now you’ve got it — eh?”

He went back to his sweeping, and Razumov climbed his stairs, envelope in hand. Once in his room he did not hasten to open it. Of course this official missive was from the superior direction of the police. A suspect! A suspect!

He stared in dreary astonishment at the absurdity of his position. He thought with a sort of dry, unemotional melancholy; three years of good work gone, the course of forty more perhaps jeopardized — turned from hope to terror, because events started by human folly link themselves into a sequence which no sagacity can foresee and no courage can break through. Fatality enters your rooms while your landlady’s back is turned; you come home and find it in possession bearing a man’s name, clothed in flesh — wearing a brown cloth coat and long boots — lounging against the stove. It asks you, “Is the outer door closed?” — and you don’t know enough to take it by the throat and fling it downstairs. You don’t know. You welcome the crazy fate. “Sit down,” you say. And it is all over. You cannot shake it off any more. It will cling to you for ever. Neither halter nor bullet can give you back the freedom of your life and the sanity of your thought... It was enough to dash one’s head against a wall.

Razumov looked slowly all round the walls as if to select a spot to dash his head against. Then he opened the letter. It directed the student Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov to present himself without delay at the General Secretariat.

Razumov had a vision of General T — -’s goggle eyes waiting for him — the embodied power of autocracy, grotesque and terrible. He embodied the whole power of autocracy because he was its guardian. He was the incarnate suspicion, the incarnate anger, the incarnate ruthlessness of a political and social regime on its defence. He loathed rebellion by instinct. And Razumov reflected that the man was simply unable to understand a reasonable adherence to the doctrine of absolutism.

“What can he want with me precisely — I wonder?” he asked himself.

As if that mental question had evoked the familiar phantom, Haldin stood suddenly before him in the room with an extraordinary completeness of detail. Though the short winter day had passed already into the sinister twilight of a land buried in snow, Razumov saw plainly the narrow leather strap round the Tcherkess coat. The illusion of that hateful presence was so perfect that he half expected it to ask, “Is the outer door closed?” He looked at it with hatred and contempt. Souls do not take a shape of clothing. Moreover, Haldin could not be dead yet. Razumov stepped forward menacingly; the vision vanished — and turning short on his heel he walked out of his room with infinite disdain.

But after going down the first flight of stairs it occurred to him that perhaps the superior authorities of police meant to confront him with Haldin in the flesh. This thought struck him like a bullet, and had he not clung with both hands to the banister he would have rolled down to the next landing most likely. His legs were of no use for a considerable time... But why? For what conceivable reason? To what end?

There could be no rational answer to these questions; but Razumov remembered the promise made by the General to Prince K — -. His action was to remain unknown.

He got down to the bottom of the stairs, lowering himself as it were from step to step, by the banister. Under the gate he regained much of his firmness of thought and limb. He went out into the street without staggering visibly. Every moment he felt steadier mentally. And yet he was saying to himself that General T — - was perfectly capable of shutting him up in the fortress for an indefinite time. His temperament fitted his remorseless task, and his omnipotence made him inaccessible to reasonable argument.

But when Razumov arrived at the Secretariat he discovered that he would have nothing to do with General T — -. It is evident from Mr. Razumov's diary that this dreaded personality was to remain in the background. A civilian of superior rank received him in a private room after a period of waiting in outer offices where a lot of scribbling went on at many tables in a heated and stuffy atmosphere.

The clerk in uniform who conducted him said in the corridor —

“You are going before Gregor Matvieitch Mikulin.”

There was nothing formidable about the man bearing that name. His mild, expectant glance was turned on the door already when Razumov entered. At once, with the penholder he was holding in his hand, he pointed to a deep sofa between two windows. He followed Razumov with his eyes while that last crossed the room and sat down. The mild gaze rested on him, not curious, not inquisitive — certainly not suspicious — almost without expression. In its passionless persistence there was something resembling sympathy.

Razumov, who had prepared his will and his intelligence to encounter General T — - himself, was profoundly troubled. All the moral bracing up against the possible excesses of power and passion went for nothing before this sallow man, who wore a full unclipped beard. It was fair, thin, and very fine. The light fell in coppery gleams on the protuberances of a high, rugged forehead. And the aspect of the broad, soft physiognomy was so homely and rustic that the careful middle parting of the hair seemed a pretentious affectation.

The diary of Mr. Razumov testifies to some irritation on his part. I may remark here that the diary proper consisting of the more or less daily entries seems to have been begun on that very evening after Mr. Razumov had returned home.

Mr. Razumov, then, was irritated. His strung-up individuality had gone to pieces within him very suddenly.

“I must be very prudent with him,” he warned himself in the silence during which they sat gazing at each other. It lasted some little time, and was characterized (for silences have their character) by a sort of sadness imparted to it perhaps by the mild and thoughtful manner of the bearded official. Razumov learned later that he was the chief of a department in the General Secretariat, with a rank in the civil service equivalent to that of a colonel in the army.

Razumov's mistrust became acute. The main point was, not to be drawn into saying too much. He had been called there for some reason. What reason? To be given to understand that he was a suspect — and also no doubt to be pumped. As to what precisely? There was nothing. Or perhaps Haldin had been telling lies... Every alarming uncertainty beset Razumov. He could bear the silence no longer, and cursing himself for his weakness spoke first, though he had promised himself not to do so on any account.

"I haven't lost a moment's time," he began in a hoarse, provoking tone; and then the faculty of speech seemed to leave him and enter the body of Councillor Mikulin, who chimed in approvingly —

"Very proper. Very proper. Though as a matter of fact..."

But the spell was broken, and Razumov interrupted him boldly, under a sudden conviction that this was the safest attitude to take. With a great flow of words he complained of being totally misunderstood. Even as he talked with a perception of his own audacity he thought that the word "misunderstood" was better than the word "mistrusted," and he repeated it again with insistence. Suddenly he ceased, being seized with fright before the attentive immobility of the official. "What am I talking about?" he thought, eyeing him with a vague gaze. Mistrusted — not misunderstood — was the right symbol for these people. Misunderstood was the other kind of curse. Both had been brought on his head by that fellow Haldin. And his head ached terribly. He passed his hand over his brow — an involuntary gesture of suffering, which he was too careless to restrain. At that moment Razumov beheld his own brain suffering on the rack — a long, pale figure drawn asunder horizontally with terrific force in the darkness of a vault, whose face he failed to see. It was as though he had dreamed for an infinitesimal fraction of time of some dark print of the Inquisition.

It is not to be seriously supposed that Razumov had actually dozed off and had dreamed in the presence of Councillor Mikulin, of an old print of the Inquisition. He was indeed extremely exhausted, and he records a remarkably dream-like experience of anguish at the circumstance that there was no one whatever near the pale and extended figure. The solitude of the racked victim was particularly horrible to behold. The mysterious impossibility to see the face, he also notes, inspired a sort of terror. All these characteristics of an ugly dream were present. Yet he is certain that he never lost the consciousness of himself on the sofa, leaning forward with his hands between his knees and turning his cap round and round in his fingers. But everything vanished at the voice of Councillor Mikulin. Razumov felt profoundly grateful for the even simplicity of its tone.

"Yes. I have listened with interest. I comprehend in a measure your... But, indeed, you are mistaken in what you..." Councillor Mikulin uttered a series of broken sentences. Instead of finishing them he glanced down his beard. It was a deliberate curtailment which somehow made the phrases more impressive. But he could talk fluently enough, as became apparent when changing his tone to persuasiveness he went on: "By listening to you as I did, I think I have proved that I do not regard our intercourse as strictly

official. In fact, I don't want it to have that character at all... Oh yes! I admit that the request for your presence here had an official form. But I put it to you whether it was a form which would have been used to secure the attendance of a..."

"Suspect," exclaimed Razumov, looking straight into the official's eyes. They were big with heavy eyelids, and met his boldness with a dim, steadfast gaze. "A suspect." The open repetition of that word which had been haunting all his waking hours gave Razumov a strange sort of satisfaction. Councillor Mikulin shook his head slightly. "Surely you do know that I've had my rooms searched by the police?"

"I was about to say a 'misunderstood person,' when you interrupted me," insinuated quietly Councillor Mikulin.

Razumov smiled without bitterness. The renewed sense of his intellectual superiority sustained him in the hour of danger. He said a little disdainfully —

"I know I am but a reed. But I beg you to allow me the superiority of the thinking reed over the unthinking forces that are about to crush him out of existence. Practical thinking in the last instance is but criticism. I may perhaps be allowed to express my wonder at this action of the police being delayed for two full days during which, of course, I could have annihilated everything compromising by burning it — let us say — and getting rid of the very ashes, for that matter."

"You are angry," remarked the official, with an unutterable simplicity of tone and manner. "Is that reasonable?"

Razumov felt himself colouring with annoyance.

"I am reasonable. I am even — permit me to say — a thinker, though to be sure, this name nowadays seems to be the monopoly of hawkers of revolutionary wares, the slaves of some French or German thought — devil knows what foreign notions. But I am not an intellectual mongrel. I think like a Russian. I think faithfully — and I take the liberty to call myself a thinker. It is not a forbidden word, as far as I know."

"No. Why should it be a forbidden word?" Councillor Mikulin turned in his seat with crossed legs and resting his elbow on the table propped his head on the knuckles of a half-closed hand. Razumov noticed a thick forefinger clasped by a massive gold band set with a blood-red stone — a signet ring that, looking as if it could weigh half a pound, was an appropriate ornament for that ponderous man with the accurate middle-parting of glossy hair above a rugged Socratic forehead.

"Could it be a wig?" Razumov detected himself wondering with an unexpected detachment. His self-confidence was much shaken. He resolved to chatter no more. Reserve! Reserve! All he had to do was to keep the Ziemianitch episode secret with absolute determination, when the questions came. Keep Ziemianitch strictly out of all the answers.

Councillor Mikulin looked at him dimly. Razumov's self-confidence abandoned him completely. It seemed impossible to keep Ziemianitch out. Every question would lead to that, because, of course, there was nothing else. He made an effort to brace himself up. It was a failure. But Councillor Mikulin was surprisingly detached too.

“Why should it be forbidden?” he repeated. “I too consider myself a thinking man, I assure you. The principal condition is to think correctly. I admit it is difficult sometimes at first for a young man abandoned to himself — with his generous impulses undisciplined, so to speak — at the mercy of every wild wind that blows. Religious belief, of course, is a great...”

Councillor Mikulin glanced down his beard, and Razumov, whose tension was relaxed by that unexpected and discursive turn, murmured with gloomy discontent —

“That man, Haldin, believed in God.”

“Ah! You are aware,” breathed out Councillor Mikulin, making the point softly, as if with discretion, but making it nevertheless plainly enough, as if he too were put off his guard by Razumov’s remark. The young man preserved an impassive, moody countenance, though he reproached himself bitterly for a pernicious fool, to have given thus an utterly false impression of intimacy. He kept his eyes on the floor. “I must positively hold my tongue unless I am obliged to speak,” he admonished himself. And at once against his will the question, “Hadn’t I better tell him everything?” presented itself with such force that he had to bite his lower lip. Councillor Mikulin could not, however, have nourished any hope of confession. He went on —

“You tell me more than his judges were able to get out of him. He was judged by a commission of three. He would tell them absolutely nothing. I have the report of the interrogatories here, by me. After every question there stands ‘Refuses to answer — refuses to answer.’ It’s like that page after page. You see, I have been entrusted with some further investigations around and about this affair. He has left me nothing to begin my investigations on. A hardened miscreant. And so, you say, he believed in...”

Again Councillor Mikulin glanced down his beard with a faint grimace; but he did not pause for long. Remarking with a shade of scorn that blasphemers also had that sort of belief, he concluded by supposing that Mr. Razumov had conversed frequently with Haldin on the subject.

“No,” said Razumov loudly, without looking up. “He talked and I listened. That is not a conversation.”

“Listening is a great art,” observed Mikulin parenthetically.

“And getting people to talk is another,” mumbled Razumov.

“Well, no — that is not very difficult,” Mikulin said innocently, “except, of course, in special cases. For instance, this Haldin. Nothing could induce him to talk. He was brought four times before the delegated judges. Four secret interrogatories — and even during the last, when your personality was put forward...”

“My personality put forward?” repeated Razumov, raising his head brusquely. “I don’t understand.” Councillor Mikulin turned squarely to the table, and taking up some sheets of grey foolscap dropped them one after another, retaining only the last in his hand. He held it before his eyes while speaking.

“It was — you see — judged necessary. In a case of that gravity no means of action upon the culprit should be neglected. You understand that yourself, I am certain.

“Razumov stared with enormous wide eyes at the side view of Councillor Mikulin, who now was not looking at him at all.

“So it was decided (I was consulted by General T — -) that a certain question should be put to the accused. But in deference to the earnest wishes of Prince K — - your name has been kept out of the documents and even from the very knowledge of the judges themselves. Prince K — - recognized the propriety, the necessity of what we proposed to do, but he was concerned for your safety. Things do leak out — that we can’t deny. One cannot always answer for the discretion of inferior officials. There was, of course, the secretary of the special tribunal — one or two gendarmes in the room. Moreover, as I have said, in deference to Prince K — - even the judges themselves were to be left in ignorance. The question ready framed was sent to them by General T — - (I wrote it out with my own hand) with instructions to put it to the prisoner the very last of all. Here it is.

“Councillor Mikulin threw back his head into proper focus and went on reading monotonously: ‘Question — Has the man well known to you, in whose rooms you remained for several hours on Monday and on whose information you have been arrested — has he had any previous knowledge of your intention to commit a political murder?...’ Prisoner refuses to reply.

“Question repeated. Prisoner preserves the same stubborn silence.

“The venerable Chaplain of the Fortress being then admitted and exhorting the prisoner to repentance, entreating him also to atone for his crime by an unreserved and full confession which should help to liberate from the sin of rebellion against the Divine laws and the sacred Majesty of the Ruler, our Christ-loving land — the prisoner opens his lips for the first time during this morning’s audience and in a loud, clear voice rejects the venerable Chaplain’s ministrations.

“At eleven o’clock the Court pronounces in summary form the death sentence.

“The execution is fixed for four o’clock in the afternoon, subject to further instructions from superior authorities.”

Councillor Mikulin dropped the page of foolscap, glanced down his beard, and turning to Razumov, added in an easy, explanatory tone —

“We saw no object in delaying the execution. The order to carry out the sentence was sent by telegraph at noon. I wrote out the telegram myself. He was hanged at four o’clock this afternoon.”

The definite information of Haldin’s death gave Razumov the feeling of general lassitude which follows a great exertion or a great excitement. He kept very still on the sofa, but a murmur escaped him —

“He had a belief in a future existence.”

Councillor Mikulin shrugged his shoulders slightly, and Razumov got up with an effort. There was nothing now to stay for in that room. Haldin had been hanged at four o’clock. There could be no doubt of that. He had, it seemed, entered upon his future existence, long boots, Astrakhan fur cap and all, down to the very leather strap round his waist. A flickering, vanishing sort of existence. It was not his soul, it was his mere

phantom he had left behind on this earth — thought Razumov, smiling caustically to himself while he crossed the room, utterly forgetful of where he was and of Councillor Mikulin's existence. The official could have set a lot of bells ringing all over the building without leaving his chair. He let Razumov go quite up to the door before he spoke.

"Come, Kirylo Sidorovitch — what are you doing?"

Razumov turned his head and looked at him in silence. He was not in the least disconcerted. Councillor Mikulin's arms were stretched out on the table before him and his body leaned forward a little with an effort of his dim gaze.

"Was I actually going to clear out like this?" Razumov wondered at himself with an impassive countenance. And he was aware of this impassiveness concealing a lucid astonishment.

"Evidently I was going out if he had not spoken," he thought. "What would he have done then? I must end this affair one way or another. I must make him show his hand."

For a moment longer he reflected behind the mask as it were, then let go the door-handle and came back to the middle of the room.

"I'll tell you what you think," he said explosively, but not raising his voice. "You think that you are dealing with a secret accomplice of that unhappy man. No, I do not know that he was unhappy. He did not tell me. He was a wretch from my point of view, because to keep alive a false idea is a greater crime than to kill a man. I suppose you will not deny that? I hated him! Visionaries work everlasting evil on earth. Their Utopias inspire in the mass of mediocre minds a disgust of reality and a contempt for the secular logic of human development."

Razumov shrugged his shoulders and stared. "What a tirade!" he thought. The silence and immobility of Councillor Mikulin impressed him. The bearded bureaucrat sat at his post, mysteriously self-possessed like an idol with dim, unreadable eyes. Razumov's voice changed involuntarily.

"If you were to ask me where is the necessity of my hate for such as Haldin, I would answer you — there is nothing sentimental in it. I did not hate him because he had committed the crime of murder. Abhorrence is not hate. I hated him simply because I am sane. It is in that character that he outraged me. His death..."

Razumov felt his voice growing thick in his throat. The dimness of Councillor Mikulin's eyes seemed to spread all over his face and made it indistinct to Razumov's sight. He tried to disregard these phenomena.

"Indeed," he pursued, pronouncing each word carefully, "what is his death to me? If he were lying here on the floor I could walk over his breast... The fellow is a mere phantom..."

Razumov's voice died out very much against his will. Mikulin behind the table did not allow himself the slightest movement. The silence lasted for some little time before Razumov could go on again.

"He went about talking of me. Those intellectual fellows sit in each other's rooms and get drunk on foreign ideas in the same way young Guards' officers treat each other with foreign wines. Merest debauchery. ...Upon my Word," — Razumov, enraged by a

sudden recollection of Ziemianitch, lowered his voice forcibly, — "upon my word, we Russians are a drunken lot. Intoxication of some sort we must have: to get ourselves wild with sorrow or maudlin with resignation; to lie inert like a log or set fire to the house. What is a sober man to do, I should like to know? To cut oneself entirely from one's kind is impossible. To live in a desert one must be a saint. But if a drunken man runs out of the grog-shop, falls on your neck and kisses you on both cheeks because something about your appearance has taken his fancy, what then — kindly tell me? You may break, perhaps, a cudgel on his back and yet not succeed in beating him off..."

Councillor Mikulin raised his hand and passed it down his face deliberately.

"That's... of course," he said in an undertone.

The quiet gravity of that gesture made Razumov pause. It was so unexpected, too. What did it mean? It had an alarming aloofness. Razumov remembered his intention of making him show his hand.

"I have said all this to Prince K — -," he began with assumed indifference, but lost it on seeing Councillor Mikulin's slow nod of assent. "You know it? You've heard... Then why should I be called here to be told of Haldin's execution? Did you want to confront me with his silence now that the man is dead? What is his silence to me! This is incomprehensible. You want in some way to shake my moral balance."

"No. Not that," murmured Councillor Mikulin, just audibly. "The service you have rendered is appreciated..."

"Is it?" interrupted Razumov ironically.

"...and your position too." Councillor Mikulin did not raise his voice. "But only think! You fall into Prince K — -'s study as if from the sky with your startling information... You are studying yet, Mr. Razumov, but we are serving already — don't forget that... And naturally some curiosity was bound to..."

Councillor Mikulin looked down his beard. Razumov's lips trembled.

"An occurrence of that sort marks a man," the homely murmur went on. "I admit I was curious to see you. General T — - thought it would be useful, too... Don't think I am incapable of understanding your sentiments. When I was young like you I studied..."

"Yes — you wished to see me," said Razumov in a tone of profound distaste. "Naturally you have the right — I mean the power. It all amounts to the same thing. But it is perfectly useless, if you were to look at me and listen to me for a year. I begin to think there is something about me which people don't seem able to make out. It's unfortunate. I imagine, however, that Prince K — - understands. He seemed to."

Councillor Mikulin moved slightly and spoke.

"Prince K — - is aware of everything that is being done, and I don't mind informing you that he approved my intention of becoming personally acquainted with you."

Razumov concealed an immense disappointment under the accents of railing surprise.

"So he is curious too!... Well — after all, Prince K — - knows me very little. It is really very unfortunate for me, but — it is not exactly my fault."

Councillor Mikulin raised a hasty deprecatory hand and inclined his head slightly over his shoulder.

“Now, Mr. Razumov — is it necessary to take it in that way? Everybody I am sure can...”

He glanced rapidly down his beard, and when he looked up again there was for a moment an interested expression in his misty gaze. Razumov discouraged it with a cold, repellent smile.

“No. That’s of no importance to be sure — except that in respect of all this curiosity being aroused by a very simple matter... What is to be done with it? It is unappeasable. I mean to say there is nothing to appease it with. I happen to have been born a Russian with patriotic instincts — whether inherited or not I am not in a position to say.”

Razumov spoke consciously with elaborate steadiness.

“Yes, patriotic instincts developed by a faculty of independent thinking — of detached thinking. In that respect I am more free than any social democratic revolution could make me. It is more than probable that I don’t think exactly as you are thinking. Indeed, how could it be? You would think most likely at this moment that I am elaborately lying to cover up the track of my repentance.”

Razumov stopped. His heart had grown too big for his breast. Councillor Mikulin did not flinch.

“Why so?” he said simply. “I assisted personally at the search of your rooms. I looked through all the papers myself. I have been greatly impressed by a sort of political confession of faith. A very remarkable document. Now may I ask for what purpose...”

“To deceive the police naturally,” said Razumov savagely... “What is all this mockery? Of course you can send me straight from this room to Siberia. That would be intelligible. To what is intelligible I can submit. But I protest against this comedy of persecution. The whole affair is becoming too comical altogether for my taste. A comedy of errors, phantoms, and suspicions. It’s positively indecent...”

Councillor Mikulin turned an attentive ear. “Did you say phantoms?” he murmured.

“I could walk over dozens of them.” Razumov, with an impatient wave of his hand, went on headlong, “But, really, I must claim the right to be done once for all with that man. And in order to accomplish this I shall take the liberty...”

Razumov on his side of the table bowed slightly to the seated bureaucrat.

“... To retire — simply to retire,” he finished with great resolution.

He walked to the door, thinking, “Now he must show his hand. He must ring and have me arrested before I am out of the building, or he must let me go. And either way...”

An unhurried voice said —

“Kirylo Sidorovitch.” Razumov at the door turned his head.

“To retire,” he repeated.

“Where to?” asked Councillor Mikulin softly.

Part 2

Chapter 1

In the conduct of an invented story there are, no doubt, certain proprieties to be observed for the sake of clearness and effect. A man of imagination, however inexperienced in the art of narrative, has his instinct to guide him in the choice of his words, and in the development of the action. A grain of talent excuses many mistakes. But this is not a work of imagination; I have no talent; my excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art, but in its artlessness. Aware of my limitations and strong in the sincerity of my purpose, I would not try (were I able) to invent anything. I push my scruples so far that I would not even invent a transition.

Dropping then Mr. Razumov's record at the point where Councillor Mikulin's question "Where to?" comes in with the force of an insoluble problem, I shall simply say that I made the acquaintance of these ladies about six months before that time. By "these ladies" I mean, of course, the mother and the sister of the unfortunate Haldin.

By what arguments he had induced his mother to sell their little property and go abroad for an indefinite time, I cannot tell precisely. I have an idea that Mrs. Haldin, at her son's wish, would have set fire to her house and emigrated to the moon without any sign of surprise or apprehension; and that Miss Haldin — Nathalie, caressingly Nataalka — would have given her assent to the scheme.

Their proud devotion to that young man became clear to me in a very short time. Following his directions they went straight to Switzerland — to Zurich — where they remained the best part of a year. From Zurich, which they did not like, they came to Geneva. A friend of mine in Lausanne, a lecturer in history at the University (he had married a Russian lady, a distant connection of Mrs. Haldin's), wrote to me suggesting I should call on these ladies. It was a very kindly meant business suggestion. Miss Haldin wished to go through a course of reading the best English authors with a competent teacher.

Mrs. Haldin received me very kindly. Her bad French, of which she was smilingly conscious, did away with the formality of the first interview. She was a tall woman in a black silk dress. A wide brow, regular features, and delicately cut lips, testified to her past beauty. She sat upright in an easy chair and in a rather weak, gentle voice told me that her Nataalka simply thirsted after knowledge. Her thin hands were lying on her lap, her facial immobility had in it something monachal. "In Russia," she went on, "all knowledge was tainted with falsehood. Not chemistry and all that, but

education generally," she explained. The Government corrupted the teaching for its own purposes. Both her children felt that. Her Nataika had obtained a diploma of a Superior School for Women and her son was a student at the St. Petersburg University. He had a brilliant intellect, a most noble unselfish nature, and he was the oracle of his comrades. Early next year, she hoped he would join them and they would then go to Italy together. In any other country but their own she would have been certain of a great future for a man with the extraordinary abilities and the lofty character of her son — but in Russia...

The young lady sitting by the window turned her head and said —

"Come, mother. Even with us things change with years."

Her voice was deep, almost harsh, and yet caressing in its harshness. She had a dark complexion, with red lips and a full figure. She gave the impression of strong vitality. The old lady sighed.

"You are both young — you two. It is easy for you to hope. But I, too, am not hopeless. Indeed, how could I be with a son like this."

I addressed Miss Haldin, asking her what authors she wished to read. She directed upon me her grey eyes shaded by black eyelashes, and I became aware, notwithstanding my years, how attractive physically her personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman something else than the mere grace of femininity. Her glance was as direct and trustful as that of a young man yet unspoiled by the world's wise lessons. And it was intrepid, but in this intrepidity there was nothing aggressive. A naive yet thoughtful assurance is a better definition. She had reflected already (in Russia the young begin to think early), but she had never known deception as yet because obviously she had never yet fallen under the sway of passion. She was — to look at her was enough — very capable of being roused by an idea or simply by a person. At least, so I judged with I believe an unbiassed mind; for clearly my person could not be the person — and as to my ideas!...

We became excellent friends in the course of our reading. It was very pleasant. Without fear of provoking a smile, I shall confess that I became very much attached to that young girl. At the end of four months I told her that now she could very well go on reading English by herself. It was time for the teacher to depart. My pupil looked unpleasantly surprised.

Mrs. Haldin, with her immobility of feature and kindly expression of the eyes, uttered from her armchair in her uncertain French, "Mais l'ami reviendra." And so it was settled. I returned — not four times a week as before, but pretty frequently. In the autumn we made some short excursions together in company with other Russians. My friendship with these ladies gave me a standing in the Russian colony which otherwise I could not have had.

The day I saw in the papers the news of Mr. de P — -'s assassination — it was a Sunday — I met the two ladies in the street and walked with them for some distance. Mrs. Haldin wore a heavy grey cloak, I remember, over her black silk dress, and her fine eyes met mine with a very quiet expression.

"We have been to the late service," she said. "Natalka came with me. Her girl-friends, the students here, of course don't... With us in Russia the church is so identified with oppression, that it seems almost necessary when one wishes to be free in this life, to give up all hope of a future existence. But I cannot give up praying for my son."

She added with a sort of stony grimness, colouring slightly, and in French, "Ce n'est peut etre qu'une habitude." ("It may be only habit.")

Miss Haldin was carrying the prayer-book. She did not glance at her mother.

"You and Victor are both profound believers," she said.

I communicated to them the news from their country which I had just read in a cafe. For a whole minute we walked together fairly briskly in silence. Then Mrs. Haldin murmured —

"There will be more trouble, more persecutions for this. They may be even closing the University. There is neither peace nor rest in Russia for one but in the grave.

"Yes. The way is hard," came from the daughter, looking straight before her at the Chain of Jura covered with snow, like a white wall closing the end of the street. "But concord is not so very far off."

"That is what my children think," observed Mrs. Haldin to me.

I did not conceal my feeling that these were strange times to talk of concord. Nathalie Haldin surprised me by saying, as if she had thought very much on the subject, that the occidentals did not understand the situation. She was very calm and youthfully superior.

"You think it is a class conflict, or a conflict of interests, as social contests are with you in Europe. But it is not that at all. It is something quite different."

"It is quite possible that I don't understand," I admitted.

That propensity of lifting every problem from the plane of the understandable by means of some sort of mystic expression, is very Russian. I knew her well enough to have discovered her scorn for all the practical forms of political liberty known to the western world. I suppose one must be a Russian to understand Russian simplicity, a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naive and hopeless cynicism. I think sometimes that the psychological secret of the profound difference of that people consists in this, that they detest life, the irremediable life of the earth as it is, whereas we westerners cherish it with perhaps an equal exaggeration of its sentimental value. But this is a digression indeed...

I helped these ladies into the tramcar and they asked me to call in the afternoon. At least Mrs. Haldin asked me as she climbed up, and her Natalka smiled down at the dense westerner indulgently from the rear platform of the moving car. The light of the clear wintry forenoon was softened in her grey eyes.

Mr. Razumov's record, like the open book of fate, revives for me the memory of that day as something startlingly pitiless in its freedom from all forebodings. Victor Haldin was still with the living, but with the living whose only contact with life is the expectation of death. He must have been already referring to the last of his earthly affections, the hours of that obstinate silence, which for him was to be prolonged into

eternity. That afternoon the ladies entertained a good many of their compatriots — more than was usual for them to receive at one time; and the drawing-room on the ground floor of a large house on the Boulevard des Philosophes was very much crowded.

I outstayed everybody; and when I rose Miss Haldin stood up too. I took her hand and was moved to revert to that morning's conversation in the street.

"Admitting that we occidentals do not understand the character of your..." I began.

It was as if she had been prepared for me by some mysterious fore-knowledge. She checked me gently —

"Their impulses — their..." she sought the proper expression and found it, but in French..."their mouvements d'ame."

Her voice was not much above a whisper.

"Very well," I said. "But still we are looking at a conflict. You say it is not a conflict of classes and not a conflict of interests. Suppose I admitted that. Are antagonistic ideas then to be reconciled more easily — can they be cemented with blood and violence into that concord which you proclaim to be so near?"

She looked at me searchingly with her clear grey eyes, without answering my reasonable question — my obvious, my unanswerable question.

"It is inconceivable," I added, with something like annoyance.

"Everything is inconceivable," she said. "The whole world is inconceivable to the strict logic of ideas. And yet the world exists to our senses, and we exist in it. There must be a necessity superior to our conceptions. It is a very miserable and a very false thing to belong to the majority. We Russians shall find some better form of national freedom than an artificial conflict of parties — which is wrong because it is a conflict and contemptible because it is artificial. It is left for us Russians to discover a better way."

Mrs. Haldin had been looking out of the window. She turned upon me the almost lifeless beauty of her face, and the living benign glance of her big dark eyes.

"That's what my children think," she declared.

"I suppose," I addressed Miss Haldin, "that you will be shocked if I tell you that I haven't understood — I won't say a single word; I've understood all the words... But what can be this era of disembodied concord you are looking forward to. Life is a thing of form. It has its plastic shape and a definite intellectual aspect. The most idealistic conceptions of love and forbearance must be clothed in flesh as it were before they can be made understandable."

I took my leave of Mrs. Haldin, whose beautiful lips never stirred. She smiled with her eyes only. Nathalie Haldin went with me as far as the door, very amiable.

"Mother imagines that I am the slavish echo of my brother Victor. It is not so. He understands me better than I can understand him. When he joins us and you come to know him you will see what an exceptional soul it is." She paused. "He is not a strong man in the conventional sense, you know," she added. "But his character is without a flaw."

“I believe that it will not be difficult for me to make friends with your brother Victor.”

“Don’t expect to understand him quite,” she said, a little maliciously. “He is not at all — at all — western at bottom.”

And on this unnecessary warning I left the room with another bow in the doorway to Mrs. Haldin in her armchair by the window. The shadow of autocracy all unperceived by me had already fallen upon the Boulevard des Philosophes, in the free, independent and democratic city of Geneva, where there is a quarter called “La Petite Russie.” Whenever two Russians come together, the shadow of autocracy is with them, tinging their thoughts, their views, their most intimate feelings, their private life, their public utterances — haunting the secret of their silences.

What struck me next in the course of a week or so was the silence of these ladies. I used to meet them walking in the public garden near the University. They greeted me with their usual friendliness, but I could not help noticing their taciturnity. By that time it was generally known that the assassin of M. de P — - had been caught, judged, and executed. So much had been declared officially to the news agencies. But for the world at large he remained anonymous. The official secrecy had withheld his name from the public. I really cannot imagine for what reason.

One day I saw Miss Haldin walking alone in the main valley of the Bastions under the naked trees.

“Mother is not very well,” she explained.

As Mrs. Haldin had, it seemed, never had a day’s illness in her life, this indisposition was disquieting. It was nothing definite, too.

“I think she is fretting because we have not heard from my brother for rather a long time.”

“No news — good news,” I said cheerfully, and we began to walk slowly side by side.

“Not in Russia,” she breathed out so low that I only just caught the words. I looked at her with more attention.

“You too are anxious?”

She admitted after a moment of hesitation that she was.

“It is really such a long time since we heard...”

And before I could offer the usual banal suggestions she confided in me.

“Oh! But it is much worse than that. I wrote to a family we know in Petersburg. They had not seen him for more than a month. They thought he was already with us. They were even offended a little that he should have left Petersburg without calling on them. The husband of the lady went at once to his lodgings. Victor had left there and they did not know his address.”

I remember her catching her breath rather pitifully. Her brother had not been seen at lectures for a very long time either. He only turned up now and then at the University gate to ask the porter for his letters. And the gentleman friend was told that the student Haldin did not come to claim the last two letters for him. But the police came

to inquire if the student Haldin ever received any correspondence at the University and took them away.

“My two last letters,” she said.

We faced each other. A few snow-flakes fluttered under the naked boughs. The sky was dark.

“What do you think could have happened?” I asked.

Her shoulders moved slightly.

“One can never tell — in Russia.”

I saw then the shadow of autocracy lying upon Russian lives in their submission or their revolt. I saw it touch her handsome open face nestled in a fur collar and darken her clear eyes that shone upon me brilliantly grey in the murky light of a beclouded, inclement afternoon.

“Let us move on,” she said. “It is cold standing — to-day.”

She shuddered a little and stamped her little feet. We moved briskly to the end of the alley and back to the great gates of the garden.

“Have you told your mother?” I ventured to ask.

“No. Not yet. I came out to walk off the impression of this letter.”

I heard a rustle of paper somewhere. It came from her muff. She had the letter with her in there.

“What is it that you are afraid of?” I asked.

To us Europeans of the West, all ideas of political plots and conspiracies seem childish, crude inventions for the theatre or a novel. I did not like to be more definite in my inquiry.

“For us — for my mother specially, what I am afraid of is incertitude. People do disappear. Yes, they do disappear. I leave you to imagine what it is — the cruelty of the dumb weeks — months — years! This friend of ours has abandoned his inquiries when he heard of the police getting hold of the letters. I suppose he was afraid of compromising himself. He has a wife and children — and why should he, after all... Moreover, he is without influential connections and not rich. What could he do?... Yes, I am afraid of silence — for my poor mother. She won't be able to bear it. For my brother I am afraid of...” she became almost indistinct, “of anything.”

We were now near the gate opposite the theatre. She raised her voice.

“But lost people do turn up even in Russia. Do you know what my last hope is? Perhaps the next thing we know, we shall see him walking into our rooms.”

I raised my hat and she passed out of the gardens, graceful and strong, after a slight movement of the head to me, her hands in the muff, crumpling the cruel Petersburg letter.

On returning home I opened the newspaper I receive from London, and glancing down the correspondence from Russia — not the telegrams but the correspondence — the first thing that caught my eye was the name of Haldin. Mr. de P — -'s death was no longer an actuality, but the enterprising correspondent was proud of having ferreted out some unofficial information about that fact of modern history. He had got hold of

Haldin's name, and had picked up the story of the midnight arrest in the street. But the sensation from a journalistic point of view was already well in the past. He did not allot to it more than twenty lines out of a full column. It was quite enough to give me a sleepless night. I perceived that it would have been a sort of treason to let Miss Haldin come without preparation upon that journalistic discovery which would infallibly be reproduced on the morrow by French and Swiss newspapers. I had a very bad time of it till the morning, wakeful with nervous worry and night-marish with the feeling of being mixed up with something theatrical and morbidly affected. The incongruity of such a complication in those two women's lives was sensible to me all night in the form of absolute anguish. It seemed due to their refined simplicity that it should remain concealed from them for ever. Arriving at an unconscionably early hour at the door of their apartment, I felt as if I were about to commit an act of vandalism...

The middle-aged servant woman led me into the drawing-room where there was a duster on a chair and a broom leaning against the centre table. The motes danced in the sunshine; I regretted I had not written a letter instead of coming myself, and was thankful for the brightness of the day. Miss Haldin in a plain black dress came lightly out of her mother's room with a fixed uncertain smile on her lips.

I pulled the paper out of my pocket. I did not imagine that a number of the Standard could have the effect of Medusa's head. Her face went stony in a moment — her eyes — her limbs. The most terrible thing was that being stony she remained alive. One was conscious of her palpitating heart. I hope she forgave me the delay of my clumsy circumlocution. It was not very prolonged; she could not have kept so still from head to foot for more than a second or two; and then I heard her draw a breath. As if the shock had paralysed her moral resistance, and affected the firmness of her muscles, the contours of her face seemed to have given way. She was frightfully altered. She looked aged — ruined. But only for a moment. She said with decision —

“I am going to tell my mother at once.”

“Would that be safe in her state?” I objected.

“What can be worse than the state she has been in for the last month? We understand this in another way. The crime is not at his door. Don't imagine I am defending him before you.”

She went to the bedroom door, then came back to ask me in a low murmur not to go till she returned. For twenty interminable minutes not a sound reached me. At last Miss Haldin came out and walked across the room with her quick light step. When she reached the armchair she dropped into it heavily as if completely exhausted.

Mrs. Haldin, she told me, had not shed a tear. She was sitting up in bed, and her immobility, her silence, were very alarming. At last she lay down gently and had motioned her daughter away.

“She will call me in presently,” added Miss Haldin. “I left a bell near the bed.”

I confess that my very real sympathy had no standpoint. The Western readers for whom this story is written will understand what I mean. It was, if I may say so, the want of experience. Death is a remorseless spoliator. The anguish of irreparable loss

is familiar to us all. There is no life so lonely as to be safe against that experience. But the grief I had brought to these two ladies had gruesome associations. It had the associations of bombs and gallows — a lurid, Russian colouring which made the complexion of my sympathy uncertain.

I was grateful to Miss Haldin for not embarrassing me by an outward display of deep feeling. I admired her for that wonderful command over herself, even while I was a little frightened at it. It was the stillness of a great tension. What if it should suddenly snap? Even the door of Mrs. Haldin's room, with the old mother alone in there, had a rather awful aspect.

Nathalie Haldin murmured sadly —

“I suppose you are wondering what my feelings are?”

Essentially that was true. It was that very wonder which unsettled my sympathy of a dense Occidental. I could get hold of nothing but of some commonplace phrases, those futile phrases that give the measure of our impotence before each other's trials I mumbled something to the effect that, for the young, life held its hopes and compensations. It held duties too — but of that I was certain it was not necessary to remind her.

She had a handkerchief in her hands and pulled at it nervously.

“I am not likely to forget my mother,” she said. “We used to be three. Now we are two — two women. She's not so very old. She may live quite a long time yet. What have we to look for in the future? For what hope and what consolation?”

“You must take a wider view,” I said resolutely, thinking that with this exceptional creature this was the right note to strike. She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then the tears she had been keeping down flowed unrestrained. She jumped up and stood in the window with her back to me.

I slipped away without attempting even to approach her. Next day I was told at the door that Mrs. Haldin was better. The middle-aged servant remarked that a lot of people — Russians — had called that day, but Miss Haldin had not seen anybody. A fortnight later, when making my daily call, I was asked in and found Mrs. Haldin sitting in her usual place by the window.

At first one would have thought that nothing was changed. I saw across the room the familiar profile, a little sharper in outline and overspread by a uniform pallor as might have been expected in an invalid. But no disease could have accounted for the change in her black eyes, smiling no longer with gentle irony. She raised them as she gave me her hand. I observed the three weeks' old number of the Standard folded with the correspondence from Russia uppermost, lying on a little table by the side of the armchair. Mrs. Haldin's voice was startlingly weak and colourless. Her first words to me framed a question.

“Has there been anything more in papers?”

I released her long emaciated hand, shook my head negatively, and sat down.

“The English press is wonderful. Nothing can be kept secret from it, and all the world must hear. Only our Russian news is not always easy to understand. Not always easy... But English mothers do not look for news like that...”

She laid her hand on the newspaper and took it away again. I said —

“We too have had tragic times in our history.”

“A long time ago. A very long time ago.”

“Yes.”

“There are nations that have made their bargain with fate,” said Miss Haldin, who had approached us. “We need not envy them.”

“Why this scorn?” I asked gently. “It may be that our bargain was not a very lofty one. But the terms men and nations obtain from Fate are hallowed by the price.”

Mrs. Haldin turned her head away and looked out of the window for a time, with that new, sombre, extinct gaze of her sunken eyes which so completely made another woman of her.

“That Englishman, this correspondent,” she addressed me suddenly, “do you think it is possible that he knew my son?”

To this strange question I could only say that it was possible of course. She saw my surprise.

“If one knew what sort of man he was one could perhaps write to him,” she murmured.

“Mother thinks,” explained Miss Haldin, standing between us, with one hand resting on the back of my chair, “that my poor brother perhaps did not try to save himself.”

I looked up at Miss Haldin in sympathetic consternation, but Miss Haldin was looking down calmly at her mother. The latter said —

“We do not know the address of any of his friends. Indeed, we know nothing of his Petersburg comrades. He had a multitude of young friends, only he never spoke much of them. One could guess that they were his disciples and that they idolized him. But he was so modest. One would think that with so many devoted...”

She averted her head again and looked down the Boulevard des Philosophes, a singularly arid and dusty thoroughfare, where nothing could be seen at the moment but two dogs, a little girl in a pinafore hopping on one leg, and in the distance a workman wheeling a bicycle.

“Even amongst the Apostles of Christ there was found a Judas,” she whispered as if to herself, but with the evident intention to be heard by me.

The Russian visitors assembled in little knots, conversed amongst themselves meantime, in low murmurs, and with brief glances in our direction. It was a great contrast to the usual loud volubility of these gatherings. Miss Haldin followed me into the ante-room.

“People will come,” she said. “We cannot shut the door in their faces.”

While I was putting on my overcoat she began to talk to me of her mother. Poor Mrs. Haldin was fretting after more news. She wanted to go on hearing about her unfortunate son. She could not make up her mind to abandon him quietly to the dumb unknown.

She would persist in pursuing him in there through the long days of motionless silence face to face with the empty Boulevard des Philosophes. She could not understand why he had not escaped — as so many other revolutionists and conspirators had managed to escape in other instances of that kind. It was really inconceivable that the means of secret revolutionary organisations should have failed so inexcusably to preserve her son. But in reality the inconceivable that staggered her mind was nothing but the cruel audacity of Death passing over her head to strike at that young and precious heart.

Miss Haldin mechanically, with an absorbed look, handed me my hat. I understood from her that the poor woman was possessed by the sombre and simple idea that her son must have perished because he did not want to be saved. It could not have been that he despaired of his country's future. That was impossible. Was it possible that his mother and sister had not known how to merit his confidence; and that, after having done what he was compelled to do, his spirit became crushed by an intolerable doubt, his mind distracted by a sudden mistrust.

I was very much shocked by this piece of ingenuity.

“Our three lives were like that!” Miss Haldin twined the fingers of both her hands together in demonstration, then separated them slowly, looking straight into my face. “That's what poor mother found to torment herself and me with, for all the years to come,” added the strange girl. At that moment her indefinable charm was revealed to me in the conjunction of passion and stoicism. I imagined what her life was likely to be by the side of Mrs. Haldin's terrible immobility, inhabited by that fixed idea. But my concern was reduced to silence by my ignorance of her modes of feeling. Difference of nationality is a terrible obstacle for our complex Western natures. But Miss Haldin probably was too simple to suspect my embarrassment. She did not wait for me to say anything, but as if reading my thoughts on my face she went on courageously —

“At first poor mother went numb, as our peasants say; then she began to think and she will go on now thinking and thinking in that unfortunate strain. You see yourself how cruel that is...”

I never spoke with greater sincerity than when I agreed with her that it would be deplorable in the highest degree. She took an anxious breath.

“But all these strange details in the English paper,” she exclaimed suddenly. “What is the meaning of them? I suppose they are true? But is it not terrible that my poor brother should be caught wandering alone, as if in despair, about the streets at night...”

We stood so close to each other in the dark anteroom that I could see her biting her lower lip to suppress a dry sob. After a short pause she said —

“I suggested to mother that he may have been betrayed by some false friend or simply by some cowardly creature. It may be easier for her to believe that.”

I understood now the poor woman's whispered allusion to Judas.

“It may be easier,” I admitted, admiring inwardly the directness and the subtlety of the girl's outlook. She was dealing with life as it was made for her by the political conditions of her country. She faced cruel realities, not morbid imaginings of her own

making. I could not defend myself from a certain feeling of respect when she added simply —

“Time they say can soften every sort of bitterness. But I cannot believe that it has any power over remorse. It is better that mother should think some person guilty of Victor’s death, than that she should connect it with a weakness of her son or a shortcoming of her own.”

“But you, yourself, don’t suppose that...” I began.

She compressed her lips and shook her head. She harboured no evil thoughts against any one, she declared — and perhaps nothing that happened was unnecessary. On these words, pronounced low and sounding mysterious in the half obscurity of the ante-room, we parted with an expressive and warm handshake. The grip of her strong, shapely hand had a seductive frankness, a sort of exquisite virility. I do not know why she should have felt so friendly to me. It may be that she thought I understood her much better than I was able to do. The most precise of her sayings seemed always to me to have enigmatical prolongations vanishing somewhere beyond my reach. I am reduced to suppose that she appreciated my attention and my silence. The attention she could see was quite sincere, so that the silence could not be suspected of coldness. It seemed to satisfy her. And it is to be noted that if she confided in me it was clearly not with the expectation of receiving advice, for which, indeed she never asked.

Chapter 2

Our daily relations were interrupted at this period for something like a fortnight. I had to absent myself unexpectedly from Geneva. On my return I lost no time in directing my steps up the Boulevard des Philosophes.

Through the open door of the drawing-room I was annoyed to hear a visitor holding forth steadily in an unctuous deep voice.

Mrs. Haldin’s armchair by the window stood empty. On the sofa, Nathalie Haldin raised her charming grey eyes in a glance of greeting accompanied by the merest hint of a welcoming smile. But she made no movement. With her strong white hands lying inverted in the lap of her mourning dress she faced a man who presented to me a robust back covered with black broadcloth, and well in keeping with the deep voice. He turned his head sharply over his shoulder, but only for a moment.

“Ah! your English friend. I know. I know. That’s nothing.”

He wore spectacles with smoked glasses, a tall silk hat stood on the floor by the side of his chair. Flourishing slightly a big soft hand he went on with his discourse, precipitating his delivery a little more.

“I have never changed the faith I held while wandering in the forests and bogs of Siberia. It sustained me then — it sustains me now. The great Powers of Europe are bound to disappear — and the cause of their collapse will be very simple. They will exhaust themselves struggling against their proletariat. In Russia it is different. In

Russia we have no classes to combat each other, one holding the power of wealth, and the other mighty with the strength of numbers. We have only an unclean bureaucracy in the face of a people as great and as incorruptible as the ocean. No, we have no classes. But we have the Russian woman. The admirable Russian woman! I receive most remarkable letters signed by women. So elevated in tone, so courageous, breathing such a noble ardour of service! The greatest part of our hopes rests on women. I behold their thirst for knowledge. It is admirable. Look how they absorb, how they are making it their own. It is miraculous. But what is knowledge? ...I understand that you have not been studying anything especially — medicine for instance. No? That's right. Had I been honoured by being asked to advise you on the use of your time when you arrived here I would have been strongly opposed to such a course. Knowledge in itself is mere dross."

He had one of those bearded Russian faces without shape, a mere appearance of flesh and hair with not a single feature having any sort of character. His eyes being hidden by the dark glasses there was an utter absence of all expression. I knew him by sight. He was a Russian refugee of mark. All Geneva knew his burly black-coated figure. At one time all Europe was aware of the story of his life written by himself and translated into seven or more languages. In his youth he had led an idle, dissolute life. Then a society girl he was about to marry died suddenly and thereupon he abandoned the world of fashion, and began to conspire in a spirit of repentance, and, after that, his native autocracy took good care that the usual things should happen to him. He was imprisoned in fortresses, beaten within an inch of his life, and condemned to work in mines, with common criminals. The great success of his book, however, was the chain.

I do not remember now the details of the weight and length of the fetters riveted on his limbs by an "Administrative" order, but it was in the number of pounds and the thickness of links an appalling assertion of the divine right of autocracy. Appalling and futile too, because this big man managed to carry off that simple engine of government with him into the woods. The sensational clink of these fetters is heard all through the chapters describing his escape — a subject of wonder to two continents. He had begun by concealing himself successfully from his guard in a hole on a river bank. It was the end of the day; with infinite labour he managed to free one of his legs. Meantime night fell. He was going to begin on his other leg when he was overtaken by a terrible misfortune. He dropped his file.

All this is precise yet symbolic; and the file had its pathetic history. It was given to him unexpectedly one evening, by a quiet, pale-faced girl. The poor creature had come out to the mines to join one of his fellow convicts, a delicate young man, a mechanic and a social democrat, with broad cheekbones and large staring eyes. She had worked her way across half Russia and nearly the whole of Siberia to be near him, and, as it seems, with the hope of helping him to escape. But she arrived too late. Her lover had died only a week before.

Through that obscure episode, as he says, in the history of ideas in Russia, the file came into his hands, and inspired him with an ardent resolution to regain his liberty. When it slipped through his fingers it was as if it had gone straight into the earth. He could by no manner of means put his hand on it again in the dark. He groped systematically in the loose earth, in the mud, in the water; the night was passing meantime, the precious night on which he counted to get away into the forests, his only chance of escape. For a moment he was tempted by despair to give up; but recalling the quiet, sad face of the heroic girl, he felt profoundly ashamed of his weakness. She had selected him for the gift of liberty and he must show himself worthy of the favour conferred by her feminine, indomitable soul. It appeared to be a sacred trust. To fail would have been a sort of treason against the sacredness of self-sacrifice and womanly love.

There are in his book whole pages of self-analysis whence emerges like a white figure from a dark confused sea the conviction of woman's spiritual superiority — his new faith confessed since in several volumes. His first tribute to it, the great act of his conversion, was his extraordinary existence in the endless forests of the Okhotsk Province, with the loose end of the chain wound about his waist. A strip torn off his convict shirt secured the end firmly. Other strips fastened it at intervals up his left leg to deaden the clanking and to prevent the slack links from getting hooked in the bushes. He became very fierce. He developed an unsuspected genius for the arts of a wild and hunted existence. He learned to creep into villages without betraying his presence by anything more than an occasional faint jingle. He broke into outhouses with an axe he managed to purloin in a wood-cutters' camp. In the deserted tracts of country he lived on wild berries and hunted for honey. His clothing dropped off him gradually. His naked tawny figure glimpsed vaguely through the bushes with a cloud of mosquitoes and flies hovering about the shaggy head, spread tales of terror through whole districts. His temper grew savage as the days went by, and he was glad to discover that that there was so much of a brute in him. He had nothing else to put his trust in. For it was as though there had been two human beings indissolubly joined in that enterprise. The civilized man, the enthusiast of advanced humanitarian ideals thirsting for the triumph of spiritual love and political liberty; and the stealthy, primeval savage, pitilessly cunning in the preservation of his freedom from day to day, like a tracked wild beast.

The wild beast was making its way instinctively eastward to the Pacific coast, and the civilised humanitarian in fearful anxious dependence watched the proceedings with awe. Through all these weeks he could never make up his mind to appeal to human compassion. In the wary primeval savage this shyness might have been natural, but the other too, the civilized creature, the thinker, the escaping "political" had developed an absurd form of morbid pessimism, a form of temporary insanity, originating perhaps in the physical worry and discomfort of the chain. These links, he fancied, made him odious to the rest of mankind. It was a repugnant and suggestive load. Nobody could feel any pity at the disgusting sight of a man escaping with a broken chain. His imagi-

nation became affected by his fetters in a precise, matter-of-fact manner. It seemed to him impossible that people could resist the temptation of fastening the loose end to a staple in the wall while they went for the nearest police official. Crouching in holes or hidden in thickets, he had tried to read the faces of unsuspecting free settlers working in the clearings or passing along the paths within a foot or two of his eyes. His feeling was that no man on earth could be trusted with the temptation of the chain.

One day, however, he chanced to come upon a solitary woman. It was on an open slope of rough grass outside the forest. She sat on the bank of a narrow stream; she had a red handkerchief on her head and a small basket was lying on the ground near her hand. At a little distance could be seen a cluster of log cabins, with a water-mill over a dammed pool shaded by birch trees and looking bright as glass in the twilight. He approached her silently, his hatchet stuck in his iron belt, a thick cudgel in his hand; there were leaves and bits of twig in his tangled hair, in his matted beard; bunches of rags he had wound round the links fluttered from his waist. A faint clink of his fetters made the woman turn her head. Too terrified by this savage apparition to jump up or even to scream, she was yet too stout-hearted to faint... Expecting nothing less than to be murdered on the spot she covered her eyes with her hands to avoid the sight of the descending axe. When at last she found courage to look again, she saw the shaggy wild man sitting on the bank six feet away from her. His thin, sinewy arms hugged his naked legs; the long beard covered the knees on which he rested his chin; all these clasped, folded limbs, the bare shoulders, the wild head with red staring eyes, shook and trembled violently while the bestial creature was making efforts to speak. It was six weeks since he had heard the sound of his own voice. It seemed as though he had lost the faculty of speech. He had become a dumb and despairing brute, till the woman's sudden, unexpected cry of profound pity, the insight of her feminine compassion discovering the complex misery of the man under the terrifying aspect of the monster, restored him to the ranks of humanity. This point of view is presented in his book, with a very effective eloquence. She ended, he says, by shedding tears over him, sacred, redeeming tears, while he also wept with joy in the manner of a converted sinner. Directing him to hide in the bushes and wait patiently (a police patrol was expected in the Settlement) she went away towards the houses, promising to return at night.

As if providentially appointed to be the newly wedded wife of the village blacksmith, the woman persuaded her husband to come out with her, bringing some tools of his trade, a hammer, a chisel, a small anvil... "My fetters" — the book says — "were struck off on the banks of the stream, in the starlight of a calm night by an athletic, taciturn young man of the people, kneeling at my feet, while the woman like a liberating genius stood by with clasped hands." Obviously a symbolic couple. At the same time they furnished his regained humanity with some decent clothing, and put heart into the new man by the information that the seacoast of the Pacific was only a very few miles away. It could be seen, in fact, from the top of the next ridge...

The rest of his escape does not lend itself to mystic treatment and symbolic interpretation. He ended by finding his way to the West by the Suez Canal route in the usual manner. Reaching the shores of South Europe he sat down to write his autobiography — the great literary success of its year. This book was followed by other books written with the declared purpose of elevating humanity. In these works he preached generally the cult of the woman. For his own part he practised it under the rites of special devotion to the transcendental merits of a certain Madame de S — , a lady of advanced views, no longer very young, once upon a time the intriguing wife of a now dead and forgotten diplomat. Her loud pretensions to be one of the leaders of modern thought and of modern sentiment, she sheltered (like Voltaire and Mme. de Stael) on the republican territory of Geneva. Driving through the streets in her big landau she exhibited to the indifference of the natives and the stares of the tourists a long-waisted, youthful figure of hieratic stiffness, with a pair of big gleaming eyes, rolling restlessly behind a short veil of black lace, which, coming down no further than her vividly red lips, resembled a mask. Usually the “heroic fugitive” (this name was bestowed upon him in a review of the English edition of his book) — the “heroic fugitive” accompanied her, sitting, portentously bearded and darkly bespectacled, not by her side, but opposite her, with his back to the horses. Thus, facing each other, with no one else in the roomy carriage, their airings suggested a conscious public manifestation. Or it may have been unconscious. Russian simplicity often marches innocently on the edge of cynicism for some lofty purpose. But it is a vain enterprise for sophisticated Europe to try and understand these doings. Considering the air of gravity extending even to the physiognomy of the coachman and the action of the showy horses, this quaint display might have possessed a mystic significance, but to the corrupt frivolity of a Western mind, like my own, it seemed hardly decent.

However, it is not becoming for an obscure teacher of languages to criticize a “heroic fugitive” of worldwide celebrity. I was aware from hearsay that he was an industrious busy-body, hunting up his compatriots in hotels, in private lodgings, and — I was told — conferring upon them the honour of his notice in public gardens when a suitable opening presented itself. I was under the impression that after a visit or two, several months before, he had given up the ladies Haldin — no doubt reluctantly, for there could be no question of his being a determined person. It was perhaps to be expected that he should reappear again on this terrible occasion, as a Russian and a revolutionist, to say the right thing, to strike the true, perhaps a comforting, note. But I did not like to see him sitting there. I trust that an unbecoming jealousy of my privileged position had nothing to do with it. I made no claim to a special standing for my silent friendship. Removed by the difference of age and nationality as if into the sphere of another existence, I produced, even upon myself, the effect of a dumb helpless ghost, of an anxious immaterial thing that could only hover about without the power to protect or guide by as much as a whisper. Since Miss Haldin with her sure instinct had refrained from introducing me to the burly celebrity, I would have retired quietly and

returned later on, had I not met a peculiar expression in her eyes which I interpreted as a request to stay, with the view, perhaps, of shortening an unwelcome visit.

He picked up his hat, but only to deposit it on his knees.

“We shall meet again, Natalia Victorovna. To-day I have called only to mark those feelings towards your honoured mother and yourself, the nature of which you cannot doubt. I needed no urging, but Eleanor — Madame de S — herself has in a way sent me. She extends to you the hand of feminine fellowship. There is positively in all the range of human sentiments no joy and no sorrow that woman cannot understand, elevate, and spiritualize by her interpretation. That young man newly arrived from St. Petersburg, I have mentioned to you, is already under the charm.”

At this point Miss Haldin got up abruptly. I was glad. He did not evidently expect anything so decisive and, at first, throwing his head back, he tilted up his dark glasses with bland curiosity. At last, recollecting himself, he stood up hastily, seizing his hat off his knees with great adroitness.

“How is it, Natalia Victorovna, that you have kept aloof so long, from what after all is — let disparaging tongues say what they like — a unique centre of intellectual freedom and of effort to shape a high conception of our future? In the case of your honoured mother I understand in a measure. At her age new ideas — new faces are not perhaps... But you! Was it mistrust — or indifference? You must come out of your reserve. We Russians have no right to be reserved with each other. In our circumstances it is almost a crime against humanity. The luxury of private grief is not for us. Nowadays the devil is not combated by prayers and fasting. And what is fasting after all but starvation. You must not starve yourself, Natalia Victorovna. Strength is what we want. Spiritual strength, I mean. As to the other kind, what could withstand us Russians if we only put it forth? Sin is different in our day, and the way of salvation for pure souls is different too. It is no longer to be found in monasteries but in the world, in the...”

The deep sound seemed to rise from under the floor, and one felt steeped in it to the lips. Miss Haldin’s interruption resembled the effort of a drowning person to keep above water. She struck in with an accent of impatience —

“But, Peter Ivanovitch, I don’t mean to retire into a monastery. Who would look for salvation there?”

“I spoke figuratively,” he boomed.

“Well, then, I am speaking figuratively too. But sorrow is sorrow and pain is pain in the old way. They make their demands upon people. One has got to face them the best way one can. I know that the blow which has fallen upon us so unexpectedly is only an episode in the fate of a people. You may rest assured that I don’t forget that. But just now I have to think of my mother. How can you expect me to leave her to herself...?”

“That is putting it in a very crude way,” he protested in his great effortless voice.

Miss Haldin did not wait for the vibration to die out.

“And run about visiting amongst a lot of strange people. The idea is distasteful for me; and I do not know what else you may mean?”

He towered before her, enormous, deferential, cropped as close as a convict and this big pinkish poll evoked for me the vision of a wild head with matted locks peering through parted bushes, glimpses of naked, tawny limbs slinking behind the masses of sodden foliage under a cloud of flies and mosquitoes. It was an involuntary tribute to the vigour of his writing. Nobody could doubt that he had wandered in Siberian forests, naked and girt with a chain. The black broadcloth coat invested his person with a character of austere decency — something recalling a missionary.

“Do you know what I want, Natalia Victorovna?” he uttered solemnly. “I want you to be a fanatic.”

“A fanatic?”

“Yes. Faith alone won’t do.”

His voice dropped to a still lower tone. He raised for a moment one thick arm; the other remained hanging down against his thigh, with the fragile silk hat at the end.

“I shall tell you now something which I entreat you to ponder over carefully. Listen, we need a force that would move heaven and earth — nothing less.”

The profound, subterranean note of this “nothing less” made one shudder, almost, like the deep muttering of wind in the pipes of an organ.

“And are we to find that force in the salon of Madame de S — ? Excuse me, Peter Ivanovitch, if I permit myself to doubt it. Is not that lady a woman of the great world, an aristocrat?”

“Prejudice!” he cried. “You astonish me. And suppose she was all that! She is also a woman of flesh and blood. There is always something to weigh down the spiritual side in all of us. But to make of it a reproach is what I did not expect from you. No! I did not expect that. One would think you have listened to some malevolent scandal.”

“I have heard no gossip, I assure you. In our province how could we? But the world speaks of her. What can there be in common in a lady of that sort and an obscure country girl like me?”

“She is a perpetual manifestation of a noble and peerless spirit,” he broke in. “Her charm — no, I shall not speak of her charm. But, of course, everybody who approaches her falls under the spell... Contradictions vanish, trouble falls away from one... Unless I am mistaken — but I never make a mistake in spiritual matters — you are troubled in your soul, Natalia Victorovna.”

Miss Haldin’s clear eyes looked straight at his soft enormous face; I received the impression that behind these dark spectacles of his he could be as impudent as he chose.

“Only the other evening walking back to town from Chateau Borel with our latest interesting arrival from Petersburg, I could notice the powerful soothing influence — I may say reconciling influence... There he was, all these kilometres along the shores of the lake, silent, like a man who has been shown the way of peace. I could feel the leaven working in his soul, you understand. For one thing he listened to me patiently. I myself was inspired that evening by the firm and exquisite genius of Eleanor — Madame de S — , you know. It was a full moon and I could observe his face. I cannot be deceived...”

Miss Haldin, looking down, seemed to hesitate.

“Well! I will think of what you said, Peter Ivanovitch. I shall try to call as soon as I can leave mother for an hour or two safely.”

Coldly as these words were said I was amazed at the concession. He snatched her right hand with such fervour that I thought he was going to press it to his lips or his breast. But he only held it by the finger-tips in his great paw and shook it a little up and down while he delivered his last volley of words.

“That’s right. That’s right. I haven’t obtained your full confidence as yet, Natalia Victorovna, but that will come. All in good time. The sister of Viktor Haldin cannot be without importance... It’s simply impossible. And no woman can remain sitting on the steps. Flowers, tears, applause — that has had its time; it’s a mediaeval conception. The arena, the arena itself is the place for women!”

He relinquished her hand with a flourish, as if giving it to her for a gift, and remained still, his head bowed in dignified submission before her femininity.

“The arena!... You must descend into the arena, Natalia.”

He made one step backwards, inclined his enormous body, and was gone swiftly. The door fell to behind him. But immediately the powerful resonance of his voice was heard addressing in the ante-room the middle-aged servant woman who was letting him out. Whether he exhorted her too to descend into the arena I cannot tell. The thing sounded like a lecture, and the slight crash of the outer door cut it short suddenly.

Chapter 3

“We remained looking at each other for a time.”

“Do you know who he is?”

Miss Haldin, coming forward, put this question to me in English.

I took her offered hand.

“Everybody knows. He is a revolutionary feminist, a great writer, if you like, and — how shall I say it — the — the familiar guest of Madame de S — ’s mystic revolutionary salon.”

Miss Haldin passed her hand over her forehead.

“You know, he was with me for more than an hour before you came in. I was so glad mother was lying down. She has many nights without sleep, and then sometimes in the middle of the day she gets a rest of several hours. It is sheer exhaustion — but still, I am thankful... If it were not for these intervals...”

She looked at me and, with that extraordinary penetration which used to disconcert me, shook her head.

“No. She would not go mad.”

“My dear young lady,” I cried, by way of protest, the more shocked because in my heart I was far from thinking Mrs. Haldin quite sane.

“You don’t know what a fine, lucid intellect mother had,” continued Nathalie Haldin, with her calm, clear-eyed simplicity, which seemed to me always to have a quality of heroism.

“I am sure...” I murmured.

“I darkened mother’s room and came out here. I’ve wanted for so long to think quietly.”

She paused, then, without giving any sign of distress, added, “It’s so difficult,” and looked at me with a strange fixity, as if watching for a sign of dissent or surprise.

I gave neither. I was irresistibly impelled to say —

“The visit from that gentleman has not made it any easier, I fear.”

Miss Haldin stood before me with a peculiar expression in her eyes.

“I don’t pretend to understand completely. Some guide one must have, even if one does not wholly give up the direction of one’s conduct to him. I am an inexperienced girl, but I am not slavish, There has been too much of that in Russia. Why should I not listen to him? There is no harm in having one’s thoughts directed. But I don’t mind confessing to you that I have not been completely candid with Peter Ivanovitch. I don’t quite know what prevented me at the moment...”

She walked away suddenly from me to a distant part of the room; but it was only to open and shut a drawer in a bureau. She returned with a piece of paper in her hand. It was thin and blackened with close handwriting. It was obviously a letter.

“I wanted to read you the very words,” she said. “This is one of my poor brother’s letters. He never doubted. How could he doubt? They make only such a small handful, these miserable oppressors, before the unanimous will of our people.”

“Your brother believed in the power of a people’s will to achieve anything?”

“It was his religion,” declared Miss Haldin.

I looked at her calm face and her animated eyes.

“Of course the will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated,” she went on. “That is the true task of real agitators. One has got to give up one’s life to it. The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel — perhaps blind — officials against a nation.”

The letter rustled slightly in her hand. I glanced down at the flimsy blackened pages whose very handwriting seemed cabalistic, incomprehensible to the experience of Western Europe.

“Stated like this,” I confessed, “the problem seems simple enough. But I fear I shall not see it solved. And if you go back to Russia I know that I shall not see you again. Yet once more I say: go back! Don’t suppose that I am thinking of your preservation. No! I know that you will not be returning to personal safety. But I had much rather think of you in danger there than see you exposed to what may be met here.”

“I tell you what,” said Miss Haldin, after a moment of reflection. “I believe that you hate revolution; you fancy it’s not quite honest. You belong to a people which

has made a bargain with fate and wouldn't like to be rude to it. But we have made no bargain. It was never offered to us — so much liberty for so much hard cash. You shrink from the idea of revolutionary action for those you think well of as if it were something — how shall I say it — not quite decent.”

I bowed my head.

“You are quite right,” I said. “I think very highly of you”

“Don't suppose I do not know it,” she began hurriedly. “Your friendship has been very valuable.”

“I have done little else but look on.”

She was a little flushed under the eyes.

“There is a way of looking on which is valuable I have felt less lonely because of it. It's difficult to explain.”

“Really? Well, I too have felt less lonely. That's easy to explain, though. But it won't go on much longer. The last thing I want to tell you is this: in a real revolution — not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions — in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement — but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment — often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured — that is the definition of revolutionary success. There have been in every revolution hearts broken by such successes. But enough of that. My meaning is that I don't want you to be a victim.”

“If I could believe all you have said I still wouldn't think of myself,” protested Miss Haldin. “I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread. The true progress must begin after. And for that the right men shall be found. They are already amongst us. One comes upon them in their obscurity, unknown, preparing themselves...”

She spread out the letter she had kept in her hand all the time, and looking down at it —

“Yes! One comes upon such men!” she repeated, and then read out the words, “Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences.”

Folding up the letter, while I looked at her interrogatively, she explained —

“These are the words which my brother applies to a young man he came to know in St. Petersburg. An intimate friend, I suppose. It must be. His is the only name my brother mentions in all his correspondence with me. Absolutely the only one, and — would you believe it? — the man is here. He arrived recently in Geneva.”

“Have you seen him?” I inquired. “But, of course; you must have seen him.”

“No! No! I haven’t! I didn’t know he was here. It’s Peter Ivanovitch himself who told me. You have heard him yourself mentioning a new arrival from Petersburg... Well, that is the man of ‘unstained, lofty, and solitary existence.’ My brother’s friend!”

“Compromised politically, I suppose,” I remarked.

“I don’t know. Yes. It must be so. Who knows! Perhaps it was this very friendship with my brother which... But no! It is scarcely possible. Really, I know nothing except what Peter Ivanovitch told me of him. He has brought a letter of introduction from Father Zosim — you know, the priest-democrat; you have heard of Father Zosim?”

“Oh yes. The famous Father Zosim was staying here in Geneva for some two months about a year ago,” I said. “When he left here he seems to have disappeared from the world.”

“It appears that he is at work in Russia again. Somewhere in the centre,” Miss Haldin said, with animation. “But please don’t mention that to any one — don’t let it slip from you, because if it got into the papers it would be dangerous for him.”

“You are anxious, of course, to meet that friend of your brother?” I asked.

Miss Haldin put the letter into her pocket. Her eyes looked beyond my shoulder at the door of her mother’s room.

“Not here,” she murmured. “Not for the first time, at least.”

After a moment of silence I said good-bye, but Miss Haldin followed me into the ante-room, closing the door behind us carefully.

“I suppose you guess where I mean to go tomorrow?”

“You have made up your mind to call on Madame de S — .”

“Yes. I am going to the Chateau Borel. I must.”

“What do you expect to hear there?” I asked, in a low voice.

I wondered if she were not deluding herself with some impossible hope. It was not that, however.

“Only think — such a friend. The only man mentioned in his letters. He would have something to give me, if nothing more than a few poor words. It may be something said and thought in those last days. Would you want me to turn my back on what is left of my poor brother — a friend?”

“Certainly not,” I said. “I quite understand your pious curiosity.”

“ — Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences,” she murmured to herself. “There are! There are! Well, let me question one of them about the loved dead.”

“How do you know, though, that you will meet him there? Is he staying in the Chateau as a guest — do you suppose?”

“I can’t really tell,” she confessed. “He brought a written introduction from Father Zosim — who, it seems, is a friend of Madame de S — too. She can’t be such a worthless woman after all.”

“There were all sorts of rumours afloat about Father Zosim himself,” I observed.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Calumny is a weapon of our government too. It’s well known. Oh yes! It is a fact that Father Zosim had the protection of the Governor-General of a certain province.

We talked on the subject with my brother two years ago, I remember. But his work was good. And now he is proscribed. What better proof can one require. But no matter what that priest was or is. All that cannot affect my brother's friend. If I don't meet him there I shall ask these people for his address. And, of course, mother must see him too, later on. There is no guessing what he may have to tell us. It would be a mercy if mamma could be soothed. You know what she imagines. Some explanation perhaps may be found, or — or even made up, perhaps. It would be no sin."

"Certainly," I said, "it would be no sin. It may be a mistake, though."

"I want her only to recover some of her old spirit. While she is like this I cannot think of anything calmly."

"Do you mean to invent some sort of pious fraud for your mother's sake?" I asked.

"Why fraud? Such a friend is sure to know something of my brother in these last days. He could tell us... There is something in the facts which will not let me rest. I am certain he meant to join us abroad — that he had some plans — some great patriotic action in view; not only for himself, but for both of us. I trusted in that. I looked forward to the time! Oh! with such hope and impatience. I could have helped. And now suddenly this appearance of recklessness — as if he had not cared..."

She remained silent for a time, then obstinately she concluded —

"I want to know..."

Thinking it over, later on, while I walked slowly away from the Boulevard des Philosophes, I asked myself critically, what precisely was it that she wanted to know? What I had heard of her history was enough to give me a clue. In the educational establishment for girls where Miss Haldin finished her studies she was looked upon rather unfavourably. She was suspected of holding independent views on matters settled by official teaching. Afterwards, when the two ladies returned to their country place, both mother and daughter, by speaking their minds openly on public events, had earned for themselves a reputation of liberalism. The three-horse trap of the district police-captain began to be seen frequently in their village. "I must keep an eye on the peasants" — so he explained his visits up at the house. "Two lonely ladies must be looked after a little." He would inspect the walls as though he wanted to pierce them with his eyes, peer at the photographs, turn over the books in the drawing-room negligently, and after the usual refreshments, would depart. But the old priest of the village came one evening in the greatest distress and agitation, to confess that he — the priest — had been ordered to watch and ascertain in other ways too (such as using his spiritual power with the servants) all that was going on in the house, and especially in respect of the visitors these ladies received, who they were, the length of their stay, whether any of them were strangers to that part of the country, and so on. The poor, simple old man was in an agony of humiliation and terror. "I came to warn you. Be cautious in your conduct, for the love of God. I am burning with shame, but there is no getting out from under the net. I shall have to tell them what I see, because if I did not there is my deacon. He would make the worst of things to curry favour. And then my son-in-law, the husband of my Parasha, who is a writer in the

Government Domain office; they would soon kick him out — and maybe send him away somewhere.” The old man lamented the necessities of the times — ”when people do not agree somehow” and wiped his eyes. He did not wish to spend the evening of his days with a shaven head in the penitent’s cell of some monastery — ”and subjected to all the severities of ecclesiastical discipline; for they would show no mercy to an old man,” he groaned. He became almost hysterical, and the two ladies, full of commiseration, soothed him the best they could before they let him go back to his cottage. But, as a matter of fact, they had very few visitors. The neighbours — some of them old friends — began to keep away; a few from timidity, others with marked disdain, being grand people that came only for the summer — Miss Haldin explained to me — aristocrats, reactionaries. It was a solitary existence for a young girl. Her relations with her mother were of the tenderest and most open kind; but Mrs. Haldin had seen the experiences of her own generation, its sufferings, its deceptions, its apostasies too. Her affection for her children was expressed by the suppression of all signs of anxiety. She maintained a heroic reserve. To Nathalie Haldin, her brother with his Petersburg existence, not enigmatical in the least (there could be no doubt of what he felt or thought) but conducted a little mysteriously, was the only visible representative of a proscribed liberty. All the significance of freedom, its indefinite promises, lived in their long discussions, which breathed the loftiest hope of action and faith in success. Then, suddenly, the action, the hopes, came to an end with the details ferreted out by the English journalist. The concrete fact, the fact of his death remained! but it remained obscure in its deeper causes. She felt herself abandoned without explanation. But she did not suspect him. What she wanted was to learn almost at any cost how she could remain faithful to his departed spirit.

Chapter 4

Several days elapsed before I met Nathalie Haldin again. I was crossing the place in front of the theatre when I made out her shapely figure in the very act of turning between the gate pillars of the unattractive public promenade of the Bastions. She walked away from me, but I knew we should meet as she returned down the main alley — unless, indeed, she were going home. In that case, I don’t think I should have called on her yet. My desire to keep her away from these people was as strong as ever, but I had no illusions as to my power. I was but a Westerner, and it was clear that Miss Haldin would not, could not listen to my wisdom; and as to my desire of listening to her voice, it were better, I thought, not to indulge overmuch in that pleasure. No, I should not have gone to the Boulevard des Philosophes; but when at about the middle of the principal alley I saw Miss Haldin coming towards me, I was too curious, and too honest, perhaps, to run away.

There was something of the spring harshness in the air. The blue sky was hard, but the young leaves clung like soft mist about the uninteresting range of trees; and the

clear sun put little points of gold into the grey of Miss Haldin's frank eyes, turned to me with a friendly greeting.

I inquired after the health of her mother.

She had a slight movement of the shoulders and a little sad sigh.

"But, you see, I did come out for a walk...for exercise, as you English say."

I smiled approvingly, and she added an unexpected remark —

"It is a glorious day."

Her voice, slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality, had the accent of spontaneous conviction. I was glad of it. It was as though she had become aware of her youth — for there was but little of spring-like glory in the rectangular railed space of grass and trees, framed visibly by the orderly roof-slopes of that town, comely without grace, and hospitable without sympathy. In the very air through which she moved there was but little warmth; and the sky, the sky of a land without horizons, swept and washed clean by the April showers, extended a cold cruel blue, without elevation, narrowed suddenly by the ugly, dark wall of the Jura where, here and there, lingered yet a few miserable trails and patches of snow. All the glory of the season must have been within herself — and I was glad this feeling had come into her life, if only for a little time.

"I am pleased to hear you say these words." She gave me a quick look. Quick, not stealthy. If there was one thing of which she was absolutely incapable, it was stealthiness. Her sincerity was expressed in the very rhythm of her walk. It was I who was looking at her covertly — if I may say so. I knew where she had been, but I did not know what she had seen and heard in that nest of aristocratic conspiracies. I use the word aristocratic, for want of a better term. The Chateau Borel, embowered in the trees and thickets of its neglected grounds, had its fame in our day, like the residence of that other dangerous and exiled woman, Madame de Stael, in the Napoleonic era. Only the Napoleonic despotism, the booted heir of the Revolution, which counted that intellectual woman for an enemy worthy to be watched, was something quite unlike the autocracy in mystic vestments, engendered by the slavery of a Tartar conquest. And Madame de S — was very far from resembling the gifted author of *Corinne*. She made a great noise about being persecuted. I don't know if she were regarded in certain circles as dangerous. As to being watched, I imagine that the Chateau Borel could be subjected only to a most distant observation. It was in its exclusiveness an ideal abode for hatching superior plots — whether serious or futile. But all this did not interest me. I wanted to know the effect its extraordinary inhabitants and its special atmosphere had produced on a girl like Miss Haldin, so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced! Her unconsciously lofty ignorance of the baser instincts of mankind left her disarmed before her own impulses. And there was also that friend of her brother, the significant new arrival from Russia... I wondered whether she had managed to meet him.

We walked for some time, slowly and in silence.

“You know,” I attacked her suddenly, “if you don’t intend telling me anything, you must say so distinctly, and then, of course, it shall be final. But I won’t play at delicacy. I ask you point-blank for all the details.”

She smiled faintly at my threatening tone.

“You are as curious as a child.”

“No. I am only an anxious old man,” I replied earnestly.

She rested her glance on me as if to ascertain the degree of my anxiety or the number of my years. My physiognomy has never been expressive, I believe, and as to my years I am not ancient enough as yet to be strikingly decrepit. I have no long beard like the good hermit of a romantic ballad; my footsteps are not tottering, my aspect not that of a slow, venerable sage. Those picturesque advantages are not mine. I am old, alas, in a brisk, commonplace way. And it seemed to me as though there were some pity for me in Miss Haldin’s prolonged glance. She stepped out a little quicker.

“You ask for all the details. Let me see. I ought to remember them. It was novel enough for a — a village girl like me.”

After a moment of silence she began by saying that the Chateau Borel was almost as neglected inside as outside. It was nothing to wonder at, a Hamburg banker, I believe, retired from business, had it built to cheer his remaining days by the view of that lake whose precise, orderly, and well-to-do beauty must have been attractive to the unromantic imagination of a business man. But he died soon. His wife departed too (but only to Italy), and this house of moneyed ease, presumably unsaleable, had stood empty for several years. One went to it up a gravel drive, round a large, coarse grass-plot, with plenty of time to observe the degradation of its stuccoed front. Miss Haldin said that the impression was unpleasant. It grew more depressing as one came nearer.

She observed green stains of moss on the steps of the terrace. The front door stood wide open. There was no one about. She found herself in a wide, lofty, and absolutely empty hall, with a good many doors. These doors were all shut. A broad, bare stone staircase faced her, and the effect of the whole was of an untenanted house. She stood still, disconcerted by the solitude, but after a while she became aware of a voice speaking continuously somewhere.

“You were probably being observed all the time,” I suggested. “There must have been eyes.”

“I don’t see how that could be,” she retorted. “I haven’t seen even a bird in the grounds. I don’t remember hearing a single twitter in the trees. The whole place appeared utterly deserted except for the voice.”

She could not make out the language — Russian, French, or German. No one seemed to answer it. It was as though the voice had been left behind by the departed inhabitants to talk to the bare walls. It went on volubly, with a pause now and then. It was lonely and sad. The time seemed very long to Miss Haldin. An invincible repugnance prevented her from opening one of the doors in the hall. It was so hopeless. No one

would come, the voice would never stop. She confessed to me that she had to resist an impulse to turn round and go away unseen, as she had come.

“Really? You had that impulse?” I cried, full of regret. “What a pity you did not obey it.”

She shook her head.

“What a strange memory it would have been for one. Those deserted grounds, that empty hall, that impersonal, voluble voice, and — nobody, nothing, not a soul.”

The memory would have been unique and harmless. But she was not a girl to run away from an intimidating impression of solitude and mystery. “No, I did not run away,” she said. “I stayed where I was — and I did see a soul. Such a strange soul.”

As she was gazing up the broad staircase, and had concluded that the voice came from somewhere above, a rustle of dress attracted her attention. She looked down and saw a woman crossing the hall, having issued apparently through one of the many doors. Her face was averted, so that at first she was not aware of Miss Haldin.

On turning her head and seeing a stranger, she appeared very much startled. From her slender figure Miss Haldin had taken her for a young girl; but if her face was almost childishly round, it was also sallow and wrinkled, with dark rings under the eyes. A thick crop of dusty brown hair was parted boyishly on the side with a lateral wave above the dry, furrowed forehead. After a moment of dumb blinking, she suddenly squatted down on the floor.

“What do you mean by squatted down?” I asked, astonished. “This is a very strange detail.”

Miss Haldin explained the reason. This person when first seen was carrying a small bowl in her hand. She had squatted down to put it on the floor for the benefit of a large cat, which appeared then from behind her skirts, and hid its head into the bowl greedily. She got up, and approaching Miss Haldin asked with nervous bluntness —

“What do you want? Who are you?”

Miss Haldin mentioned her name and also the name of Peter Ivanovitch. The girlish, elderly woman nodded and puckered her face into a momentary expression of sympathy. Her black silk blouse was old and even frayed in places; the black serge skirt was short and shabby. She continued to blink at close quarters, and her eyelashes and eyebrows seemed shabby too. Miss Haldin, speaking gently to her, as if to an unhappy and sensitive person, explained how it was that her visit could not be an altogether unexpected event to Madame de S — .

“Ah! Peter Ivanovitch brought you an invitation. How was I to know? A dame de compagnie is not consulted, as you may imagine.”

The shabby woman laughed a little. Her teeth, splendidly white and admirably even, looked absurdly out of place, like a string of pearls on the neck of a ragged tramp. “Peter Ivanovitch is the greatest genius of the century perhaps, but he is the most inconsiderate man living. So if you have an appointment with him you must not be surprised to hear that he is not here.”

Miss Haldin explained that she had no appointment with Peter Ivanovitch. She became interested at once in that bizarre person.

“Why should he put himself out for you or any one else? Oh! these geniuses. If you only knew! Yes! And their books — I mean, of course, the books that the world admires, the inspired books. But you have not been behind the scenes. Wait till you have to sit at a table for a half a day with a pen in your hand. He can walk up and down his rooms for hours and hours. I used to get so stiff and numb that I was afraid I would lose my balance and fall off the chair all at once.”

She kept her hands folded in front of her, and her eyes, fixed on Miss Haldin’s face, betrayed no animation whatever. Miss Haldin, gathering that the lady who called herself a *dame de compagnie* was proud of having acted as secretary to Peter Ivanovitch, made an amiable remark.

“You could not imagine a more trying experience,” declared the lady. “There is an Anglo-American journalist interviewing Madame de S — now, or I would take you up,” she continued in a changed tone and glancing towards the staircase. “I act as master of ceremonies.”

It appeared that Madame de S — could not bear Swiss servants about her person; and, indeed, servants would not stay for very long in the Chateau Borel. There were always difficulties. Miss Haldin had already noticed that the hall was like a dusty barn of marble and stucco with cobwebs in the corners and faint tracks of mud on the black and white tessellated floor.

“I look also after this animal,” continued the *dame de compagnie*, keeping her hands folded quietly in front of her; and she bent her worn gaze upon the cat. “I don’t mind a bit. Animals have their rights; though, strictly speaking, I see no reason why they should not suffer as well as human beings. Do you? But of course they never suffer so much. That is impossible. Only, in their case it is more pitiful because they cannot make a revolution. I used to be a Republican. I suppose you are a Republican?”

Miss Haldin confessed to me that she did not know what to say. But she nodded slightly, and asked in her turn —

“And are you no longer a Republican?”

“After taking down Peter Ivanovitch from dictation for two years, it is difficult for me to be anything. First of all, you have to sit perfectly motionless. The slightest movement you make puts to flight the ideas of Peter Ivanovitch. You hardly dare to breathe. And as to coughing — God forbid! Peter Ivanovitch changed the position of the table to the wall because at first I could not help raising my eyes to look out of the window, while waiting for him to go on with his dictation. That was not allowed. He said I stared so stupidly. I was likewise not permitted to look at him over my shoulder. Instantly Peter Ivanovitch stamped his foot, and would roar, ‘Look down on the paper!’ It seems my expression, my face, put him off. Well, I know that I am not beautiful, and that my expression is not hopeful either. He said that my air of unintelligent expectation irritated him. These are his own words.”

Miss Haldin was shocked, but admitted to me that she was not altogether surprised.

“Is it possible that Peter Ivanovitch could treat any woman so rudely?” she cried.

The dame de compagnie nodded several times with an air of discretion, then assured Miss Haldin that she did not mind in the least. The trying part of it was to have the secret of the composition laid bare before her; to see the great author of the revolutionary gospels grope for words as if he were in the dark as to what he meant to say.

“I am quite willing to be the blind instrument of higher ends. To give one’s life for the cause is nothing. But to have one’s illusions destroyed — that is really almost more than one can bear. I really don’t exaggerate,” she insisted. “It seemed to freeze my very beliefs in me — the more so that when we worked in winter Peter Ivanovitch, walking up and down the room, required no artificial heat to keep himself warm. Even when we move to the South of France there are bitterly cold days, especially when you have to sit still for six hours at a stretch. The walls of these villas on the Riviera are so flimsy. Peter Ivanovitch did not seem to be aware of anything. It is true that I kept down my shivers from fear of putting him out. I used to set my teeth till my jaws felt absolutely locked. In the moments when Peter Ivanovitch interrupted his dictation, and sometimes these intervals were very long — often twenty minutes, no less, while he walked to and fro behind my back muttering to himself — I felt I was dying by inches, I assure you. Perhaps if I had let my teeth rattle Peter Ivanovitch might have noticed my distress, but I don’t think it would have had any practical effect. She’s very miserly in such matters.”

The dame de compagnie glanced up the staircase. The big cat had finished the milk and was rubbing its whiskered cheek sinuously against her skirt. She dived to snatch it up from the floor.

“Miserliness is rather a quality than otherwise, you know,” she continued, holding the cat in her folded arms. “With us it is misers who can spare money for worthy objects — not the so-called generous natures. But pray don’t think I am a sybarite. My father was a clerk in the Ministry of Finances with no position at all. You may guess by this that our home was far from luxurious, though of course we did not actually suffer from cold. I ran away from my parents, you know, directly I began to think by myself. It is not very easy, such thinking. One has got to be put in the way of it, awakened to the truth. I am indebted for my salvation to an old apple-woman, who had her stall under the gateway of the house we lived in. She had a kind wrinkled face, and the most friendly voice imaginable. One day, casually, we began to talk about a child, a ragged little girl we had seen begging from men in the streets at dusk; and from one thing to another my eyes began to open gradually to the horrors from which innocent people are made to suffer in this world, only in order that governments might exist. After I once understood the crime of the upper classes, I could not go on living with my parents. Not a single charitable word was to be heard in our home from year’s end to year’s end; there was nothing but the talk of vile office intrigues, and of promotion and of salaries, and of courting the favour of the chiefs. The mere idea of marrying one day such another man as my father made me shudder. I don’t mean that there was

anyone wanting to marry me. There was not the slightest prospect of anything of the kind. But was it not sin enough to live on a Government salary while half Russia was dying of hunger? The Ministry of Finances! What a grotesque horror it is! What does the starving, ignorant people want with a Ministry of Finances? I kissed my old folks on both cheeks, and went away from them to live in cellars, with the proletariat. I tried to make myself useful to the utterly hopeless. I suppose you understand what I mean? I mean the people who have nowhere to go and nothing to look forward to in this life. Do you understand how frightful that is — nothing to look forward to! Sometimes I think that it is only in Russia that there are such people and such a depth of misery can be reached. Well, I plunged into it, and — do you know — there isn't much that one can do in there. No, indeed — at least as long as there are Ministries of Finances and such like grotesque horrors to stand in the way. I suppose I would have gone mad there just trying to fight the vermin, if it had not been for a man. It was my old friend and teacher, the poor saintly apple-woman, who discovered him for me, quite accidentally. She came to fetch me late one evening in her quiet way. I followed her where she would lead; that part of my life was in her hands altogether, and without her my spirit would have perished miserably. The man was a young workman, a lithographer by trade, and he had got into trouble in connexion with that affair of temperance tracts — you remember. There was a lot of people put in prison for that. The Ministry of Finances again! What would become of it if the poor folk ceased making beasts of themselves with drink? Upon my word, I would think that finances and all the rest of it are an invention of the devil; only that a belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness. Finances indeed!"

Hatred and contempt hissed in her utterance of the word "finances," but at the very moment she gently stroked the cat reposing in her arms. She even raised them slightly, and inclining her head rubbed her cheek against the fur of the animal, which received this caress with the complete detachment so characteristic of its kind. Then looking at Miss Haldin she excused herself once more for not taking her upstairs to Madame S — The interview could not be interrupted. Presently the journalist would be seen coming down the stairs. The best thing was to remain in the hall; and besides, all these rooms (she glanced all round at the many doors), all these rooms on the ground floor were unfurnished.

"Positively there is no chair down here to offer you," she continued. "But if you prefer your own thoughts to my chatter, I will sit down on the bottom step here and keep silent."

Miss Haldin hastened to assure her that, on the contrary, she was very much interested in the story of the journeyman lithographer. He was a revolutionist, of course.

"A martyr, a simple man," said the dame de compangnie, with a faint sigh, and gazing through the open front door dreamily. She turned her misty brown eyes on Miss Haldin.

"I lived with him for four months. It was like a nightmare."

As Miss Haldin looked at her inquisitively she began to describe the emaciated face of the man, his fleshless limbs, his destitution. The room into which the apple-woman had led her was a tiny garret, a miserable den under the roof of a sordid house. The plaster fallen off the walls covered the floor, and when the door was opened a horrible tapestry of black cobwebs waved in the draught. He had been liberated a few days before — flung out of prison into the streets. And Miss Haldin seemed to see for the first time, a name and a face upon the body of that suffering people whose hard fate had been the subject of so many conversations, between her and her brother, in the garden of their country house.

He had been arrested with scores and scores of other people in that affair of the lithographed temperance tracts. Unluckily, having got hold of a great many suspected persons, the police thought they could extract from some of them other information relating to the revolutionist propaganda.

“They beat him so cruelly in the course of investigation,” went on the dame de compagnie, “that they injured him internally. When they had done with him he was doomed. He could do nothing for himself. I beheld him lying on a wooden bedstead without any bedding, with his head on a bundle of dirty rags, lent to him out of charity by an old rag-picker, who happened to live in the basement of the house. There he was, uncovered, burning with fever, and there was not even a jug in the room for the water to quench his thirst with. There was nothing whatever — just that bedstead and the bare floor.”

“Was there no one in all that great town amongst the liberals and revolutionaries, to extend a helping hand to a brother?” asked Miss Haldin indignantly.

“Yes. But you do not know the most terrible part of that man’s misery. Listen. It seems that they ill-used him so atrociously that, at last, his firmness gave way, and he did let out some information. Poor soul, the flesh is weak, you know. What it was he did not tell me. There was a crushed spirit in that mangled body. Nothing I found to say could make him whole. When they let him out, he crept into that hole, and bore his remorse stoically. He would not go near anyone he knew. I would have sought assistance for him, but, indeed, where could I have gone looking for it? Where was I to look for anyone who had anything to spare or any power to help? The people living round us were all starving and drunken. They were the victims of the Ministry of Finances. Don’t ask me how we lived. I couldn’t tell you. It was like a miracle of wretchedness. I had nothing to sell, and I assure you my clothes were in such a state that it was impossible for me to go out in the daytime. I was indecent. I had to wait till it was dark before I ventured into the streets to beg for a crust of bread, or whatever I could get, to keep him and me alive. Often I got nothing, and then I would crawl back and lie on the floor by the side of his couch. Oh yes, I can sleep quite soundly on bare boards. That is nothing, and I am only mentioning it to you so that you should not think I am a sybarite. It was infinitely less killing than the task of sitting for hours at a table in a cold study to take the books of Peter Ivanovitch from dictation. But you shall see yourself what that is like, so I needn’t say any more about it.”

"It is by no means certain that I will ever take Peter Ivanovitch from dictation," said Miss Haldin.

"No!" cried the other incredulously. "Not certain? You mean to say that you have not made up your mind?"

When Miss Haldin assured her that there never had been any question of that between her and Peter Ivanovitch, the woman with the cat compressed her lips tightly for a moment.

"Oh, you will find yourself settled at the table before you know that you have made up your mind. Don't make a mistake, it is disenchanting to hear Peter Ivanovitch dictate, but at the same time there is a fascination about it. He is a man of genius. Your face is certain not to irritate him; you may perhaps even help his inspiration, make it easier for him to deliver his message. As I look at you, I feel certain that you are the kind of woman who is not likely to check the flow of his inspiration."

Miss Haldin thought it useless to protest against all these assumptions.

"But this man — this workman did he die under your care?" she said, after a short silence.

The dame de compagnie, listening up the stairs where now two voices were alternating with some animation, made no answer for a time. When the loud sounds of the discussion had sunk into an almost inaudible murmur, she turned to Miss Haldin.

"Yes, he died, but not, literally speaking, in my arms, as you might suppose. As a matter of fact, I was asleep when he breathed his last. So even now I cannot say I have seen anybody die. A few days before the end, some young men found us out in our extremity. They were revolutionists, as you might guess. He ought to have trusted in his political friends when he came out of prison. He had been liked and respected before, and nobody would have dreamed of reproaching him with his indiscretion before the police. Everybody knows how they go to work, and the strongest man has his moments of weakness before pain. Why, even hunger alone is enough to give one queer ideas as to what may be done. A doctor came, our lot was alleviated as far as physical comforts go, but otherwise he could not be consoled — poor man. I assure you, Miss Haldin, that he was very lovable, but I had not the strength to weep. I was nearly dead myself. But there were kind hearts to take care of me. A dress was found to clothe my nakedness. I tell you, I was not decent — and after a time the revolutionists placed me with a Jewish family going abroad, as governess. Of course I could teach the children, I finished the sixth class of the Lyceum; but the real object was, that I should carry some important papers across the frontier. I was entrusted with a packet which I carried next my heart. The gendarmes at the station did not suspect the governess of a Jewish family, busy looking after three children. I don't suppose those Hebrews knew what I had on me, for I had been introduced to them in a very roundabout way by persons who did not belong to the revolutionary movement, and naturally I had been instructed to accept a very small salary. When we reached Germany I left that family and delivered my papers to a revolutionist in Stuttgart; after this I was employed in various ways. But you do not want to hear all that. I have never felt that I was very useful, but I live in

hopes of seeing all the Ministries destroyed, finances and all. The greatest joy of my life has been to hear what your brother has done.”

She directed her round eyes again to the sunshine outside, while the cat reposed within her folded arms in lordly beatitude and sphinx-like meditation.

“Yes! I rejoiced,” she began again. “For me there is a heroic ring about the very name of Haldin. They must have been trembling with fear in their Ministries — all those men with fiendish hearts. Here I stand talking to you, and when I think of all the cruelties, oppressions, and injustices that are going on at this very moment, my head begins to swim. I have looked closely at what would seem inconceivable if one’s own eyes had not to be trusted. I have looked at things that made me hate myself for my helplessness. I hated my hands that had no power, my voice that could not be heard, my very mind that would not become unhinged. Ah! I have seen things. And you?”

Miss Haldin was moved. She shook her head slightly.

“No, I have seen nothing for myself as yet,” she murmured “We have always lived in the country. It was my brother’s wish.”

“It is a curious meeting — this — between you and me,” continued the other. “Do you believe in chance, Miss Haldin? How could I have expected to see you, his sister, with my own eyes? Do you know that when the news came the revolutionaries here were as much surprised as pleased, every bit? No one seemed to know anything about your brother. Peter Ivanovitch himself had not foreseen that such a blow was going to be struck. I suppose your brother was simply inspired. I myself think that such deeds should be done by inspiration. It is a great privilege to have the inspiration and the opportunity. Did he resemble you at all? Don’t you rejoice, Miss Haldin?”

“You must not expect too much from me,” said Miss Haldin, repressing an inclination to cry which came over her suddenly. She succeeded, then added calmly, “I am not a heroic person!”

“You think you couldn’t have done such a thing yourself perhaps?”

“I don’t know. I must not even ask myself till I have lived a little longer, seen more...”

The other moved her head appreciatively. The purring of the cat had a loud complacency in the empty hall. No sound of voices came from upstairs. Miss Haldin broke the silence.

“What is it precisely that you heard people say about my brother? You said that they were surprised. Yes, I supposed they were. Did it not seem strange to them that my brother should have failed to save himself after the most difficult part — that is, getting away from the spot — was over? Conspirators should understand these things well. There are reasons why I am very anxious to know how it is he failed to escape.”

The dame de compagnie had advanced to the open hall-door. She glanced rapidly over her shoulder at Miss Haldin, who remained within the hall.

“Failed to escape,” she repeated absently. “Didn’t he make the sacrifice of his life? Wasn’t he just simply inspired? Wasn’t it an act of abnegation? Aren’t you certain?”

“What I am certain of,” said Miss Haldin, “is that it was not an act of despair. Have you not heard some opinion expressed here upon his miserable capture?”

The dame de compagnie mused for a while in the doorway.

“Did I hear? Of course, everything is discussed here. Has not all the world been speaking about your brother? For my part, the mere mention of his achievement plunges me into an envious ecstasy. Why should a man certain of immortality think of his life at all?”

She kept her back turned to Miss Haldin. Upstairs from behind a great dingy white and gold door, visible behind the balustrade of the first floor landing, a deep voice began to drone formally, as if reading over notes or something of the sort. It paused frequently, and then ceased altogether.

“I don’t think I can stay any longer now,” said Miss Haldin. “I may return another day.”

She waited for the dame de compagnie to make room for her exit; but the woman appeared lost in the contemplation of sunshine and shadows, sharing between themselves the stillness of the deserted grounds. She concealed the view of the drive from Miss Haldin. Suddenly she said —

“It will not be necessary; here is Peter Ivanovitch himself coming up. But he is not alone. He is seldom alone now.”

Hearing that Peter Ivanovitch was approaching, Miss Haldin was not so pleased as she might have been expected to be. Somehow she had lost the desire to see either the heroic captive or Madame de S — , and the reason of that shrinking which came upon her at the very last minute is accounted for by the feeling that those two people had not been treating the woman with the cat kindly.

“Would you please let me pass?” said Miss Haldin at last, touching lightly the shoulder of the dame de compagnie.

But the other, pressing the cat to her breast, did not budge.

“I know who is with him,” she said, without even looking back.

More unaccountably than ever Miss Haldin felt a strong impulse to leave the house.

“Madame de S — may be engaged for some time yet, and what I have got to say to Peter Ivanovitch is just a simple question which I might put to him when I meet him in the grounds on my way down. I really think I must go. I have been some time here, and I am anxious to get back to my mother. Will you let me pass, please?”

The dame de compagnie turned her head at last.

“I never supposed that you really wanted to see Madame de S — ,” she said, with unexpected insight. “Not for a moment.” There was something confidential and mysterious in her tone. She passed through the door, with Miss Haldin following her, on to the terrace, and they descended side by side the moss-grown stone steps. There was no one to be seen on the part of the drive visible from the front of the house.

“They are hidden by the trees over there,” explained Miss Haldin’s new acquaintance, “but you shall see them directly. I don’t know who that young man is to whom Peter Ivanovitch has taken such a fancy. He must be one of us, or he would not be admitted here when the others come. You know what I mean by the others. But I must say that he is not at all mystically inclined. I don’t know that I have made him out yet.

Naturally I am never for very long in the drawing-room. There is always something to do for me, though the establishment here is not so extensive as the villa on the Riviera. But still there are plenty of opportunities for me to make myself useful."

To the left, passing by the ivy-grown end of the stables, appeared Peter Ivanovitch and his companion. They walked very slowly, conversing with some animation. They stopped for a moment, and Peter Ivanovitch was seen to gesticulate, while the young man listened motionless, with his arms hanging down and his head bowed a little. He was dressed in a dark brown suit and a black hat. The round eyes of the dame de compagnie remained fixed on the two figures, which had resumed their leisurely approach.

"An extremely polite young man," she said. "You shall see what a bow he will make; and it won't altogether be so exceptional either. He bows in the same way when he meets me alone in the hall."

She moved on a few steps, with Miss Haldin by her side, and things happened just as she had foretold. The young man took off his hat, bowed and fell back, while Peter Ivanovitch advanced quicker, his black, thick arms extended heartily, and seized hold of both Miss Haldin's hands, shook them, and peered at her through his dark glasses.

"That's right, that's right!" he exclaimed twice, approvingly. "And so you have been looked after by..." He frowned slightly at the dame de compagnie, who was still nursing the cat. "I conclude Eleanor — Madame de S — is engaged. I know she expected somebody to-day. So the newspaper man did turn up, eh? She is engaged?"

For all answer the dame de compagnie turned away her head.

"It is very unfortunate — very unfortunate indeed. I very much regret that you should have been..." He lowered suddenly his voice. "But what is it — surely you are not departing, Natalia Victorovna? You got bored waiting, didn't you?"

"Not in the least," Miss Haldin protested. "Only I have been here some time, and I am anxious to get back to my mother."

"The time seemed long, eh? I am afraid our worthy friend here" (Peter Ivanovitch suddenly jerked his head sideways towards his right shoulder and jerked it up again), — "our worthy friend here has not the art of shortening the moments of waiting. No, distinctly she has not the art; and in that respect good intentions alone count for nothing."

The dame de compagnie dropped her arms, and the cat found itself suddenly on the ground. It remained quite still after alighting, one hind leg stretched backwards. Miss Haldin was extremely indignant on behalf of the lady companion.

"Believe me, Peter Ivanovitch, that the moments I have passed in the hall of this house have been not a little interesting, and very instructive too. They are memorable. I do not regret the waiting, but I see that the object of my call here can be attained without taking up Madame de S — 's time."

At this point I interrupted Miss Haldin. The above relation is founded on her narrative, which I have not so much dramatized as might be supposed. She had rendered, with extraordinary feeling and animation, the very accent almost of the disciple of the

old apple-woman, the irreconcilable hater of Ministries, the voluntary servant of the poor. Miss Haldin's true and delicate humanity had been extremely shocked by the uncongenial fate of her new acquaintance, that lady companion, secretary, whatever she was. For my own part, I was pleased to discover in it one more obstacle to intimacy with Madame de S — . I had a positive abhorrence for the painted, bedizened, dead-faced, glassy-eyed Egeria of Peter Ivanovitch. I do not know what was her attitude to the unseen, but I know that in the affairs of this world she was avaricious, greedy, and unscrupulous. It was within my knowledge that she had been worsted in a sordid and desperate quarrel about money matters with the family of her late husband, the diplomatist. Some very august personages indeed (whom in her fury she had insisted upon scandalously involving in her affairs) had incurred her animosity. I find it perfectly easy to believe that she had come to within an ace of being spirited away, for reasons of state, into some discreet maison de sante — a madhouse of sorts, to be plain. It appears, however, that certain high-placed personages opposed it for reasons which...

But it's no use to go into details.

Wonder may be expressed at a man in the position of a teacher of languages knowing all this with such definiteness. A novelist says this and that of his personages, and if only he knows how to say it earnestly enough he may not be questioned upon the inventions of his brain in which his own belief is made sufficiently manifest by a telling phrase, a poetic image, the accent of emotion. Art is great! But I have no art, and not having invented Madame de S — , I feel bound to explain how I came to know so much about her.

My informant was the Russian wife of a friend of mine already mentioned, the professor of Lausanne University. It was from her that I learned the last fact of Madame de S — 's history, with which I intend to trouble my readers. She told me, speaking positively, as a person who trusts her sources, of the cause of Madame de S — 's flight from Russia, some years before. It was neither more nor less than this: that she became suspect to the police in connexion with the assassination of the Emperor Alexander. The ground of this suspicion was either some unguarded expressions that escaped her in public, or some talk overheard in her salon. Overheard, we must believe, by some guest, perhaps a friend, who hastened to play the informer, I suppose. At any rate, the overheard matter seemed to imply her foreknowledge of that event, and I think she was wise in not waiting for the investigation of such a charge. Some of my readers may remember a little book from her pen, published in Paris, a mystically bad-tempered, declamatory, and frightfully disconnected piece of writing, in which she all but admits the foreknowledge, more than hints at its supernatural origin, and plainly suggests in venomous innuendoes that the guilt of the act was not with the terrorists, but with a palace intrigue. When I observed to my friend, the professor's wife, that the life of Madame de S — , with its unofficial diplomacy, its intrigues, lawsuits, favours, disgrace, expulsions, its atmosphere of scandal, occultism, and charlatanism, was more fit for the eighteenth century than for the conditions of our own time, she assented with a smile, but a moment after went on in a reflective tone: "Charlatanism? — yes, in a

certain measure. Still, times are changed. There are forces now which were non-existent in the eighteenth century. I should not be surprised if she were more dangerous than an Englishman would be willing to believe. And what's more, she is looked upon as really dangerous by certain people — chez nous."

Chez nous in this connexion meant Russia in general, and the Russian political police in particular. The object of my digression from the straight course of Miss Haldin's relation (in my own words) of her visit to the Chateau Borel, was to bring forward that statement of my friend, the professor's wife. I wanted to bring it forward simply to make what I have to say presently of Mr. Razumov's presence in Geneva, a little more credible — for this is a Russian story for Western ears, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral negation, and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe. And this I state as my excuse for having left Miss Haldin standing, one of the little group of two women and two men who had come together below the terrace of the Chateau Borel.

The knowledge which I have just stated was in my mind when, as I have said, I interrupted Miss Haldin. I interrupted her with the cry of profound satisfaction —

"So you never saw Madame de S — , after all?"

Miss Haldin shook her head. It was very satisfactory to me. She had not seen Madame de S — ! That was excellent, excellent! I welcomed the conviction that she would never know Madame de S — now. I could not explain the reason of the conviction but by the knowledge that Miss Haldin was standing face to face with her brother's wonderful friend. I preferred him to Madame de S — as the companion and guide of that young girl, abandoned to her inexperience by the miserable end of her brother. But, at any rate, that life now ended had been sincere, and perhaps its thoughts might have been lofty, its moral sufferings profound, its last act a true sacrifice. It is not for us, the staid lovers calmed by the possession of a conquered liberty, to condemn without appeal the fierceness of thwarted desire.

I am not ashamed of the warmth of my regard for Miss Haldin. It was, it must be admitted, an unselfish sentiment, being its own reward. The late Victor Haldin — in the light of that sentiment — appeared to me not as a sinister conspirator, but as a pure enthusiast. I did not wish indeed to judge him, but the very fact that he did not escape, that fact which brought so much trouble to both his mother and his sister, spoke to me in his favour. Meantime, in my fear of seeing the girl surrender to the influence of the Chateau Borel revolutionary feminism, I was more than willing to put my trust in that friend of the late Victor Haldin. He was nothing but a name, you will say. Exactly! A name! And what's more, the only name; the only name to be found in the correspondence between brother and sister. The young man had turned up; they had come face to face, and, fortunately, without the direct interference of Madame de S — . What will come of it? what will she tell me presently? I was asking myself.

It was only natural that my thought should turn to the young man, the bearer of the only name uttered in all the dream-talk of a future to be brought about by a revolution. And my thought took the shape of asking myself why this young man had

not called upon these ladies. He had been in Geneva for some days before Miss Haldin heard of him first in my presence from Peter Ivanovitch. I regretted that last's presence at their meeting. I would rather have had it happen somewhere out of his spectacled sight. But I supposed that, having both these young people there, he introduced them to each other.

I broke the silence by beginning a question on that point —

“I suppose Peter Ivanovitch...”

Miss Haldin gave vent to her indignation. Peter Ivanovitch directly he had got his answer from her had turned upon the dame de compagnie in a shameful manner.

“Turned upon her?” I wondered. “What about? For what reason?”

“It was unheard of; it was shameful,” Miss Haldin pursued, with angry eyes. “Il lui a fait une scene — like this, before strangers. And for what? You would never guess. For some eggs... Oh!”

I was astonished. “Eggs, did you say?”

“For Madame de S — . That lady observes a special diet, or something of the sort. It seems she complained the day before to Peter Ivanovitch that the eggs were not rightly prepared. Peter Ivanovitch suddenly remembered this against the poor woman, and flew out at her. It was most astonishing. I stood as if rooted.”

“Do you mean to say that the great feminist allowed himself to be abusive to a woman?” I asked.

“Oh, not that! It was something you have no conception of. It was an odious performance. Imagine, he raised his hat to begin with. He made his voice soft and deprecatory. ‘Ah! you are not kind to us — you will not deign to remember...’ This sort of phrases, that sort of tone. The poor creature was terribly upset. Her eyes ran full of tears. She did not know where to look. I shouldn’t wonder if she would have preferred abuse, or even a blow.”

I did not remark that very possibly she was familiar with both on occasions when no one was by. Miss Haldin walked by my side, her head up in scornful and angry silence.

“Great men have their surprising peculiarities,” I observed inanely. “Exactly like men who are not great. But that sort of thing cannot be kept up for ever. How did the great feminist wind up this very characteristic episode?”

Miss Haldin, without turning her face my way, told me that the end was brought about by the appearance of the interviewer, who had been closeted with Madame de S — .

He came up rapidly, unnoticed, lifted his hat slightly, and paused to say in French: “The Baroness has asked me, in case I met a lady on my way out, to desire her to come in at once.”

After delivering this message, he hurried down the drive. The dame de compagnie flew towards the house, and Peter Ivanovitch followed her hastily, looking uneasy. In a moment Miss Haldin found herself alone with the young man, who undoubtedly must

have been the new arrival from Russia. She wondered whether her brother's friend had not already guessed who she was.

I am in a position to say that, as a matter of fact, he had guessed. It is clear to me that Peter Ivanovitch, for some reason or other, had refrained from alluding to these ladies' presence in Geneva. But Razumov had guessed. The trustful girl! Every word uttered by Haldin lived in Razumov's memory. They were like haunting shapes; they could not be exorcised. The most vivid amongst them was the mention of the sister. The girl had existed for him ever since. But he did not recognize her at once. Coming up with Peter Ivanovitch, he did observe her; their eyes had met, even. He had responded, as no one could help responding, to the harmonious charm of her whole person, its strength, its grace, its tranquil frankness — and then he had turned his gaze away. He said to himself that all this was not for him; the beauty of women and the friendship of men were not for him. He accepted that feeling with a purposeful sternness, and tried to pass on. It was only her outstretched hand which brought about the recognition. It stands recorded in the pages of his self-confession, that it nearly suffocated him physically with an emotional reaction of hate and dismay, as though her appearance had been a piece of accomplished treachery.

He faced about. The considerable elevation of the terrace concealed them from anyone lingering in the doorway of the house; and even from the upstairs windows they could not have been seen. Through the thickets run wild, and the trees of the gently sloping grounds, he had cold, placid glimpses of the lake. A moment of perfect privacy had been vouchsafed to them at this juncture. I wondered to myself what use they had made of that fortunate circumstance.

“Did you have time for more than a few words?” I asked.

That animation with which she had related to me the incidents of her visit to the Chateau Borel had left her completely. Strolling by my side, she looked straight before her; but I noticed a little colour on her cheek. She did not answer me.

After some little time I observed that they could not have hoped to remain forgotten for very long, unless the other two had discovered Madame de S — swooning with fatigue, perhaps, or in a state of morbid exaltation after the long interview. Either would require their devoted ministrations. I could depict to myself Peter Ivanovitch rushing busily out of the house again, bareheaded, perhaps, and on across the terrace with his swinging gait, the black skirts of the frock-coat floating clear of his stout light grey legs. I confess to having looked upon these young people as the quarry of the “heroic fugitive.” I had the notion that they would not be allowed to escape capture. But of that I said nothing to Miss Haldin, only as she still remained uncommunicative, I pressed her a little.

“Well — but you can tell me at least your impression.”

She turned her head to look at me, and turned away again.

“Impression?” she repeated slowly, almost dreamily; then in a quicker tone —

“He seems to be a man who has suffered more from his thoughts than from evil fortune.”

"From his thoughts, you say?"

"And that is natural enough in a Russian," she took me up. "In a young Russian; so many of them are unfit for action, and yet unable to rest."

"And you think he is that sort of man?"

"No, I do not judge him. How could I, so suddenly? You asked for my impression — I explain my impression. I — I — don't know the world, nor yet the people in it; I have been too solitary — I am too young to trust my own opinions."

"Trust your instinct," I advised her. "Most women trust to that, and make no worse mistakes than men. In this case you have your brother's letter to help you."

She drew a deep breath like a light sigh. "Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences," she quoted as if to herself. But I caught the wistful murmur distinctly.

"High praise," I whispered to her.

"The highest possible."

"So high that, like the award of happiness, it is more fit to come only at the end of a life. But still no common or altogether unworthy personality could have suggested such a confident exaggeration of praise and..."

"Ah!" She interrupted me ardently. "And if you had only known the heart from which that judgment has come!"

She ceased on that note, and for a space I reflected on the character of the words which I perceived very well must tip the scale of the girl's feelings in that young man's favour. They had not the sound of a casual utterance. Vague they were to my Western mind and to my Western sentiment, but I could not forget that, standing by Miss Haldin's side, I was like a traveller in a strange country. It had also become clear to me that Miss Haldin was unwilling to enter into the details of the only material part of their visit to the Chateau Borel. But I was not hurt. Somehow I didn't feel it to be a want of confidence. It was some other difficulty — a difficulty I could not resent. And it was without the slightest resentment that I said —

"Very well. But on that high ground, which I will not dispute, you, like anyone else in such circumstances, you must have made for yourself a representation of that exceptional friend, a mental image of him, and — please tell me — you were not disappointed?"

"What do you mean? His personal appearance?"

"I don't mean precisely his good looks, or otherwise."

We turned at the end of the alley and made a few steps without looking at each other.

"His appearance is not ordinary," said Miss Haldin at last.

"No, I should have thought not — from the little you've said of your first impression. After all, one has to fall back on that word. Impression! What I mean is that something indescribable which is likely to mark a 'not ordinary' person."

I perceived that she was not listening. There was no mistaking her expression; and once more I had the sense of being out of it — not because of my age, which at any rate could draw inferences — but altogether out of it, on another plane whence I could

only watch her from afar. And so ceasing to speak I watched her stepping out by my side.

“No,” she exclaimed suddenly, “I could not have been disappointed with a man of such strong feeling.”

“Aha! Strong feeling,” I muttered, thinking to myself censoriously: like this, at once, all in a moment!

“What did you say?” inquired Miss Haldin innocently.

“Oh, nothing. I beg your pardon. Strong feeling. I am not surprised.”

“And you don’t know how abruptly I behaved to him!” she cried remorsefully.

I suppose I must have appeared surprised, for, looking at me with a still more heightened colour, she said she was ashamed to admit that she had not been sufficiently collected; she had failed to control her words and actions as the situation demanded. She lost the fortitude worthy of both the men, the dead and the living; the fortitude which should have been the note of the meeting of Victor Haldin’s sister with Victor Haldin’s only known friend. He was looking at her keenly, but said nothing, and she was — she confessed — painfully affected by his want of comprehension. All she could say was: “You are Mr. Razumov.” A slight frown passed over his forehead. After a short, watchful pause, he made a little bow of assent, and waited.

At the thought that she had before her the man so highly regarded by her brother, the man who had known his value, spoken to him, understood him, had listened to his confidences, perhaps had encouraged him — her lips trembled, her eyes ran full of tears; she put out her hand, made a step towards him impulsively, saying with an effort to restrain her emotion, “Can’t you guess who I am?” He did not take the proffered hand. He even recoiled a pace, and Miss Haldin imagined that he was unpleasantly affected. Miss Haldin excused him, directing her displeasure at herself. She had behaved unworthily, like an emotional French girl. A manifestation of that kind could not be welcomed by a man of stern, self-contained character.

He must have been stern indeed, or perhaps very timid with women, not to respond in a more human way to the advances of a girl like Nathalie Haldin — I thought to myself. Those lofty and solitary existences (I remembered the words suddenly) make a young man shy and an old man savage — often.

“Well,” I encouraged Miss Haldin to proceed.

She was still very dissatisfied with herself.

“I went from bad to worse,” she said, with an air of discouragement very foreign to her. “I did everything foolish except actually bursting into tears. I am thankful to say I did not do that. But I was unable to speak for quite a long time.”

She had stood before him, speechless, swallowing her sobs, and when she managed at last to utter something, it was only her brother’s name — “Victor — Victor Haldin!” she gasped out, and again her voice failed her.

“Of course,” she commented to me, “this distressed him. He was quite overcome. I have told you my opinion that he is a man of deep feeling — it is impossible to doubt it. You should have seen his face. He positively reeled. He leaned against the wall

of the terrace. Their friendship must have been the very brotherhood of souls! I was grateful to him for that emotion, which made me feel less ashamed of my own lack of self-control. Of course I had regained the power of speech at once, almost. All this lasted not more than a few seconds. 'I am his sister,' I said. 'Maybe you have heard of me.'

"And had he?" I interrupted.

"I don't know. How could it have been otherwise? And yet... But what does that matter? I stood there before him, near enough to be touched and surely not looking like an impostor. All I know is, that he put out both his hands then to me, I may say flung them out at me, with the greatest readiness and warmth, and that I seized and pressed them, feeling that I was finding again a little of what I thought was lost to me for ever, with the loss of my brother — some of that hope, inspiration, and support which I used to get from my dear dead..."

I understood quite well what she meant. We strolled on slowly. I refrained from looking at her. And it was as if answering my own thoughts that I murmured —

"No doubt it was a great friendship — as you say. And that young man ended by welcoming your name, so to speak, with both hands. After that, of course, you would understand each other. Yes, you would understand each other quickly."

It was a moment before I heard her voice.

"Mr. Razumov seems to be a man of few words. A reserved man — even when he is strongly moved."

Unable to forget — or even to forgive — the bass-toned expansiveness of Peter Ivanovitch, the Archpatron of revolutionary parties, I said that I took this for a favourable trait of character. It was associated with sincerity — in my mind.

"And, besides, we had not much time," she added.

"No, you would not have, of course." My suspicion and even dread of the feminist and his Egeria was so ineradicable that I could not help asking with real anxiety, which I made smiling —

"But you escaped all right?"

She understood me, and smiled too, at my uneasiness.

"Oh yes! I escaped, if you like to call it that. I walked away quickly. There was no need to run. I am neither frightened nor yet fascinated, like that poor woman who received me so strangely."

"And Mr. — Mr. Razumov...?"

"He remained there, of course. I suppose he went into the house after I left him. You remember that he came here strongly recommended to Peter Ivanovitch — possibly entrusted with important messages for him."

"Ah yes! From that priest who..."

"Father Zosim — yes. Or from others, perhaps."

"You left him, then. But have you seen him since, may I ask?"

For some time Miss Haldin made no answer to this very direct question, then —

"I have been expecting to see him here to-day," she said quietly.

“You have! Do you meet, then, in this garden? In that case I had better leave you at once.”

“No, why leave me? And we don’t meet in this garden. I have not seen Mr. Razumov since that first time. Not once. But I have been expecting him...”

She paused. I wondered to myself why that young revolutionist should show so little alacrity.

“Before we parted I told Mr. Razumov that I walked here for an hour every day at this time. I could not explain to him then why I did not ask him to come and see us at once. Mother must be prepared for such a visit. And then, you see, I do not know myself what Mr. Razumov has to tell us. He, too, must be told first how it is with poor mother. All these thoughts flashed through my mind at once. So I told him hurriedly that there was a reason why I could not ask him to see us at home, but that I was in the habit of walking here... This is a public place, but there are never many people about at this hour. I thought it would do very well. And it is so near our apartments. I don’t like to be very far away from mother. Our servant knows where I am in case I should be wanted suddenly.”

“Yes. It is very convenient from that point of view,” I agreed.

In fact, I thought the Bastions a very convenient place, since the girl did not think it prudent as yet to introduce that young man to her mother. It was here, then, I thought, looking round at that plot of ground of deplorable banality, that their acquaintance will begin and go on in the exchange of generous indignations and of extreme sentiments, too poignant, perhaps, for a non-Russian mind to conceive. I saw these two, escaped out of four score of millions of human beings ground between the upper and nether millstone, walking under these trees, their young heads close together. Yes, an excellent place to stroll and talk in. It even occurred to me, while we turned once more away from the wide iron gates, that when tired they would have plenty of accommodation to rest themselves. There was a quantity of tables and chairs displayed between the restaurant chalet and the bandstand, a whole raft of painted deals spread out under the trees. In the very middle of it I observed a solitary Swiss couple, whose fate was made secure from the cradle to the grave by the perfected mechanism of democratic institutions in a republic that could almost be held in the palm of ones hand. The man, colourlessly uncouth, was drinking beer out of a glittering glass; the woman, rustic and placid, leaning back in the rough chair, gazed idly around.

There is little logic to be expected on this earth, not only in the matter of thought, but also of sentiment. I was surprised to discover myself displeased with that unknown young man. A week had gone by since they met. Was he callous, or shy, or very stupid? I could not make it out.

“Do you think,” I asked Miss Haldin, after we had gone some distance up the great alley, “that Mr Razumov understood your intention?”

“Understood what I meant?” she wondered. “He was greatly moved. That I know! In my own agitation I could see it. But I spoke distinctly. He heard me; he seemed, indeed, to hang on my words...”

Unconsciously she had hastened her pace. Her utterance, too, became quicker.

I waited a little before I observed thoughtfully —

“And yet he allowed all these days to pass.”

“How can we tell what work he may have to do here? He is not an idler travelling for his pleasure. His time may not be his own — nor yet his thoughts, perhaps.”

She slowed her pace suddenly, and in a lowered voice added —

“Or his very life” — then paused and stood still “For all I know, he may have had to leave Geneva the very day he saw me.”

“Without telling you!” I exclaimed incredulously.

“I did not give him time. I left him quite abruptly. I behaved emotionally to the end. I am sorry for it. Even if I had given him the opportunity he would have been justified in taking me for a person not to be trusted. An emotional, tearful girl is not a person to confide in. But even if he has left Geneva for a time, I am confident that we shall meet again.”

“Ah! you are confident... I dare say. But on what ground?”

“Because I’ve told him that I was in great need of some one, a fellow-countryman, a fellow-believer, to whom I could give my confidence in a certain matter.”

“I see. I don’t ask you what answer he made. I confess that this is good ground for your belief in Mr. Razumov’s appearance before long. But he has not turned up to-day?”

“No,” she said quietly, “not to-day;” and we stood for a time in silence, like people that have nothing more to say to each other and let their thoughts run widely asunder before their bodies go off their different ways. Miss Haldin glanced at the watch on her wrist and made a brusque movement. She had already overstayed her time, it seemed.

“I don’t like to be away from mother,” she murmured, shaking her head. “It is not that she is very ill now. But somehow when I am not with her I am more uneasy than ever.”

Mrs. Haldin had not made the slightest allusion to her son for the last week or more. She sat, as usual, in the arm-chair by the window, looking out silently on that hopeless stretch of the Boulevard des Philosophes. When she spoke, a few lifeless words, it was of indifferent, trivial things.

“For anyone who knows what the poor soul is thinking of, that sort of talk is more painful than her silence. But that is bad too; I can hardly endure it, and I dare not break it.”

Miss Haldin sighed, refastening a button of her glove which had come undone. I knew well enough what a hard time of it she must be having. The stress, its causes, its nature, would have undermined the health of an Occidental girl; but Russian natures have a singular power of resistance against the unfair strains of life. Straight and supple, with a short jacket open on her black dress, which made her figure appear more slender and her fresh but colourless face more pale, she compelled my wonder and admiration.

“I can’t stay a moment longer. You ought to come soon to see mother. You know she calls you ‘L’ami.’ It is an excellent name, and she really means it. And now au revoir; I must run.”

She glanced vaguely down the broad walk — the hand she put out to me eluded my grasp by an unexpected upward movement, and rested upon my shoulder. Her red lips were slightly parted, not in a smile, however, but expressing a sort of startled pleasure. She gazed towards the gates and said quickly, with a gasp —

“There! I knew it. Here he comes!”

I understood that she must mean Mr. Razumov. A young man was walking up the alley, without haste. His clothes were some dull shade of brown, and he carried a stick. When my eyes first fell on him, his head was hanging on his breast as if in deep thought. While I was looking at him he raised it sharply, and at once stopped. I am certain he did, but that pause was nothing more perceptible than a faltering check in his gait, instantaneously overcome. Then he continued his approach, looking at us steadily. Miss Haldin signed to me to remain, and advanced a step or two to meet him.

I turned my head away from that meeting, and did not look at them again till I heard Miss Haldin’s voice uttering his name in the way of introduction. Mr. Razumov was informed, in a warm, low tone, that, besides being a wonderful teacher, I was a great support “in our sorrow and distress.”

Of course I was described also as an Englishman. Miss Haldin spoke rapidly, faster than I have ever heard her speak, and that by contrast made the quietness of her eyes more expressive.

“I have given him my confidence,” she added, looking all the time at Mr. Razumov. That young man did, indeed, rest his gaze on Miss Haldin, but certainly did not look into her eyes which were so ready for him. Afterwards he glanced backwards and forwards at us both, while the faint commencement of a forced smile, followed by the suspicion of a frown, vanished one after another; I detected them, though neither could have been noticed by a person less intensely bent upon divining him than myself. I don’t know what Nathalie Haldin had observed, but my attention seized the very shades of these movements. The attempted smile was given up, the incipient frown was checked, and smoothed so that there should be no sign; but I imagined him exclaiming inwardly

—
“Her confidence! To this elderly person — this foreigner!”

I imagined this because he looked foreign enough to me. I was upon the whole favourably impressed. He had an air of intelligence and even some distinction quite above the average of the students and other inhabitants of the Petite Russie. His features were more decided than in the generality of Russian faces; he had a line of the jaw, a clean-shaven, sallow cheek; his nose was a ridge, and not a mere protuberance. He wore the hat well down over his eyes, his dark hair curled low on the nape of his neck; in the ill-fitting brown clothes there were sturdy limbs; a slight stoop brought out a satisfactory breadth of shoulders. Upon the whole I was not disappointed. Studious — robust — shy.

Before Miss Haldin had ceased speaking I felt the grip of his hand on mine, a muscular, firm grip, but unexpectedly hot and dry. Not a word or even a mutter assisted this short and arid handshake.

I intended to leave them to themselves, but Miss Haldin touched me lightly on the forearm with a significant contact, conveying a distinct wish. Let him smile who likes, but I was only too ready to stay near Nathalie Haldin, and I am not ashamed to say that it was no smiling matter to me. I stayed, not as a youth would have stayed, uplifted, as it were poised in the air, but soberly, with my feet on the ground and my mind trying to penetrate her intention. She had turned to Razumov.

“Well. This is the place. Yes, it is here that I meant you to come. I have been walking every day... Don’t excuse yourself — I understand. I am grateful to you for coming to-day, but all the same I cannot stay now. It is impossible. I must hurry off home. Yes, even with you standing before me, I must run off. I have been too long away... You know how it is?”

These last words were addressed to me. I noticed that Mr. Razumov passed the tip of his tongue over his lips just as a parched, feverish man might do. He took her hand in its black glove, which closed on his, and held it — detained it quite visibly to me against a drawing-back movement.

“Thank you once more for — for understanding me,” she went on warmly. He interrupted her with a certain effect of roughness. I didn’t like him speaking to this frank creature so much from under the brim of his hat, as it were. And he produced a faint, rasping voice quite like a man with a parched throat.

“What is there to thank me for? Understand you?... How did I understand you?... You had better know that I understand nothing. I was aware that you wanted to see me in this garden. I could not come before. I was hindered. And even to-day, you see...late.”

She still held his hand.

“I can, at any rate, thank you for not dismissing me from your mind as a weak, emotional girl. No doubt I want sustaining. I am very ignorant. But I can be trusted. Indeed I can!”

“You are ignorant,” he repeated thoughtfully. He had raised his head, and was looking straight into her face now, while she held his hand. They stood like this for a long moment. She released his hand.

“Yes. You did come late. It was good of you to come on the chance of me having loitered beyond my time. I was talking with this good friend here. I was talking of you. Yes, Kirylo Sidorovitch, of you. He was with me when I first heard of your being here in Geneva. He can tell you what comfort it was to my bewildered spirit to hear that news. He knew I meant to seek you out. It was the only object of my accepting the invitation of Peter Ivanovitch...”

“Peter Ivanovitch talked to you of me,” he interrupted, in that wavering, hoarse voice which suggested a horribly dry throat.

“Very little. Just told me your name, and that you had arrived here. Why should I have asked for more? What could he have told me that I did not know already from my brother’s letter? Three lines! And how much they meant to me! I will show them to you one day, Kirylo Sidorovitch. But now I must go. The first talk between us cannot be a matter of five minutes, so we had better not begin...”

I had been standing a little aside, seeing them both in profile. At that moment it occurred to me that Mr. Razumov’s face was older than his age.

“If mother” — the girl had turned suddenly to me, “were to wake up in my absence (so much longer than usual) she would perhaps question me. She seems to miss me more, you know, of late. She would want to know what delayed me — and, you see, it would be painful for me to dissemble before her.”

I understood the point very well. For the same reason she checked what seemed to be on Mr. Razumov’s part a movement to accompany her.

“No! No! I go alone, but meet me here as soon as possible.” Then to me in a lower, significant tone —

“Mother may be sitting at the window at this moment, looking down the street. She must not know anything of Mr. Razumov’s presence here till — till something is arranged.” She paused before she added a little louder, but still speaking to me, “Mr. Razumov does not quite understand my difficulty, but you know what it is.”

Chapter 5

With a quick inclination of the head for us both, and an earnest, friendly glance at the young man, Miss Haldin left us covering our heads and looking after her straight, supple figure receding rapidly. Her walk was not that hybrid and uncertain gliding affected by some women, but a frank, strong, healthy movement forward. Rapidly she increased the distance — disappeared with suddenness at last. I discovered only then that Mr. Razumov, after ramming his hat well over his brow, was looking me over from head to foot. I dare say I was a very unexpected fact for that young Russian to stumble upon. I caught in his physiognomy, in his whole bearing, an expression compounded of curiosity and scorn, tempered by alarm — as though he had been holding his breath while I was not looking. But his eyes met mine with a gaze direct enough. I saw then for the first time that they were of a clear brown colour and fringed with thick black eyelashes. They were the youngest feature of his face. Not at all unpleasant eyes. He swayed slightly, leaning on his stick and generally hung in the wind. It flashed upon me that in leaving us together Miss Haldin had an intention — that something was entrusted to me, since, by a mere accident I had been found at hand. On this assumed ground I put all possible friendliness into my manner. I cast about for some right thing to say, and suddenly in Miss Haldin’s last words I perceived the clue to the nature of my mission.

“No,” I said gravely, if with a smile, “you cannot be expected to understand.”

His clean-shaven lip quivered ever so little before he said, as if wickedly amused — “But haven’t you heard just now? I was thanked by that young lady for understanding so well.”

I looked at him rather hard. Was there a hidden and inexplicable sneer in this retort? No. It was not that. It might have been resentment. Yes. But what had he to resent? He looked as though he had not slept very well of late. I could almost feel on me the weight of his unrefreshed, motionless stare, the stare of a man who lies unwinking in the dark, angrily passive in the toils of disastrous thoughts. Now, when I know how true it was, I can honestly affirm that this was the effect he produced on me. It was painful in a curiously indefinite way — for, of course, the definition comes to me now while I sit writing in the fullness of my knowledge. But this is what the effect was at that time of absolute ignorance. This new sort of uneasiness which he seemed to be forcing upon me I attempted to put down by assuming a conversational, easy familiarity.

“That extremely charming and essentially admirable young girl (I am — as you see — old enough to be frank in my expressions) was referring to her own feelings. Surely you must have understood that much?”

He made such a brusque movement that he even tottered a little.

“Must understand this! Not expected to understand that! I may have other things to do. And the girl is charming and admirable. Well — and if she is! I suppose I can see that for myself.”

This sally would have been insulting if his voice had not been practically extinct, dried up in his throat; and the rustling effort of his speech too painful to give real offence.

I remained silent, checked between the obvious fact and the subtle impression. It was open to me to leave him there and then; but the sense of having been entrusted with a mission, the suggestion of Miss Haldin’s last glance, was strong upon me. After a moment of reflection I said —

“Shall we walk together a little?”

He shrugged his shoulders so violently that he tottered again. I saw it out of the corner of my eye as I moved on, with him at my elbow. He had fallen back a little and was practically out of my sight, unless I turned my head to look at him. I did not wish to indispose him still further by an appearance of marked curiosity. It might have been distasteful to such a young and secret refugee from under the pestilential shadow hiding the true, kindly face of his land. And the shadow, the attendant of his countrymen, stretching across the middle of Europe, was lying on him too, darkening his figure to my mental vision. “Without doubt,” I said to myself, “he seems a sombre, even a desperate revolutionist; but he is young, he may be unselfish and humane, capable of compassion, of...”

I heard him clear gratefully his parched throat, and became all attention.

“This is beyond everything,” were his first words. “It is beyond everything! I find you here, for no reason that I can understand, in possession of something I cannot be

expected to understand! A confidant! A foreigner! Talking about an admirable Russian girl. Is the admirable girl a fool, I begin to wonder? What are you at? What is your object?"

He was barely audible, as if his throat had no more resonance than a dry rag, a piece of tinder. It was so pitiful that I found it extremely easy to control my indignation.

"When you have lived a little longer, Mr. Razumov, you will discover that no woman is an absolute fool. I am not a feminist, like that illustrious author, Peter Ivanovitch, who, to say the truth, is not a little suspect to me..."

He interrupted me, in a surprising note of whispering astonishment.

"Suspect to you! Peter Ivanovitch suspect to you! To you!..."

"Yes, in a certain aspect he is," I said, dismissing my remark lightly. "As I was saying, Mr. Razumov, when you have lived long enough, you will learn to discriminate between the noble trustfulness of a nature foreign to every meanness and the flattered credulity of some women; though even the credulous, silly as they may be, unhappy as they are sure to be, are never absolute fools. It is my belief that no woman is ever completely deceived. Those that are lost leap into the abyss with their eyes open, if all the truth were known."

"Upon my word," he cried at my elbow, "what is it to me whether women are fools or lunatics? I really don't care what you think of them. I — I am not interested in them. I let them be. I am not a young man in a novel. How do you know that I want to learn anything about women?... What is the meaning of all this?"

"The object, you mean, of this conversation, which I admit I have forced upon you in a measure."

"Forced! Object!" he repeated, still keeping half a pace or so behind me. "You wanted to talk about women, apparently. That's a subject. But I don't care for it. I have never... In fact, I have had other subjects to think about."

"I am concerned here with one woman only — a young girl — the sister of your dead friend — Miss Haldin. Surely you can think a little of her. What I meant from the first was that there is a situation which you cannot be expected to understand."

I listened to his unsteady footfalls by my side for the space of several strides.

"I think that it may prepare the ground for your next interview with Miss Haldin if I tell you of it. I imagine that she might have had something of the kind in her mind when she left us together. I believe myself authorized to speak. The peculiar situation I have alluded to has arisen in the first grief and distress of Victor Haldin's execution. There was something peculiar in the circumstances of his arrest. You no doubt know the whole truth..."

I felt my arm seized above the elbow, and next instant found myself swung so as to face Mr. Razumov.

"You spring up from the ground before me with this talk. Who the devil are you? This is not to be borne! Why! What for? What do you know what is or is not peculiar? What have you to do with any confounded circumstances, or with anything that happens in Russia, anyway?"

He leaned on his stick with his other hand, heavily; and when he let go my arm, I was certain in my mind that he was hardly able to keep on his feet.

“Let us sit down at one of these vacant tables,” I proposed, disregarding this display of unexpectedly profound emotion. It was not without its effect on me, I confess. I was sorry for him.

“What tables? What are you talking about? Oh — the empty tables? The tables there. Certainly. I will sit at one of the empty tables.”

I led him away from the path to the very centre of the raft of deals before the chalet. The Swiss couple were gone by that time. We were alone on the raft, so to speak. Mr. Razumov dropped into a chair, let fall his stick, and propped on his elbows, his head between his hands, stared at me persistently, openly, and continuously, while I signalled the waiter and ordered some beer. I could not quarrel with this silent inspection very well, because, truth to tell, I felt somewhat guilty of having been sprung on him with some abruptness — of having “sprung from the ground,” as he expressed it.

While waiting to be served I mentioned that, born from parents settled in St. Petersburg, I had acquired the language as a child. The town I did not remember, having left it for good as a boy of nine, but in later years I had renewed my acquaintance with the language. He listened, without as much as moving his eyes the least little bit. He had to change his position when the beer came, and the instant draining of his glass revived him. He leaned back in his chair and, folding his arms across his chest, continued to stare at me squarely. It occurred to me that his clean-shaven, almost swarthy face was really of the very mobile sort, and that the absolute stillness of it was the acquired habit of a revolutionist, of a conspirator everlastingly on his guard against self-betrayal in a world of secret spies.

“But you are an Englishman — a teacher of English literature,” he murmured, in a voice that was no longer issuing from a parched throat. “I have heard of you. People told me you have lived here for years.”

“Quite true. More than twenty years. And I have been assisting Miss Haldin with her English studies.”

“You have been reading English poetry with her,” he said, immovable now, like another man altogether, a complete stranger to the man of the heavy and uncertain footfalls a little while ago — at my elbow.

“Yes, English poetry,” I said. “But the trouble of which I speak was caused by an English newspaper.”

He continued to stare at me. I don’t think he was aware that the story of the midnight arrest had been ferreted out by an English journalist and given to the world. When I explained this to him he muttered contemptuously, “It may have been altogether a lie.”

“I should think you are the best judge of that,” I retorted, a little disconcerted. “I must confess that to me it looks to be true in the main.”

“How can you tell truth from lies?” he queried in his new, immovable manner.

“I don’t know how you do it in Russia,” I began, rather nettled by his attitude. He interrupted me.

“In Russia, and in general everywhere — in a newspaper, for instance. The colour of the ink and the shapes of the letters are the same.”

“Well, there are other trifles one can go by. The character of the publication, the general verisimilitude of the news, the consideration of the motive, and so on. I don’t trust blindly the accuracy of special correspondents — but why should this one have gone to the trouble of concocting a circumstantial falsehood on a matter of no importance to the world?”

“That’s what it is,” he grumbled. “What’s going on with us is of no importance — a mere sensational story to amuse the readers of the papers — the superior contemptuous Europe. It is hateful to think of. But let them wait a bit!”

He broke off on this sort of threat addressed to the western world. Disregarding the anger in his stare, I pointed out that whether the journalist was well- or ill-informed, the concern of the friends of these ladies was with the effect the few lines of print in question had produced — the effect alone. And surely he must be counted as one of the friends — if only for the sake of his late comrade and intimate fellow-revolutionist. At that point I thought he was going to speak vehemently; but he only astounded me by the convulsive start of his whole body. He restrained himself, folded his loosened arms tighter across his chest, and sat back with a smile in which there was a twitch of scorn and malice.

“Yes, a comrade and an intimate... Very well,” he said.

“I ventured to speak to you on that assumption. And I cannot be mistaken. I was present when Peter Ivanovitch announced your arrival here to Miss Haldin, and I saw her relief and thankfulness when your name was mentioned. Afterwards she showed me her brother’s letter, and read out the few words in which he alludes to you. What else but a friend could you have been?”

“Obviously. That’s perfectly well known. A friend. Quite correct... Go on. You were talking of some effect.”

I said to myself: “He puts on the callousness of a stern revolutionist, the insensibility to common emotions of a man devoted to a destructive idea. He is young, and his sincerity assumes a pose before a stranger, a foreigner, an old man. Youth must assert itself...” As concisely as possible I exposed to him the state of mind poor Mrs. Haldin had been thrown into by the news of her son’s untimely end.

He listened — I felt it — with profound attention. His level stare deflected gradually downwards, left my face, and rested at last on the ground at his feet.

“You can enter into the sister’s feelings. As you said, I have only read a little English poetry with her, and I won’t make myself ridiculous in your eyes by trying to speak of her. But you have seen her. She is one of these rare human beings that do not want explaining. At least I think so. They had only that son, that brother, for a link with the wider world, with the future. The very groundwork of active existence for Nathalie

Haldin is gone with him. Can you wonder then that she turns with eagerness to the only man her brother mentions in his letters. Your name is a sort of legacy.”

“What could he have written of me?” he cried, in a low, exasperated tone.

“Only a few words. It is not for me to repeat them to you, Mr. Razumov; but you may believe my assertion that these words are forcible enough to make both his mother and his sister believe implicitly in the worth of your judgment and in the truth of anything you may have to say to them. It’s impossible for you now to pass them by like strangers.”

I paused, and for a moment sat listening to the footsteps of the few people passing up and down the broad central walk. While I was speaking his head had sunk upon his breast above his folded arms. He raised it sharply.

“Must I go then and lie to that old woman!”

It was not anger; it was something else, something more poignant, and not so simple. I was aware of it sympathetically, while I was profoundly concerned at the nature of that exclamation.

“Dear me! Won’t the truth do, then? I hoped you could have told them something consoling. I am thinking of the poor mother now. Your Russia is a cruel country.”

He moved a little in his chair.

“Yes,” I repeated. “I thought you would have had something authentic to tell.”

The twitching of his lips before he spoke was curious.

“What if it is not worth telling?”

“Not worth — from what point of view? I don’t understand.”

“From every point of view.”

I spoke with some asperity.

“I should think that anything which could explain the circumstances of that midnight arrest...”

“Reported by a journalist for the amusement of the civilized Europe,” he broke in scornfully.

“Yes, reported... But aren’t they true? I can’t make out your attitude in this? Either the man is a hero to you, or...”

He approached his face with fiercely distended nostrils close to mine so suddenly that I had the greatest difficulty in not starting back.

“You ask me! I suppose it amuses you, all this. Look here! I am a worker. I studied. Yes, I studied very hard. There is intelligence here.” (He tapped his forehead with his finger-tips.) “Don’t you think a Russian may have sane ambitions? Yes — I had even prospects. Certainly! I had. And now you see me here, abroad, everything gone, lost, sacrificed. You see me here — and you ask! You see me, don’t you? — sitting before you.”

He threw himself back violently. I kept outwardly calm.

“Yes, I see you here; and I assume you are here on account of the Haldin affair?”

His manner changed.

“You call it the Haldin affair — do you?” he observed indifferently.

"I have no right to ask you anything," I said. "I wouldn't presume. But in that case the mother and the sister of him who must be a hero in your eyes cannot be indifferent to you. The girl is a frank and generous creature, having the noblest — well — illusions. You will tell her nothing — or you will tell her everything. But speaking now of the object with which I've approached you first, we have to deal with the morbid state of the mother. Perhaps something could be invented under your authority as a cure for a distracted and suffering soul filled with maternal affection."

His air of weary indifference was accentuated, I could not help thinking, wilfully.

"Oh yes. Something might," he mumbled carelessly.

He put his hand over his mouth to conceal a yawn. When he uncovered his lips they were smiling faintly.

"Pardon me. This has been a long conversation, and I have not had much sleep the last two nights."

This unexpected, somewhat insolent sort of apology had the merit of being perfectly true. He had had no nightly rest to speak of since that day when, in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, the sister of Victor Haldin had appeared before him. The perplexities and the complex terrors — I may say — of this sleeplessness are recorded in the document I was to see later — the document which is the main source of this narrative. At the moment he looked to me convincingly tired, gone slack all over, like a man who has passed through some sort of crisis.

"I have had a lot of urgent writing to do," he added.

I rose from my chair at once, and he followed my example, without haste, a little heavily.

"I must apologize for detaining you so long," I said.

"Why apologize? One can't very well go to bed before night. And you did not detain me. I could have left you at any time."

I had not stayed with him to be offended.

"I am glad you have been sufficiently interested," I said calmly. "No merit of mine, though — the commonest sort of regard for the mother of your friend was enough... As to Miss Haldin herself, she at one time was disposed to think that her brother had been betrayed to the police in some way."

To my great surprise Mr. Razumov sat down again suddenly. I stared at him, and I must say that he returned my stare without winking for quite a considerable time.

"In some way," he mumbled, as if he had not understood or could not believe his ears.

"Some unforeseen event, a sheer accident might have done that," I went on. "Or, as she characteristically put it to me, the folly or weakness of some unhappy fellow-revolutionist."

"Folly or weakness," he repeated bitterly.

"She is a very generous creature," I observed after a time. The man admired by Victor Haldin fixed his eyes on the ground. I turned away and moved off, apparently unnoticed by him. I nourished no resentment of the moody brusqueness with which he

had treated me. The sentiment I was carrying away from that conversation was that of hopelessness. Before I had got fairly clear of the raft of chairs and tables he had rejoined me.

“H’m, yes!” I heard him at my elbow again. “But what do you think?”

I did not look round even.

“I think that you people are under a curse.”

He made no sound. It was only on the pavement outside the gate that I heard him again.

“I should like to walk with you a little.”

After all, I preferred this enigmatical young man to his celebrated compatriot, the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I saw no reason for being particularly gracious.

“I am going now to the railway station, by the shortest way from here, to meet a friend from England,” I said, for all answer to his unexpected proposal. I hoped that something informing could come of it. As we stood on the curbstone waiting for a tramcar to pass, he remarked gloomily —

“I like what you said just now.”

“Do you?”

We stepped off the pavement together.

“The great problem,” he went on, “is to understand thoroughly the nature of the curse.”

“That’s not very difficult, I think.”

“I think so too,” he agreed with me, and his readiness, strangely enough, did not make him less enigmatical in the least.

“A curse is an evil spell,” I tried him again. “And the important, the great problem, is to find the means to break it.”

“Yes. To find the means.”

That was also an assent, but he seemed to be thinking of something else. We had crossed diagonally the open space before the theatre, and began to descend a broad, sparsely frequented street in the direction of one of the smaller bridges. He kept on by my side without speaking for a long time.

“You are not thinking of leaving Geneva soon?” I asked.

He was silent for so long that I began to think I had been indiscreet, and should get no answer at all. Yet on looking at him I almost believed that my question had caused him something in the nature of positive anguish. I detected it mainly in the clasp of his hands, in which he put a great force stealthily. Once, however, he had overcome that sort of agonizing hesitation sufficiently to tell me that he had no such intention, he became rather communicative — at least relatively to the former off-hand curtness of his speeches. The tone, too, was more amiable. He informed me that he intended to study and also to write. He went even so far as to tell me he had been to Stuttgart. Stuttgart, I was aware, was one of the revolutionary centres. The directing committee of one of the Russian parties (I can’t tell now which) was located in that town. It was there that he got into touch with the active work of the revolutionists outside Russia.

"I have never been abroad before," he explained, in a rather inanimate voice now. Then, after a slight hesitation, altogether different from the agonizing irresolution my first simple question "whether he meant to stay in Geneva" had aroused, he made me an unexpected confidence —

"The fact is, I have received a sort of mission from them."

"Which will keep you here in Geneva?"

"Yes. Here. In this odious..."

I was satisfied with my faculty for putting two and two together when I drew the inference that the mission had something to do with the person of the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I kept that surmise to myself naturally, and Mr. Razumov said nothing more for some considerable time. It was only when we were nearly on the bridge we had been making for that he opened his lips again, abruptly —

"Could I see that precious article anywhere?"

I had to think for a moment before I saw what he was referring to.

"It has been reproduced in parts by the Press here. There are files to be seen in various places. My copy of the English newspaper I have left with Miss Haldin, I remember, on the day after it reached me. I was sufficiently worried by seeing it lying on a table by the side of the poor mother's chair for weeks. Then it disappeared. It was a relief, I assure you."

He had stopped short.

"I trust," I continued, "that you will find time to see these ladies fairly often — that you will make time."

He stared at me so queerly that I hardly know how to define his aspect. I could not understand it in this connexion at all. What ailed him? I asked myself. What strange thought had come into his head? What vision of all the horrors that can be seen in his hopeless country had come suddenly to haunt his brain? If it were anything connected with the fate of Victor Haldin, then I hoped earnestly he would keep it to himself for ever. I was, to speak plainly, so shocked that I tried to conceal my impression by — Heaven forgive me — a smile and the assumption of a light manner.

"Surely," I exclaimed, "that needn't cost you a great effort."

He turned away from me and leaned over the parapet of the bridge. For a moment I waited, looking at his back. And yet, I assure you, I was not anxious just then to look at his face again. He did not move at all. He did not mean to move. I walked on slowly on my way towards the station, and at the end of the bridge I glanced over my shoulder. No, he had not moved. He hung well over the parapet, as if captivated by the smooth rush of the blue water under the arch. The current there is swift, extremely swift; it makes some people dizzy; I myself can never look at it for any length of time without experiencing a dread of being suddenly snatched away by its destructive force. Some brains cannot resist the suggestion of irresistible power and of headlong motion.

It apparently had a charm for Mr. Razumov. I left him hanging far over the parapet of the bridge. The way he had behaved to me could not be put down to mere boorishness. There was something else under his scorn and impatience. Perhaps, I thought,

with sudden approach to hidden truth, it was the same thing which had kept him over a week, nearly ten days indeed, from coming near Miss Haldin. But what it was I could not tell.

Part 3

Chapter 1

The water under the bridge ran violent and deep. Its slightly undulating rush seemed capable of scouring out a channel for itself through solid granite while you looked. But had it flowed through Razumov's breast, it could not have washed away the accumulated bitterness the wrecking of his life had deposited there.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he thought, staring downwards at the headlong flow so smooth and clean that only the passage of a faint air-bubble, or a thin vanishing streak of foam like a white hair, disclosed its vertiginous rapidity, its terrible force. "Why has that meddling old Englishman blundered against me? And what is this silly tale of a crazy old woman?"

He was trying to think brutally on purpose, but he avoided any mental reference to the young girl. "A crazy old woman," he repeated to himself. "It is a fatality! Or ought I to despise all this as absurd? But no! I am wrong! I can't afford to despise anything. An absurdity may be the starting-point of the most dangerous complications. How is one to guard against it? It puts to rout one's intelligence. The more intelligent one is the less one suspects an absurdity."

A wave of wrath choked his thoughts for a moment. It even made his body leaning over the parapet quiver; then he resumed his silent thinking, like a secret dialogue with himself. And even in that privacy, his thought had some reservations of which he was vaguely conscious.

"After all, this is not absurd. It is insignificant. It is absolutely insignificant — absolutely. The craze of an old woman — the fussy officiousness of a blundering elderly Englishman. What devil put him in the way? Haven't I treated him cavalierly enough? Haven't I just? That's the way to treat these meddling persons. Is it possible that he still stands behind my back, waiting?"

Razumov felt a faint chill run down his spine. It was not fear. He was certain that it was not fear — not fear for himself — but it was, all the same, a sort of apprehension as if for another, for some one he knew without being able to put a name on the personality. But the recollection that the officious Englishman had a train to meet tranquillized him for a time. It was too stupid to suppose that he should be wasting his time in waiting. It was unnecessary to look round and make sure.

But what did the man mean by his extraordinary rigmarole about the newspaper, and that crazy old woman? he thought suddenly. It was a damnable presumption,

anyhow, something that only an Englishman could be capable of. All this was a sort of sport for him — the sport of revolution — a game to look at from the height of his superiority. And what on earth did he mean by his exclamation, “Won’t the truth do?”

Razumov pressed his folded arms to the stone coping over which he was leaning with force. “Won’t the truth do? The truth for the crazy old mother of the — ”

The young man shuddered again. Yes. The truth would do! Apparently it would do. Exactly. And receive thanks, he thought, formulating the unspoken words cynically. “Fall on my neck in gratitude, no doubt,” he jeered mentally. But this mood abandoned him at once. He felt sad, as if his heart had become empty suddenly. “Well, I must be cautious,” he concluded, coming to himself as though his brain had been awakened from a trance. “There is nothing, no one, too insignificant, too absurd to be disregarded,” he thought wearily. “I must be cautious.”

Razumov pushed himself with his hand away from the balustrade and, retracing his steps along the bridge, walked straight to his lodgings, where, for a few days, he led a solitary and retired existence. He neglected Peter Ivanovitch, to whom he was accredited by the Stuttgart group; he never went near the refugee revolutionists, to whom he had been introduced on his arrival. He kept out of that world altogether. And he felt that such conduct, causing surprise and arousing suspicion, contained an element of danger for himself.

This is not to say that during these few days he never went out. I met him several times in the streets, but he gave me no recognition. Once, going home after an evening call on the ladies Haldin, I saw him crossing the dark roadway of the Boulevard des Philosophes. He had a broad-brimmed soft hat, and the collar of his coat turned up. I watched him make straight for the house, but, instead of going in, he stopped opposite the still lighted windows, and after a time went away down a side-street.

I knew that he had not been to see Mrs. Haldin yet. Miss Haldin told me he was reluctant; moreover, the mental condition of Mrs. Haldin had changed. She seemed to think now that her son was living, and she perhaps awaited his arrival. Her immobility in the great arm-chair in front of the window had an air of expectancy, even when the blind was down and the lamps lighted.

For my part, I was convinced that she had received her death-stroke; Miss Haldin, to whom, of course, I said nothing of my forebodings, thought that no good would come from introducing Mr. Razumov just then, an opinion which I shared fully. I knew that she met the young man on the Bastions. Once or twice I saw them strolling slowly up the main alley. They met every day for weeks. I avoided passing that way during the hour when Miss Haldin took her exercise there. One day, however, in a fit of absent-mindedness, I entered the gates and came upon her walking alone. I stopped to exchange a few words. Mr. Razumov failed to turn up, and we began to talk about him — naturally.

“Did he tell you anything definite about your brother’s activities — his end?” I ventured to ask.

“No,” admitted Miss Haldin, with some hesitation. “Nothing definite.”

I understood well enough that all their conversations must have been referred mentally to that dead man who had brought them together. That was unavoidable. But it was in the living man that she was interested. That was unavoidable too, I suppose. And as I pushed my inquiries I discovered that he had disclosed himself to her as a by no means conventional revolutionist, contemptuous of catchwords, of theories, of men too. I was rather pleased at that — but I was a little puzzled.

“His mind goes forward, far ahead of the struggle,” Miss Haldin explained. “Of course, he is an actual worker too,” she added.

“And do you understand him?” I inquired point-blank.

She hesitated again. “Not altogether,” she murmured.

I perceived that he had fascinated her by an assumption of mysterious reserve.

“Do you know what I think?” she went on, breaking through her reserved, almost reluctant attitude: “I think that he is observing, studying me, to discover whether I am worthy of his trust...”

“And that pleases you?”

She kept mysteriously silent for a moment. Then with energy, but in a confidential tone —

“I am convinced;” she declared, “that this extraordinary man is meditating some vast plan, some great undertaking; he is possessed by it — he suffers from it — and from being alone in the world.”

“And so he’s looking for helpers?” I commented, turning away my head.

Again there was a silence.

“Why not?” she said at last.

The dead brother, the dying mother, the foreign friend, had fallen into a distant background. But, at the same time, Peter Ivanovitch was absolutely nowhere now. And this thought consoled me. Yet I saw the gigantic shadow of Russian life deepening around her like the darkness of an advancing night. It would devour her presently. I inquired after Mrs. Haldin — that other victim of the deadly shade.

A remorseful uneasiness appeared in her frank eyes. Mother seemed no worse, but if I only knew what strange fancies she had sometimes! Then Miss Haldin, glancing at her watch, declared that she could not stay a moment longer, and with a hasty hand-shake ran off lightly.

Decidedly, Mr. Razumov was not to turn up that day. Incomprehensible youth!

But less than an hour afterwards, while crossing the Place Mollard, I caught sight of him boarding a South Shore tramcar.

“He’s going to the Chateau Borel,” I thought.

After depositing Razumov at the gates of the Chateau Borel, some half a mile or so from the town, the car continued its journey between two straight lines of shady trees. Across the roadway in the sunshine a short wooden pier jutted into the shallow pale water, which farther out had an intense blue tint contrasting unpleasantly with the green orderly slopes on the opposite shore. The whole view, with the harbour jetties of white stone underlining vividly the dark front of the town to the left, and

the expanding space of water to the right with jutting promontories of no particular character, had the uninspiring, glittering quality of a very fresh oleograph. Razumov turned his back on it with contempt. He thought it odious — oppressively odious — in its unsuggestive finish: the very perfection of mediocrity attained at last after centuries of toil and culture. And turning his back on it, he faced the entrance to the grounds of the Chateau Borel.

The bars of the central way and the wrought-iron arch between the dark weather-stained stone piers were very rusty; and, though fresh tracks of wheels ran under it, the gate looked as if it had not been opened for a very long time. But close against the lodge, built of the same grey stone as the piers (its windows were all boarded up), there was a small side entrance. The bars of that were rusty too; it stood ajar and looked as though it had not been closed for a long time. In fact, Razumov, trying to push it open a little wider, discovered it was immovable.

“Democratic virtue. There are no thieves here, apparently,” he muttered to himself, with displeasure. Before advancing into the grounds he looked back sourly at an idle working man lounging on a bench in the clean, broad avenue. The fellow had thrown his feet up; one of his arms hung over the low back of the public seat; he was taking a day off in lordly repose, as if everything in sight belonged to him.

“Elector! Eligible! Enlightened!” Razumov muttered to himself. “A brute, all the same.”

Razumov entered the grounds and walked fast up the wide sweep of the drive, trying to think of nothing — to rest his head, to rest his emotions too. But arriving at the foot of the terrace before the house he faltered, affected physically by some invisible interference. The mysteriousness of his quickened heart-beats startled him. He stopped short and looked at the brick wall of the terrace, faced with shallow arches, meagrely clothed by a few unthriving creepers, with an ill-kept narrow flower-bed along its foot.

“It is here!” he thought, with a sort of awe. “It is here — on this very spot...”

He was tempted to flight at the mere recollection of his first meeting with Nathalie Haldin. He confessed it to himself; but he did not move, and that not because he wished to resist an unworthy weakness, but because he knew that he had no place to fly to. Moreover, he could not leave Geneva. He recognized, even without thinking, that it was impossible. It would have been a fatal admission, an act of moral suicide. It would have been also physically dangerous. Slowly he ascended the stairs of the terrace, flanked by two stained greenish stone urns of funereal aspect.

Across the broad platform, where a few blades of grass sprouted on the discoloured gravel, the door of the house, with its ground-floor windows shuttered, faced him, wide open. He believed that his approach had been noted, because, framed in the doorway, without his tall hat, Peter Ivanovitch seemed to be waiting for his approach.

The ceremonious black frock-coat and the bared head of Europe’s greatest feminist accentuated the dubiousness of his status in the house rented by Madame de S — , his Egeria. His aspect combined the formality of the caller with the freedom of the

proprietor. Florid and bearded and masked by the dark blue glasses, he met the visitor, and at once took him familiarly under the arm.

Razumov suppressed every sign of repugnance by an effort which the constant necessity of prudence had rendered almost mechanical. And this necessity had settled his expression in a cast of austere, almost fanatical, aloofness. The "heroic fugitive," impressed afresh by the severe detachment of this new arrival from revolutionary Russia, took a conciliatory, even a confidential tone. Madame de S — was resting after a bad night. She often had bad nights. He had left his hat upstairs on the landing and had come down to suggest to his young friend a stroll and a good open-hearted talk in one of the shady alleys behind the house. After voicing this proposal, the great man glanced at the unmoved face by his side, and could not restrain himself from exclaiming —

"On my word, young man, you are an extraordinary person."

"I fancy you are mistaken, Peter Ivanovitch. If I were really an extraordinary person, I would not be here, walking with you in a garden in Switzerland, Canton of Geneva, Commune of — what's the name of the Commune this place belongs to?... Never mind — the heart of democracy, anyhow. A fit heart for it; no bigger than a parched pea and about as much value. I am no more extraordinary than the rest of us Russians, wandering abroad."

But Peter Ivanovitch dissented emphatically —

"No! No! You are not ordinary. I have some experience of Russians who are — well — living abroad. You appear to me, and to others too, a marked personality."

"What does he mean by this?" Razumov asked himself, turning his eyes fully on his companion. The face of Peter Ivanovitch expressed a meditative seriousness.

"You don't suppose, Kirylo Sidorovitch, that I have not heard of you from various points where you made yourself known on your way here? I have had letters."

"Oh, we are great in talking about each other," interjected Razumov, who had listened with great attention. "Gossip, tales, suspicions, and all that sort of thing, we know how to deal in to perfection. Calumny, even."

In indulging in this sally, Razumov managed very well to conceal the feeling of anxiety which had come over him. At the same time he was saying to himself that there could be no earthly reason for anxiety. He was relieved by the evident sincerity of the protesting voice.

"Heavens!" cried Peter Ivanovitch. "What are you talking about? What reason can you have to...?"

The great exile flung up his arms as if words had failed him in sober truth. Razumov was satisfied. Yet he was moved to continue in the same vein.

"I am talking of the poisonous plants which flourish in the world of conspirators, like evil mushrooms in a dark cellar."

"You are casting aspersions," remonstrated Peter Ivanovitch, "which as far as you are concerned — "

“No!” Razumov interrupted without heat. “Indeed, I don’t want to cast aspersions, but it’s just as well to have no illusions.”

Peter Ivanovitch gave him an inscrutable glance of his dark spectacles, accompanied by a faint smile.

“The man who says that he has no illusions has at least that one,” he said, in a very friendly tone. “But I see how it is, Kirylo Sidorovitch. You aim at stoicism.”

“Stoicism! That’s a pose of the Greeks and the Romans. Let’s leave it to them. We are Russians, that is — children; that is — sincere; that is — cynical, if you like. But that’s not a pose.”

A long silence ensued. They strolled slowly under the lime-trees. Peter Ivanovitch had put his hands behind his back. Razumov felt the ungravelled ground of the deeply shaded walk damp and as if slippery under his feet. He asked himself, with uneasiness, if he were saying the right things. The direction of the conversation ought to have been more under his control, he reflected. The great man appeared to be reflecting on his side too. He cleared his throat slightly, and Razumov felt at once a painful reawakening of scorn and fear.

“I am astonished,” began Peter Ivanovitch gently. “Supposing you are right in your indictment, how can you raise any question of calumny or gossip, in your case? It is unreasonable. The fact is, Kirylo Sidorovitch, there is not enough known of you to give hold to gossip or even calumny. Just now you are a man associated with a great deed, which had been hoped for, and tried for too, without success. People have perished for attempting that which you and Haldin have done at last. You come to us out of Russia, with that prestige. But you cannot deny that you have not been communicative, Kirylo Sidorovitch. People you have met imparted their impressions to me; one wrote this, another that, but I form my own opinions. I waited to see you first. You are a man out of the common. That’s positively so. You are close, very close. This taciturnity, this severe brow, this something inflexible and secret in you, inspires hopes and a little wonder as to what you may mean. There is something of a Brutus...”

“Pray spare me those classical allusions!” burst out Razumov nervously. “What comes Junius Brutus to do here? It is ridiculous! Do you mean to say,” he added sarcastically, but lowering his voice, “that the Russian revolutionists are all patricians and that I am an aristocrat?”

Peter Ivanovitch, who had been helping himself with a few gestures, clasped his hands again behind his back, and made a few steps, pondering.

“Not all patricians,” he muttered at last. “But you, at any rate, are one of us.”

Razumov smiled bitterly.

“To be sure my name is not Gugenheimer,” he said in a sneering tone. “I am not a democratic Jew. How can I help it? Not everybody has such luck. I have no name, I have no...”

The European celebrity showed a great concern. He stepped back a pace and his arms flew in front of his person, extended, deprecatory, almost entreating. His deep bass voice was full of pain.

“But, my dear young friend!” he cried. “My dear Kirylo Sidorovitch...”

Razumov shook his head.

“The very patronymic you are so civil as to use when addressing me I have no legal right to — but what of that? I don’t wish to claim it. I have no father. So much the better. But I will tell you what: my mother’s grandfather was a peasant — a serf. See how much I am one of you. I don’t want anyone to claim me. But Russia can’t disown me. She cannot!”

Razumov struck his breast with his fist.

“I am it!”

Peter Ivanovitch walked on slowly, his head lowered. Razumov followed, vexed with himself. That was not the right sort of talk. All sincerity was an imprudence. Yet one could not renounce truth altogether, he thought, with despair. Peter Ivanovitch, meditating behind his dark glasses, became to him suddenly so odious that if he had had a knife, he fancied he could have stabbed him not only without compunction, but with a horrible, triumphant satisfaction. His imagination dwelt on that atrocity in spite of himself. It was as if he were becoming light-headed. “It is not what is expected of me,” he repeated to himself. “It is not what is — I could get away by breaking the fastening on the little gate I see there in the back wall. It is a flimsy lock. Nobody in the house seems to know he is here with me. Oh yes. The hat! These women would discover presently the hat he has left on the landing. They would come upon him, lying dead in this damp, gloomy shade — but I would be gone and no one could ever...Lord! Am I going mad?” he asked himself in a fright.

The great man was heard — musing in an undertone.

“H’m, yes! That — no doubt — in a certain sense...” He raised his voice. “There is a deal of pride about you...”

The intonation of Peter Ivanovitch took on a homely, familiar ring, acknowledging, in a way, Razumov’s claim to peasant descent.

“A great deal of pride, brother Kirylo. And I don’t say that you have no justification for it. I have admitted you had. I have ventured to allude to the facts of your birth simply because I attach no mean importance to it. You are one of us — un des notres. I reflect on that with satisfaction.”

“I attach some importance to it also,” said Razumov quietly. “I won’t even deny that it may have some importance for you too,” he continued, after a slight pause and with a touch of grimness of which he was himself aware, with some annoyance. He hoped it had escaped the perception of Peter Ivanovitch. “But suppose we talk no more about it?”

“Well, we shall not — not after this one time, Kirylo Sidorovitch,” persisted the noble arch-priest of Revolution. “This shall be the last occasion. You cannot believe for a moment that I had the slightest idea of wounding your feelings. You are clearly a superior nature — that’s how I read you. Quite above the common — h’m — susceptibilities. But the fact is, Kirylo Sidorovitch, I don’t know your susceptibilities. Nobody, out of Russia, knows much of you — as yet!”

“You have been watching me?” suggested Razumov.

“Yes.”

The great man had spoken in a tone of perfect frankness, but as they turned their faces to each other Razumov felt baffled by the dark spectacles. Under their cover, Peter Ivanovitch hinted that he had felt for some time the need of meeting a man of energy and character, in view of a certain project. He said nothing more precise, however; and after some critical remarks upon the personalities of the various members of the committee of revolutionary action in Stuttgart, he let the conversation lapse for quite a long while. They paced the alley from end to end. Razumov, silent too, raised his eyes from time to time to cast a glance at the back of the house. It offered no sign of being inhabited. With its grimy, weather-stained walls and all the windows shuttered from top to bottom, it looked damp and gloomy and deserted. It might very well have been haunted in traditional style by some doleful, groaning, futile ghost of a middle-class order. The shades evoked, as worldly rumour had it, by Madame de S — to meet statesmen, diplomatists, deputies of various European Parliaments, must have been of another sort. Razumov had never seen Madame de S — but in the carriage.

Peter Ivanovitch came out of his abstraction.

“Two things I may say to you at once. I believe, first, that neither a leader nor any decisive action can come out of the dregs of a people. Now, if you ask me what are the dregs of a people — h’m — it would take too long to tell. You would be surprised at the variety of ingredients that for me go to the making up of these dregs — of that which ought, must remain at the bottom. Moreover, such a statement might be subject to discussion. But I can tell you what is not the dregs. On that it is impossible for us to disagree. The peasantry of a people is not the dregs; neither is its highest class — well — the nobility. Reflect on that, Kirylo Sidorovitch! I believe you are well fitted for reflection. Everything in a people that is not genuine, not its own by origin or development, is — well — dirt! Intelligence in the wrong place is that. Foreign-bred doctrines are that. Dirt! Dregs! The second thing I would offer to your meditation is this: that for us at this moment there yawns a chasm between the past and the future. It can never be bridged by foreign liberalism. All attempts at it are either folly or cheating. Bridged it can never be! It has to be filled up.”

A sort of sinister jocularly had crept into the tones of the burly feminist. He seized Razumov’s arm above the elbow, and gave it a slight shake.

“Do you understand, enigmatical young man? It has got to be just filled up.”

Razumov kept an unmoved countenance.

“Don’t you think that I have already gone beyond meditation on that subject?” he said, freeing his arm by a quiet movement which increased the distance a little between himself and Peter Ivanovitch, as they went on strolling abreast. And he added that surely whole cartloads of words and theories could never fill that chasm. No meditation was necessary. A sacrifice of many lives could alone — He fell silent without finishing the phrase.

Peter Ivanovitch inclined his big hairy head slowly. After a moment he proposed that they should go and see if Madame de S — was now visible.

“We shall get some tea,” he said, turning out of the shaded gloomy walk with a brisker step.

The lady companion had been on the look out. Her dark skirt whisked into the doorway as the two men came in sight round the corner. She ran off somewhere altogether, and had disappeared when they entered the hall. In the crude light falling from the dusty glass skylight upon the black and white tessellated floor, covered with muddy tracks, their footsteps echoed faintly. The great feminist led the way up the stairs. On the balustrade of the first-floor landing a shiny tall hat reposed, rim upwards, opposite the double door of the drawing-room, haunted, it was said, by evoked ghosts, and frequented, it was to be supposed, by fugitive revolutionists. The cracked white paint of the panels, the tarnished gilt of the mouldings, permitted one to imagine nothing but dust and emptiness within. Before turning the massive brass handle, Peter Ivanovitch gave his young companion a sharp, partly critical, partly preparatory glance.

“No one is perfect,” he murmured discreetly. Thus, the possessor of a rare jewel might, before opening the casket, warn the profane that no gem perhaps is flawless.

He remained with his hand on the door-handle so long that Razumov assented by a moody “No.”

“Perfection itself would not produce that effect,” pursued Peter Ivanovitch, “in a world not meant for it. But you shall find there a mind — no! — the quintessence of feminine intuition which will understand any perplexity you may be suffering from by the irresistible, enlightening force of sympathy. Nothing can remain obscure before that — that — inspired, yes, inspired penetration, this true light of femininity.”

The gaze of the dark spectacles in its glossy steadfastness gave his face an air of absolute conviction. Razumov felt a momentary shrinking before that closed door.

“Penetration? Light,” he stammered out. “Do you mean some sort of thought-reading?”

Peter Ivanovitch seemed shocked.

“I mean something utterly different,” he retorted, with a faint, pitying smile.

Razumov began to feel angry, very much against his wish.

“This is very mysterious,” he muttered through his teeth.

“You don’t object to being understood, to being guided?” queried the great feminist. Razumov exploded in a fierce whisper.

“In what sense? Be pleased to understand that I am a serious person. Who do you take me for?”

They looked at each other very closely. Razumov’s temper was cooled by the impenetrable earnestness of the blue glasses meeting his stare. Peter Ivanovitch turned the handle at last.

“You shall know directly,” he said, pushing the door open.

A low-pitched grating voice was heard within the room.

“Enfin.”

In the doorway, his black-coated bulk blocking the view, Peter Ivanovitch boomed in a hearty tone with something boastful in it.

“Yes. Here I am!”

He glanced over his shoulder at Razumov, who waited for him to move on.

“And I am bringing you a proved conspirator — a real one this time. *Un vrai celui la.*”

This pause in the doorway gave the “proved conspirator” time to make sure that his face did not betray his angry curiosity and his mental disgust.

These sentiments stand confessed in Mr. Razumov’s memorandum of his first interview with Madame de S — . The very words I use in my narrative are written where their sincerity cannot be suspected. The record, which could not have been meant for anyone’s eyes but his own, was not, I think, the outcome of that strange impulse of indiscretion common to men who lead secret lives, and accounting for the invariable existence of “compromising documents” in all the plots and conspiracies of history. Mr. Razumov looked at it, I suppose, as a man looks at himself in a mirror, with wonder, perhaps with anguish, with anger or despair. Yes, as a threatened man may look fearfully at his own face in the glass, formulating to himself reassuring excuses for his appearance marked by the taint of some insidious hereditary disease.

Chapter 2

The Egeria of the “Russian Mazzini” produced, at first view, a strong effect by the death-like immobility of an obviously painted face. The eyes appeared extraordinarily brilliant. The figure, in a close-fitting dress, admirably made, but by no means fresh, had an elegant stiffness. The rasping voice inviting him to sit down; the rigidity of the upright attitude with one arm extended along the back of the sofa, the white gleam of the big eyeballs setting off the black, fathomless stare of the enlarged pupils, impressed Razumov more than anything he had seen since his hasty and secret departure from St. Petersburg. A witch in Parisian clothes, he thought. A portent! He actually hesitated in his advance, and did not even comprehend, at first, what the rasping voice was saying.

“Sit down. Draw your chair nearer me. There — ”

He sat down. At close quarters the rouged cheekbones, the wrinkles, the fine lines on each side of the vivid lips, astounded him. He was being received graciously, with a smile which made him think of a grinning skull.

“We have been hearing about you for some time.”

He did not know what to say, and murmured some disconnected words. The grinning skull effect vanished.

“And do you know that the general complaint is that you have shown yourself very reserved everywhere?”

Razumov remained silent for a time, thinking of his answer.

“I, don’t you see, am a man of action,” he said huskily, glancing upwards.

Peter Ivanovitch stood in portentous expectant silence by the side of his chair. A slight feeling of nausea came over Razumov. What could be the relations of these two people to each other? She like a galvanized corpse out of some Hoffman’s Tale — he the preacher of feminist gospel for all the world, and a super-revolutionist besides! This ancient, painted mummy with unfathomable eyes, and this burly, bull-necked, deferential...what was it? Witchcraft, fascination... “It’s for her money,” he thought. “She has millions!”

The walls, the floor of the room were bare like a barn. The few pieces of furniture had been discovered in the garrets and dragged down into service without having been properly dusted, even. It was the refuse the banker’s widow had left behind her. The windows without curtains had an indigent, sleepless look. In two of them the dirty yellowy-white blinds had been pulled down. All this spoke, not of poverty, but of sordid penuriousness.

The hoarse voice on the sofa uttered angrily —

“You are looking round, Kirylo Sidorovitch. I have been shamefully robbed, positively ruined.”

A rattling laugh, which seemed beyond her control, interrupted her for a moment.

“A slavish nature would find consolation in the fact that the principal robber was an exalted and almost a sacrosanct person — a Grand Duke, in fact. Do you understand, Mr. Razumov? A Grand Duke — No! You have no idea what thieves those people are! Downright thieves!”

Her bosom heaved, but her left arm remained rigidly extended along the back of the couch.

“You will only upset yourself,” breathed out a deep voice, which, to Razumov’s startled glance, seemed to proceed from under the steady spectacles of Peter Ivanovitch, rather than from his lips, which had hardly moved.

“What of hat? I say thieves! Voleurs! Voleurs!”

Razumov was quite confounded by this unexpected clamour, which had in it something of wailing and croaking, and more than a suspicion of hysteria.

“Voleurs! Voleurs! Vol...”

“No power on earth can rob you of your genius,” shouted Peter Ivanovitch in an overpowering bass, but without stirring, without a gesture of any kind. A profound silence fell.

Razumov remained outwardly impassive. “What is the meaning of this performance?” he was asking himself. But with a preliminary sound of bumping outside some door behind him, the lady companion, in a threadbare black skirt and frayed blouse, came in rapidly, walking on her heels, and carrying in both hands a big Russian samovar, obviously too heavy for her. Razumov made an instinctive movement to help, which startled her so much that she nearly dropped her hissing burden. She managed, however, to land it on the table, and looked so frightened that Razumov

hastened to sit down. She produced then, from an adjacent room, four glass tumblers, a teapot, and a sugar-basin, on a black iron tray.

The rasping voice asked from the sofa abruptly —

“Les gateaux? Have you remembered to bring the cakes?”

Peter Ivanovitch, without a word, marched out on to the landing, and returned instantly with a parcel wrapped up in white glazed paper, which he must have extracted from the interior of his hat. With imperturbable gravity he undid the string and smoothed the paper open on a part of the table within reach of Madame de S — ’s hand. The lady companion poured out the tea, then retired into a distant corner out of everybody’s sight. From time to time Madame de S — extended a claw-like hand, glittering with costly rings, towards the paper of cakes, took up one and devoured it, displaying her big false teeth ghoulishly. Meantime she talked in a hoarse tone of the political situation in the Balkans. She built great hopes on some complication in the peninsula for arousing a great movement of national indignation in Russia against “these thieves — thieves thieves.”

“You will only upset yourself,” Peter Ivanovitch interposed, raising his glassy gaze. He smoked cigarettes and drank tea in silence, continuously. When he had finished a glass, he flourished his hand above his shoulder. At that signal the lady companion, ensconced in her corner, with round eyes like a watchful animal, would dart out to the table and pour him out another tumblerful.

Razumov looked at her once or twice. She was anxious, tremulous, though neither Madame de S — nor Peter Ivanovitch paid the slightest attention to her. “What have they done between them to that forlorn creature?” Razumov asked himself. “Have they terrified her out of her senses with ghosts, or simply have they only been beating her?” When she gave him his second glass of tea, he noticed that her lips trembled in the manner of a scared person about to burst into speech. But of course she said nothing, and retired into her corner, as if hugging to herself the smile of thanks he gave her.

“She may be worth cultivating,” thought Razumov suddenly.

He was calming down, getting hold of the actuality into which he had been thrown — for the first time perhaps since Victor Haldin had entered his room...and had gone out again. He was distinctly aware of being the object of the famous — or notorious — Madame de S — ’s ghastly graciousness.

Madame de S — was pleased to discover that this young man was different from the other types of revolutionist members of committees, secret emissaries, vulgar and unmannerly fugitive professors, rough students, ex-cobblers with apostolic faces, consumptive and ragged enthusiasts, Hebrew youths, common fellows of all sorts that used to come and go around Peter Ivanovitch — fanatics, pedants, proletarians all. It was pleasant to talk to this young man of notably good appearance — for Madame de S — was not always in a mystical state of mind. Razumov’s taciturnity only excited her to a quicker, more voluble utterance. It still dealt with the Balkans. She knew all the statesmen of that region, Turks, Bulgarians, Montenegrins, Roumanians, Greeks, Armenians, and nondescripts, young and old, the living and the dead. With some money

an intrigue could be started which would set the Peninsula in a blaze and outrage the sentiment of the Russian people. A cry of abandoned brothers could be raised, and then, with the nation seething with indignation, a couple of regiments or so would be enough to begin a military revolution in St. Petersburg and make an end of these thieves...

“Apparently I’ve got only to sit still and listen,” the silent Razumov thought to himself. “As to that hairy and obscene brute” (in such terms did Mr. Razumov refer mentally to the popular expounder of a feministic conception of social state), “as to him, for all his cunning he too shall speak out some day.”

Razumov ceased to think for a moment. Then a sombre-toned reflection formulated itself in his mind, ironical and bitter. “I have the gift of inspiring confidence.” He heard himself laughing aloud. It was like a goad to the painted, shiny-eyed harridan on the sofa.

“You may well laugh!” she cried hoarsely. “What else can one do! Perfect swindlers — and what base swindlers at that! Cheap Germans — Holstein-Gottorps! Though, indeed, it’s hardly safe to say who and what they are. A family that counts a creature like Catherine the Great in its ancestry — you understand!”

“You are only upsetting yourself,” said Peter Ivanovitch, patiently but in a firm tone. This admonition had its usual effect on the Egeria. She dropped her thick, discoloured eyelids and changed her position on the sofa. All her angular and lifeless movements seemed completely automatic now that her eyes were closed. Presently she opened them very full. Peter Ivanovitch drank tea steadily, without haste.

“Well, I declare!” She addressed Razumov directly. “The people who have seen you on your way here are right. You are very reserved. You haven’t said twenty words altogether since you came in. You let nothing of your thoughts be seen in your face either.”

“I have been listening, Madame,” said Razumov, using French for the first time, hesitatingly, not being certain of his accent. But it seemed to produce an excellent impression. Madame de S — looked meaningly into Peter Ivanovitch’s spectacles, as if to convey her conviction of this young man’s merit. She even nodded the least bit in his direction, and Razumov heard her murmur under her breath the words, “Later on in the diplomatic service,” which could not but refer to the favourable impression he had made. The fantastic absurdity of it revolted him because it seemed to outrage his ruined hopes with the vision of a mock-career. Peter Ivanovitch, impassive as though he were deaf, drank some more tea. Razumov felt that he must say something.

“Yes,” he began deliberately, as if uttering a meditated opinion. “Clearly. Even in planning a purely military revolution the temper of the people should be taken into account.”

“You have understood me perfectly. The discontent should be spiritualized. That is what the ordinary heads of revolutionary committees will not understand. They aren’t capable of it. For instance, Mordatiev was in Geneva last month. Peter Ivanovitch brought him here. You know Mordatiev? Well, yes — you have heard of him. They call

him an eagle — a hero! He has never done half as much as you have. Never attempted — not half...”

Madame de S — agitated herself angularly on the sofa.

“We, of course, talked to him. And do you know what he said to me? ‘What have we to do with Balkan intrigues? We must simply extirpate the scoundrels.’ Extirpate is all very well — but what then? The imbecile! I screamed at him, ‘But you must spiritualize — don’t you understand? — spiritualize the discontent.’...”

She felt nervously in her pocket for a handkerchief; she pressed it to her lips.

“Spiritualize?” said Razumov interrogatively, watching her heaving breast. The long ends of an old black lace scarf she wore over her head slipped off her shoulders and hung down on each side of her ghastly rosy cheeks.

“An odious creature,” she burst out again. “Imagine a man who takes five lumps of sugar in his tea... Yes, I said spiritualize! How else can you make discontent effective and universal?”

“Listen to this, young man.” Peter Ivanovitch made himself heard solemnly. “Effective and universal.”

Razumov looked at him suspiciously.

“Some say hunger will do that,” he remarked.

“Yes. I know. Our people are starving in heaps. But you can’t make famine universal. And it is not despair that we want to create. There is no moral support to be got out of that. It is indignation...”

Madame de S — let her thin, extended arm sink on her knees.

“I am not a Mordatiev,” began Razumov.

“Bien sur!” murmured Madame de S — .

“Though I too am ready to say extirpate, extirpate! But in my ignorance of political work, permit me to ask: A Balkan — well — intrigue, wouldn’t that take a very long time?”

Peter Ivanovitch got up and moved off quietly, to stand with his face to the window. Razumov heard a door close; he turned his head and perceived that the lady companion had scuttled out of the room.

“In matters of politics I am a supernaturalist.” Madame de S — broke the silence harshly.

Peter Ivanovitch moved away from the window and struck Razumov lightly on the shoulder. This was a signal for leaving, but at the same time he addressed Madame de S — in a peculiar reminding tone — -

“Eleanor!”

Whatever it meant, she did not seem to hear him. She leaned back in the corner of the sofa like a wooden figure. The immovable peevishness of the face, framed in the limp, rusty lace, had a character of cruelty.

“As to extirpating,” she croaked at the attentive Razumov, “there is only one class in Russia which must be extirpated. Only one. And that class consists of only one family. You understand me? That one family must be extirpated.”

Her rigidity was frightful, like the rigor of a corpse galvanized into harsh speech and glittering stare by the force of murderous hate. The sight fascinated Razumov — yet he felt more self-possessed than at any other time since he had entered this weirdly bare room. He was interested. But the great feminist by his side again uttered his appeal —

“Eleanor!”

She disregarded it. Her carmine lips vaticinated with an extraordinary rapidity. The liberating spirit would use arms before which rivers would part like Jordan, and ramparts fall down like the walls of Jericho. The deliverance from bondage would be effected by plagues and by signs, by wonders and by war. The women...

“Eleanor!”

She ceased; she had heard him at last. She pressed her hand to her forehead.

“What is it? Ah yes! That girl — the sister of...”

It was Miss Haldin that she meant. That young girl and her mother had been leading a very retired life. They were provincial ladies — were they not? The mother had been very beautiful — traces were left yet. Peter Ivanovitch, when he called there for the first time, was greatly struck...But the cold way they received him was really surprising.

“He is one of our national glories,” Madams de S — cried out, with sudden vehemence. “All the world listens to him.”

“I don’t know these ladies,” said Razumov loudly rising from his chair.

“What are you saying, Kirylo Sidorovitch? I understand that she was talking to you here, in the garden, the other day.”

“Yes, in the garden,” said Razumov gloomily. Then, with an effort, “She made herself known to me.”

“And then ran away from us all,” Madame de S — continued, with ghastly vivacity. “After coming to the very door! What a peculiar proceeding! Well, I have been a shy little provincial girl at one time. Yes, Razumov” (she fell into this familiarity intentionally, with an appalling grimace of graciousness. Razumov gave a perceptible start), “yes, that’s my origin. A simple provincial family.

“You are a marvel,” Peter Ivanovich uttered.

But it was to Razumov that she gave her death’s-head smile. Her tone was quite imperious.

“You must bring the wild young thing here. She is wanted. I reckon upon your success — mind!”

“She is not a wild young thing,” muttered Razumov, in a surly voice.

“Well, then — that’s all the same. She may be one of these young conceited democrats. Do you know what I think? I think she is very much like you in character. There is a smouldering fire of scorn in you. You are darkly self-sufficient, but I can see your very soul.”

Her shiny eyes had a dry, intense stare, which, missing Razumov, gave him an absurd notion that she was looking at something which was visible to her behind him. He cursed himself for an impressionable fool, and asked with forced calmness —

“What is it you see? Anything resembling me?”

She moved her rigidly set face from left to right, negatively.

“Some sort of phantom in my image?” pursued Razumov slowly. “For, I suppose, a soul when it is seen is just that. A vain thing. There are phantoms of the living as well as of the dead.”

The tenseness of Madame de S — ’s stare had relaxed, and now she looked at Razumov in a silence that became disconcerting.

“I myself have had an experience,” he stammered out, as if compelled. “I’ve seen a phantom once.” The unnaturally red lips moved to frame a question harshly.

“Of a dead person?”

“No. Living.”

“A friend?”

“No.”

“An enemy?”

“I hated him.”

“Ah! It was not a woman, then?”

“A woman!” repeated Razumov, his eyes looking straight into the eyes of Madame de S — . “Why should it have been a woman? And why this conclusion? Why should I not have been able to hate a woman?”

As a matter of fact, the idea of hating a woman was new to him. At that moment he hated Madame de S — . But it was not exactly hate. It was more like the abhorrence that may be caused by a wooden or plaster figure of a repulsive kind. She moved no more than if she were such a figure; even her eyes, whose unwinking stare plunged into his own, though shining, were lifeless, as though they were as artificial as her teeth. For the first time Razumov became aware of a faint perfume, but faint as it was it nauseated him exceedingly. Again Peter Ivanovitch tapped him slightly on the shoulder. Thereupon he bowed, and was about to turn away when he received the unexpected favour of a bony, inanimate hand extended to him, with the two words in hoarse French —

“Au revoir!”

He bowed over the skeleton hand and left the room, escorted by the great man, who made him go out first. The voice from the sofa cried after them —

“You remain here, Pierre.”

“Certainly, ma chere amie.”

But he left the room with Razumov, shutting the door behind him. The landing was prolonged into a bare corridor, right and left, desolate perspectives of white and gold decoration without a strip of carpet. The very light, pouring through a large window at the end, seemed dusty; and a solitary speck reposing on the balustrade of white

marble — the silk top-hat of the great feminist — asserted itself extremely, black and glossy in all that crude whiteness.

Peter Ivanovitch escorted the visitor without opening his lips. Even when they had reached the head of the stairs Peter Ivanovitch did not break the silence. Razumov's impulse to continue down the flight and out of the house without as much as a nod abandoned him suddenly. He stopped on the first step and leaned his back against the wall. Below him the great hall with its chequered floor of black and white seemed absurdly large and like some public place where a great power of resonance awaits the provocation of footfalls and voices. As if afraid of awakening the loud echoes of that empty house, Razumov adopted a low tone.

"I really have no mind to turn into a dilettante spiritualist."

Peter Ivanovitch shook his head slightly, very serious.

"Or spend my time in spiritual ecstasies or sublime meditations upon the gospel of feminism," continued Razumov. "I made my way here for my share of action — action, most respected Peter Ivanovitch! It was not the great European writer who attracted me, here, to this odious town of liberty. It was somebody much greater. It was the idea of the chief which attracted me. There are starving young men in Russia who believe in you so much that it seems the only thing that keeps them alive in their misery. Think of that, Peter Ivanovitch! No! But only think of that!"

The great man, thus entreated, perfectly motionless and silent, was the very image of patient, placid respectability.

"Of course I don't speak of the people. They are brutes," added Razumov, in the same subdued but forcible tone. At this, a protesting murmur issued from the "heroic fugitive's" beard. A murmur of authority.

"Say — children."

"No! Brutes!" Razumov insisted bluntly.

"But they are sound, they are innocent," the great man pleaded in a whisper.

"As far as that goes, a brute is sound enough." Razumov raised his voice at last. "And you can't deny the natural innocence of a brute. But what's the use of disputing about names? You just try to give these children the power and stature of men and see what they will be like. You just give it to them and see... But never mind. I tell you, Peter Ivanovitch, that half a dozen young men do not come together nowadays in a shabby student's room without your name being whispered, not as a leader of thought, but as a centre of revolutionary energies — the centre of action. What else has drawn me near you, do you think? It is not what all the world knows of you, surely. It's precisely what the world at large does not know. I was irresistibly drawn-let us say impelled, yes, impelled; or, rather, compelled, driven — driven," repented Razumov loudly, and ceased, as if startled by the hollow reverberation of the word "driven" along two bare corridors and in the great empty hall.

Peter Ivanovitch did not seem startled in the least. The young man could not control a dry, uneasy laugh. The great revolutionist remained unmoved with an effect of commonplace, homely superiority.

“Curse him,” said Razumov to himself, “he is waiting behind his spectacles for me to give myself away.” Then aloud, with a satanic enjoyment of the scorn prompting him to play with the greatness of the great man —

“Ah, Peter Ivanovitch, if you only knew the force which drew — no, which drove me towards you! The irresistible force.”

He did not feel any desire to laugh now. This time Peter Ivanovitch moved his head sideways, knowingly, as much as to say, “Don’t I?” This expressive movement was almost imperceptible. Razumov went on in secret derision —

“All these days you have been trying to read me, Peter Ivanovitch. That is natural. I have perceived it and I have been frank. Perhaps you may think I have not been very expansive? But with a man like you it was not needed; it would have looked like an impertinence, perhaps. And besides, we Russians are prone to talk too much as a rule. I have always felt that. And yet, as a nation, we are dumb. I assure you that I am not likely to talk to you so much again — ha! ha! — ”

Razumov, still keeping on the lower step, came a little nearer to the great man.

“You have been condescending enough. I quite understood it was to lead me on. You must render me the justice that I have not tried to please. I have been impelled, compelled, or rather sent — let us say sent — towards you for a work that no one but myself can do. You would call it a harmless delusion: a ridiculous delusion at which you don’t even smile. It is absurd of me to talk like this, yet some day you shall remember these words, I hope. Enough of this. Here I stand before you-confessed! But one thing more I must add to complete it: a mere blind tool I can never consent to be.”

Whatever acknowledgment Razumov was prepared for, he was not prepared to have both his hands seized in the great man’s grasp. The swiftness of the movement was aggressive enough to startle. The burly feminist could not have been quicker had his purpose been to jerk Razumov treacherously up on the landing and bundle him behind one of the numerous closed doors near by. This idea actually occurred to Razumov; his hands being released after a darkly eloquent squeeze, he smiled, with a beating heart, straight at the beard and the spectacles hiding that impenetrable man.

He thought to himself (it stands confessed in his handwriting), “I won’t move from here till he either speaks or turns away. This is a duel.” Many seconds passed without a sign or sound.

“Yes, yes,” the great man said hurriedly, in subdued tones, as if the whole thing had been a stolen, breathless interview. “Exactly. Come to see us here in a few days. This must be gone into deeply — deeply, between you and me. Quite to the bottom. To the...And, by the by, you must bring along Natalia Victorovna — you know, the Haldin girl...”

“Am I to take this as my first instruction from you?” inquired Razumov stiffly.

Peter Ivanovitch seemed perplexed by this new attitude.

“Ah! h’m! You are naturally the proper person — la personne indiquee. Every one shall be wanted presently. Every one.”

He bent down from the landing over Razumov, who had lowered his eyes.

“The moment of action approaches,” he murmured.

Razumov did not look up. He did not move till he heard the door of the drawing-room close behind the greatest of feminists returning to his painted Egeria. Then he walked down slowly into the hall. The door stood open, and the shadow of the house was lying aslant over the greatest part of the terrace. While crossing it slowly, he lifted his hat and wiped his damp forehead, expelling his breath with force to get rid of the last vestiges of the air he had been breathing inside. He looked at the palms of his hands, and rubbed them gently against his thighs.

He felt, bizarre as it may seem, as though another self, an independent sharer of his mind, had been able to view his whole person very distinctly indeed. “This is curious,” he thought. After a while he formulated his opinion of it in the mental ejaculation: “Beastly!” This disgust vanished before a marked uneasiness. “This is an effect of nervous exhaustion,” he reflected with weary sagacity. “How am I to go on day after day if I have no more power of resistance — moral resistance?”

He followed the path at the foot of the terrace. “Moral resistance, moral resistance;” he kept on repeating these words mentally. Moral endurance. Yes, that was the necessity of the situation. An immense longing to make his way out of these grounds and to the other end of the town, of throwing himself on his bed and going to sleep for hours, swept everything clean out of his mind for a moment. “Is it possible that I am but a weak creature after all?” he asked himself, in sudden alarm. “Eh! What’s that?”

He gave a start as if awakened from a dream. He even swayed a little before recovering himself.

“Ah! You stole away from us quietly to walk about here,” he said.

The lady companion stood before him, but how she came there he had not the slightest idea. Her folded arms were closely cherishing the cat.

“I have been unconscious as I walked, it’s a positive fact,” said Razumov to himself in wonder. He raised his hat with marked civility.

The sallow woman blushed duskily. She had her invariably scared expression, as if somebody had just disclosed to her some terrible news. But she held her ground, Razumov noticed, without timidity. “She is incredibly shabby,” he thought. In the sunlight her black costume looked greenish, with here and there threadbare patches where the stuff seemed decomposed by age into a velvety, black, furry state. Her very hair and eyebrows looked shabby. Razumov wondered whether she were sixty years old. Her figure, though, was young enough. He observed that she did not appear starved, but rather as if she had been fed on unwholesome scraps and leavings of plates.

Razumov smiled amiably and moved out of her way. She turned her head to keep her scared eyes on him.

“I know what you have been told in there,” she affirmed, without preliminaries. Her tone, in contrast with her manner, had an unexpectedly assured character which put Razumov at his ease.

“Do you? You must have heard all sorts of talk on many occasions in there.”

She varied her phrase, with the same incongruous effect of positiveness.

"I know to a certainty what you have been told to do."

"Really?" Razumov shrugged his shoulders a little. He was about to pass on with a bow, when a sudden thought struck him. "Yes. To be sure! In your confidential position you are aware of many things," he murmured, looking at the cat.

That animal got a momentary convulsive hug from the lady companion.

"Everything was disclosed to me a long time ago," she said.

"Everything," Razumov repeated absently.

"Peter Ivanovitch is an awful despot," she jerked out.

Razumov went on studying the stripes on the grey fur of the cat.

"An iron will is an integral part of such a temperament. How else could he be a leader? And I think that you are mistaken in — "

"There!" she cried. "You tell me that I am mistaken. But I tell you all the same that he cares for no one." She jerked her head up. "Don't you bring that girl here. That's what you have been told to do — to bring that girl here. Listen to me; you had better tie a stone round her neck and throw her into the lake."

Razumov had a sensation of chill and gloom, as if a heavy cloud had passed over the sun.

"The girl?" he said. "What have I to do with her?"

"But you have been told to bring Nathalie Haldin here. Am I not right? Of course I am right. I was not in the room, but I know. I know Peter Ivanovitch sufficiently well. He is a great man. Great men are horrible. Well, that's it. Have nothing to do with her. That's the best you can do, unless you want her to become like me — disillusioned! Disillusioned!"

"Like you," repeated Razumov, glaring at her face, as devoid of all comeliness of feature and complexion as the most miserable beggar is of money. He smiled, still feeling chilly: a peculiar sensation which annoyed him. "Disillusioned as to Peter Ivanovitch! Is that all you have lost?"

She declared, looking frightened, but with immense conviction, "Peter Ivanovitch stands for everything." Then she added, in another tone, "Keep the girl away from this house."

"And are you absolutely inciting me to disobey Peter Ivanovitch just because — because you are disillusioned?"

She began to blink.

"Directly I saw you for the first time I was comforted. You took your hat off to me. You looked as if one could trust you. Oh!"

She shrank before Razumov's savage snarl of, "I have heard something like this before."

She was so confounded that she could do nothing but blink for a long time.

"It was your humane manner," she explained plaintively. "I have been starving for, I won't say kindness, but just for a little civility, for I don't know how long. And now you are angry..."

“But no, on the contrary,” he protested. “I am very glad you trust me. It’s possible that later on I may...”

“Yes, if you were to get ill,” she interrupted eagerly, “or meet some bitter trouble, you would find I am not a useless fool. You have only to let me know. I will come to you. I will indeed. And I will stick to you. Misery and I are old acquaintances — but this life here is worse than starving.”

She paused anxiously, then in a voice for the first time sounding really timid, she added —

“Or if you were engaged in some dangerous work. Sometimes a humble companion — I would not want to know anything. I would follow you with joy. I could carry out orders. I have the courage.”

Razumov looked attentively at the scared round eyes, at the withered, sallow, round cheeks. They were quivering about the corners of the mouth.

“She wants to escape from here,” he thought.

“Suppose I were to tell you that I am engaged in dangerous work?” he uttered slowly.

She pressed the cat to her threadbare bosom with a breathless exclamation. “Ah!” Then not much above a whisper: “Under Peter Ivanovitch?”

“No, not under Peter Ivanovitch.”

He read admiration in her eyes, and made an effort to smile.

“Then — alone?”

He held up his closed hand with the index raised. “Like this finger,” he said.

She was trembling slightly. But it occurred to Razumov that they might have been observed from the house, and he became anxious to be gone. She blinked, raising up to him her puckered face, and seemed to beg mutely to be told something more, to be given a word of encouragement for her starving, grotesque, and pathetic devotion.

“Can we be seen from the house?” asked Razumov confidentially.

She answered, without showing the slightest surprise at the question —

“No, we can’t, on account of this end of the stables.” And she added, with an acuteness which surprised Razumov, “But anybody looking out of an upstairs window would know that you have not passed through the gates yet.”

“Who’s likely to spy out of the window?” queried Razumov. “Peter Ivanovitch?”

She nodded.

“Why should he trouble his head?”

“He expects somebody this afternoon.”

“You know the person?”

“There’s more than one.”

She had lowered her eyelids. Razumov looked at her curiously.

“Of course. You hear everything they say.”

She murmured without any animosity —

“So do the tables and chairs.”

He understood that the bitterness accumulated in the heart of that helpless creature had got into her veins, and, like some subtle poison, had decomposed her fidelity to

that hateful pair. It was a great piece of luck for him, he reflected; because women are seldom venal after the manner of men, who can be bought for material considerations. She would be a good ally, though it was not likely that she was allowed to hear as much as the tables and chairs of the Chateau Borel. That could not be expected. But still... And, at any rate, she could be made to talk.

When she looked up her eyes met the fixed stare of Razumov, who began to speak at once.

“Well, well, dear...but upon my word, I haven’t the pleasure of knowing your name yet. Isn’t it strange?”

For the first time she made a movement of the shoulders.

“Is it strange? No one is told my name. No one cares. No one talks to me, no one writes to me. My parents don’t even know if I’m alive. I have no use for a name, and I have almost forgotten it myself.”

Razumov murmured gravely, “Yes, but still...”

She went on much slower, with indifference —

“You may call me Tekla, then. My poor Andrei called me so. I was devoted to him. He lived in wretchedness and suffering, and died in misery. That is the lot of all us Russians, nameless Russians. There is nothing else for us, and no hope anywhere, unless...”

“Unless what?”

“Unless all these people with names are done away with,” she finished, blinking and pursing up her lips.

“It will be easier to call you Tekla, as you direct me,” said Razumov, “if you consent to call me Kirylo, when we are talking like this — quietly — only you and me.”

And he said to himself, “Here’s a being who must be terribly afraid of the world, else she would have run away from this situation before.” Then he reflected that the mere fact of leaving the great man abruptly would make her a suspect. She could expect no support or countenance from anyone. This revolutionist was not fit for an independent existence.

She moved with him a few steps, blinking and nursing the cat with a small balancing movement of her arms.

“Yes — only you and I. That’s how I was with my poor Andrei, only he was dying, killed by these official brutes — while you! You are strong. You kill the monsters. You have done a great deed. Peter Ivanovitch himself must consider you. Well — don’t forget me — especially if you are going back to work in Russia. I could follow you, carrying anything that was wanted — at a distance, you know. Or I could watch for hours at the corner of a street if necessary, — in wet or snow — yes, I could — all day long. Or I could write for you dangerous documents, lists of names or instructions, so that in case of mischance the handwriting could not compromise you. And you need not be afraid if they were to catch me. I would know how to keep dumb. We women are not so easily daunted by pain. I heard Peter Ivanovitch say it is our blunt nerves or something. We can stand it better. And it’s true; I would just as soon bite my tongue

out and throw it at them as not. What's the good of speech to me? Who would ever want to hear what I could say? Ever since I closed the eyes of my poor Andrei I haven't met a man who seemed to care for the sound of my voice. I should never have spoken to you if the very first time you appeared here you had not taken notice of me so nicely. I could not help speaking of you to that charming dear girl. Oh, the sweet creature! And strong! One can see that at once. If you have a heart don't let her set her foot in here. Good-bye!"

Razumov caught her by the arm. Her emotion at being thus seized manifested itself by a short struggle, after which she stood still, not looking at him.

"But you can tell me," he spoke in her ear, "why they — these people in that house there — are so anxious to get hold of her?"

She freed herself to turn upon him, as if made angry by the question.

"Don't you understand that Peter Ivanovitch must direct, inspire, influence? It is the breath of his life. There can never be too many disciples. He can't bear thinking of anyone escaping him. And a woman, too! There is nothing to be done without women, he says. He has written it. He — "

The young man was staring at her passion when she broke off suddenly and ran away behind the stable.

Chapter 3

Razumov, thus left to himself, took the direction of the gate. But on this day of many conversations, he discovered that very probably he could not leave the grounds without having to hold another one.

Stepping in view from beyond the lodge appeared the expected visitors of Peter Ivanovitch: a small party composed of two men and a woman. They noticed him too, immediately, and stopped short as if to consult. But in a moment the woman, moving aside, motioned with her arm to the two men, who, leaving the drive at once, struck across the large neglected lawn, or rather grass-plot, and made directly for the house. The woman remained on the path waiting for Razumov's approach. She had recognized him. He, too, had recognized her at the first glance. He had been made known to her at Zurich, where he had broken his journey while on his way from Dresden. They had been much together for the three days of his stay.

She was wearing the very same costume in which he had seen her first. A blouse of crimson silk made her noticeable at a distance. With that she wore a short brown skirt and a leather belt. Her complexion was the colour of coffee and milk, but very clear; her eyes black and glittering, her figure erect. A lot of thick hair, nearly white, was done up loosely under a dusty Tyrolese hat of dark cloth, which seemed to have lost some of its trimmings.

The expression of her face was grave, intent; so grave that Razumov, after approaching her close, felt obliged to smile. She greeted him with a manly hand-grasp.

“What! Are you going away?” she exclaimed. “How is that, Razumov?”

“I am going away because I haven’t been asked to stay,” Razumov answered, returning the pressure of her hand with much less force than she had put into it.

She jerked her head sideways like one who understands. Meantime Razumov’s eyes had strayed after the two men. They were crossing the grass-plot obliquely, without haste. The shorter of the two was buttoned up in a narrow overcoat of some thin grey material, which came nearly to his heels. His companion, much taller and broader, wore a short, close-fitting jacket and tight trousers tucked into shabby top-boots.

The woman, who had sent them out of Razumov’s way apparently, spoke in a businesslike voice.

“I had to come rushing from Zurich on purpose to meet the train and take these two along here to see Peter Ivanovitch. I’ve just managed it.”

“Ah! indeed,” Razumov said perfunctorily, and very vexed at her staying behind to talk to him “From Zurich — yes, of course. And these two, they come from...”

She interrupted, without emphasis —

“From quite another direction. From a distance, too. A considerable distance.”

Razumov shrugged his shoulders. The two men from a distance, after having reached the wall of the terrace, disappeared suddenly at its foot as if the earth had opened to swallow them up.

“Oh, well, they have just come from America.” The woman in the crimson blouse shrugged her shoulders too a little before making that statement. “The time is drawing near,” she interjected, as if speaking to herself. “I did not tell them who you were. Yakovlitch would have wanted to embrace you.”

“Is that he with the wisp of hair hanging from his chin, in the long coat?”

“You’ve guessed aright. That’s Yakovlitch.”

“And they could not find their way here from the station without you coming on purpose from Zurich to show it to them? Verily, without women we can do nothing. So it stands written, and apparently so it is.”

He was conscious of an immense lassitude under his effort to be sarcastic. And he could see that she had detected it with those steady, brilliant black eyes.

“What is the matter with you?”

“I don’t know. Nothing. I’ve had a devil of a day.”

She waited, with her black eyes fixed on his face. Then —

“What of that? You men are so impressionable and self-conscious. One day is like another, hard, hard — and there’s an end of it, till the great day comes. I came over for a very good reason. They wrote to warn Peter Ivanovitch of their arrival. But where from? Only from Cherbourg on a bit of ship’s notepaper. Anybody could have done that. Yakovlitch has lived for years and years in America. I am the only one at hand who had known him well in the old days. I knew him very well indeed. So Peter Ivanovitch telegraphed, asking me to come. It’s natural enough, is it not?”

“You came to vouch for his identity?” inquired Razumov.

“Yes. Something of the kind. Fifteen years of a life like his make changes in a man. Lonely, like a crow in a strange country. When I think of Yakovlitch before he went to America — ”

The softness of the low tone caused Razumov to glance at her sideways. She sighed; her black eyes were looking away; she had plunged the fingers of her right hand deep into the mass of nearly white hair, and stirred them there absently. When she withdrew her hand the little hat perched on the top of her head remained slightly tilted, with a queer inquisitive effect, contrasting strongly with the reminiscent murmur that escaped her.

“We were not in our first youth even then. But a man is a child always.”

Razumov thought suddenly, “They have been living together.” Then aloud —

“Why didn’t you follow him to America?” he asked point-blank.

She looked up at him with a perturbed air.

“Don’t you remember what was going on fifteen years ago? It was a time of activity. The Revolution has its history by this time. You are in it and yet you don’t seem to know it. Yakovlitch went away then on a mission; I went back to Russia. It had to be so. Afterwards there was nothing for him to come back to.”

“Ah! indeed,” muttered Razumov, with affected surprise. “Nothing!”

“What are you trying to insinuate” she exclaimed quickly. “Well, and what then if he did get discouraged a little...”

“He looks like a Yankee, with that goatee hanging from his chin. A regular Uncle Sam,” growled Razumov. “Well, and you? You who went to Russia? You did not get discouraged.”

“Never mind. Yakovlitch is a man who cannot be doubted. He, at any rate, is the right sort.”

Her black, penetrating gaze remained fixed upon Razumov while she spoke, and for a moment afterwards.

“Pardon me,” Razumov inquired coldly, “but does it mean that you, for instance, think that I am not the right sort?”

She made no protest, gave no sign of having heard the question; she continued looking at him in a manner which he judged not to be absolutely unfriendly. In Zurich when he passed through she had taken him under her charge, in a way, and was with him from morning till night during his stay of two days. She took him round to see several people. At first she talked to him a great deal and rather unreservedly, but always avoiding all reference to herself; towards the middle of the second day she fell silent, attending him zealously as before, and even seeing him off at the railway station, where she pressed his hand firmly through the lowered carriage window, and, stepping back without a word, waited till the train moved. He had noticed that she was treated with quiet regard. He knew nothing of her parentage, nothing of her private history or political record; he judged her from his own private point of view, as being a distinct danger in his path. “Judged” is not perhaps the right word. It was more of a feeling,

the summing up of slight impressions aided by the discovery that he could not despise her as he despised all the others. He had not expected to see her again so soon.

No, decidedly; her expression was not unfriendly. Yet he perceived an acceleration in the beat of his heart. The conversation could not be abandoned at that point. He went on in accents of scrupulous inquiry —

“Is it perhaps because I don’t seem to accept blindly every development of the general doctrine — such for instance as the feminism of our great Peter Ivanovitch? If that is what makes me suspect, then I can only say I would scorn to be a slave even to an idea.”

She had been looking at him all the time, not as a listener looks at one, but as if the words he chose to say were only of secondary interest. When he finished she slipped her hand, by a sudden and decided movement, under his arm and impelled him gently towards the gate of the grounds. He felt her firmness and obeyed the impulsion at once, just as the other two men had, a moment before, obeyed unquestioningly the wave of her hand.

They made a few steps like this.

“No, Razumov, your ideas are probably all right,” she said. “You may be valuable — very valuable. What’s the matter with you is that you don’t like us.”

She released him. He met her with a frosty smile.

“Am I expected then to have love as well as convictions?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“You know very well what I mean. People have been thinking you not quite whole-hearted. I have heard that opinion from one side and another. But I have understood you at the end of the first day...”

Razumov interrupted her, speaking steadily.

“I assure you that your perspicacity is at fault here.”

“What phrases he uses!” she exclaimed parenthetically. “Ah! Kirylo Sidorovitch, you like other men are fastidious, full of self-love and afraid of trifles. Moreover, you had no training. What you want is to be taken in hand by some woman. I am sorry I am not staying here a few days. I am going back to Zurich to-morrow, and shall take Yakovlitch with me most likely.”

This information relieved Razumov.

“I am sorry too,” he said. “But, all the same, I don’t think you understand me.”

He breathed more freely; she did not protest, but asked, “And how did you get on with Peter Ivanovitch? You have seen a good deal of each other. How is it between you two?”

Not knowing what answer to make, the young man inclined his head slowly.

Her lips had been parted in expectation. She pressed them together, and seemed to reflect.

“That’s all right.”

This had a sound of finality, but she did not leave him. It was impossible to guess what she had in her mind. Razumov muttered —

"It is not of me that you should have asked that question. In a moment you shall see Peter Ivanovitch himself, and the subject will come up naturally. He will be curious to know what has delayed you so long in this garden."

"No doubt Peter Ivanovitch will have something to say to me. Several things. He may even speak of you — question me. Peter Ivanovitch is inclined to trust me generally."

"Question you? That's very likely."

She smiled, half serious.

"Well — and what shall I say to him?"

"I don't know. You may tell him of your discovery."

"What's that?"

"Why — my lack of love for..."

"Oh! That's between ourselves," she interrupted, it was hard to say whether in jest or earnest.

"I see that you want to tell Peter Ivanovitch something in my favour," said Razumov, with grim playfulness. "Well, then, you can tell him that I am very much in earnest about my mission. I mean to succeed."

"You have been given a mission!" she exclaimed quickly.

"It amounts to that. I have been told to bring about a certain event."

She looked at him searchingly.

"A mission," she repeated, very grave and interested all at once. "What sort of mission?"

"Something in the nature of propaganda work."

"Ah! Far away from here?"

"No. Not very far," said Razumov, restraining a sudden desire to laugh, although he did not feel joyous in the least.

"So!" she said thoughtfully. "Well, I am not asking questions. It's sufficient that Peter Ivanovitch should know what each of us is doing. Everything is bound to come right in the end."

"You think so?"

"I don't think, young man. I just simply believe it."

"And is it to Peter Ivanovitch that you owe that faith?"

She did not answer the question, and they stood idle, silent, as if reluctant to part with each other.

"That's just like a man," she murmured at last. "As if it were possible to tell how a belief comes to one." Her thin Mephistophelian eyebrows moved a little. "Truly there are millions of people in Russia who would envy the life of dogs in this country. It is a horror and a shame to confess this even between ourselves. One must believe for very pity. This can't go on. No! It can't go on. For twenty years I have been coming and going, looking neither to the left nor to the right... What are you smiling to yourself for? You are only at the beginning. You have begun well, but you just wait till you have trodden every particle of yourself under your feet in your comings and goings. For that is what it comes to. You've got to trample down every particle of your own

feelings; for stop you cannot, you must not. I have been young, too — but perhaps you think that I am complaining-eh?”

“I don’t think anything of the sort,” protested Razumov indifferently.

“I dare say you don’t, you dear superior creature. You don’t care.”

She plunged her fingers into the bunch of hair on the left side, and that brusque movement had the effect of setting the Tyrolese hat straight on her head. She frowned under it without animosity, in the manner of an investigator. Razumov averted his face carelessly.

“You men are all alike. You mistake luck for merit. You do it in good faith too! I would not be too hard on you. It’s masculine nature. You men are ridiculously pitiful in your aptitude to cherish childish illusions down to the very grave. There are a lot of us who have been at work for fifteen years — I mean constantly — trying one way after another, underground and above ground, looking neither to the right nor to the left! I can talk about it. I have been one of these that never rested... There! What’s the use of talking... Look at my grey hairs! And here two babies come along — I mean you and Haldin — you come along and manage to strike a blow at the very first try.”

At the name of Haldin falling from the rapid and energetic lips of the woman revolutionist, Razumov had the usual brusque consciousness of the irrevocable. But in all the months which had passed over his head he had become hardened to the experience. The consciousness was no longer accompanied by the blank dismay and the blind anger of the early days. He had argued himself into new beliefs; and he had made for himself a mental atmosphere of gloomy and sardonic reverie, a sort of murky medium through which the event appeared like a featureless shadow having vaguely the shape of a man; a shape extremely familiar, yet utterly inexpressive, except for its air of discreet waiting in the dusk. It was not alarming.

“What was he like?” the woman revolutionist asked unexpectedly.

“What was he like?” echoed Razumov, making a painful effort not to turn upon her savagely. But he relieved himself by laughing a little while he stole a glance at her out of the corners of his eyes. This reception of her inquiry disturbed her.

“How like a woman,” he went on. “What is the good of concerning yourself with his appearance? Whatever it was, he is removed beyond all feminine influences now.”

A frown, making three folds at the root of her nose, accentuated the Mephistophelian slant of her eyebrows.

“You suffer, Razumov,” she suggested, in her low, confident voice.

“What nonsense!” Razumov faced the woman fairly. “But now I think of it, I am not sure that he is beyond the influence of one woman at least; the one over there — Madame de S — , you know. Formerly the dead were allowed to rest, but now it seems they are at the beck and call of a crazy old harridan. We revolutionists make wonderful discoveries. It is true that they are not exactly our own. We have nothing of our own. But couldn’t the friend of Peter Ivanovitch satisfy your feminine curiosity? Couldn’t she conjure him up for you?” — he jested like a man in pain.

Her concentrated frowning expression relaxed, and she said, a little wearily, "Let us hope she will make an effort and conjure up some tea for us. But that is by no means certain. I am tired, Razumov."

"You tired! What a confession! Well, there has been tea up there. I had some. If you hurry on after Yakovlitch, instead of wasting your time with such an unsatisfactory sceptical person as myself, you may find the ghost of it — the cold ghost of it — still lingering in the temple. But as to you being tired I can hardly believe it. We are not supposed to be. We mustn't, We can't. The other day I read in some paper or other an alarmist article on the tireless activity of the revolutionary parties. It impresses the world. It's our prestige."

"He flings out continually these flouts and sneers;" the woman in the crimson blouse spoke as if appealing quietly to a third person, but her black eyes never left Razumov's face. "And what for, pray? Simply because some of his conventional notions are shocked, some of his petty masculine standards. You might think he was one of these nervous sensitives that come to a bad end. And yet," she went on, after a short, reflective pause and changing the mode of her address, "and yet I have just learned something which makes me think that you are a man of character, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Yes! indeed — you are."

The mysterious positiveness of this assertion startled Razumov. Their eyes met. He looked away and, through the bars of the rusty gate, stared at the clean, wide road shaded by the leafy trees. An electric tramcar, quite empty, ran along the avenue with a metallic rustle. It seemed to him he would have given anything to be sitting inside all alone. He was inexpressibly weary, weary in every fibre of his body, but he had a reason for not being the first to break off the conversation. At any instant, in the visionary and criminal babble of revolutionists, some momentous words might fall on his ear; from her lips, from anybody's lips. As long as he managed to preserve a clear mind and to keep down his irritability there was nothing to fear. The only condition of success and safety was indomitable will-power, he reminded himself.

He longed to be on the other side of the bars, as though he were actually a prisoner within the grounds of this centre of revolutionary plots, of this house of folly, of blindness, of villainy and crime. Silently he indulged his wounded spirit in a feeling of immense moral and mental remoteness. He did not even smile when he heard her repeat the words —

"Yes! A strong character."

He continued to gaze through the bars like a moody prisoner, not thinking of escape, but merely pondering upon the faded memories of freedom.

"If you don't look out," he mumbled, still looking away, "you shall certainly miss seeing as much as the mere ghost of that tea."

She was not to be shaken off in such a way. As a matter of fact he had not expected to succeed.

“Never mind, it will be no great loss. I mean the missing of her tea and only the ghost of it at that. As to the lady, you must understand that she has her positive uses. See that, Razumov.”

He turned his head at this imperative appeal and saw the woman revolutionist making the motions of counting money into the palm of her hand.

“That’s what it is. You see?”

Razumov uttered a slow “I see,” and returned to his prisoner-like gazing upon the neat and shady road.

“Material means must be obtained in some way, and this is easier than breaking into banks. More certain too. There! I am joking... What is he muttering to himself now?” she cried under her breath.

“My admiration of Peter Ivanovitch’s devoted self-sacrifice, that’s all. It’s enough to make one sick.”

“Oh, you squeamish, masculine creature. Sick! Makes him sick! And what do you know of the truth of it? There’s no looking into the secrets of the heart. Peter Ivanovitch knew her years ago, in his worldly days, when he was a young officer in the Guards. It is not for us to judge an inspired person. That’s where you men have an advantage. You are inspired sometimes both in thought and action. I have always admitted that when you are inspired, when you manage to throw off your masculine cowardice and prudishness you are not to be equalled by us. Only, how seldom... Whereas the silliest woman can always be made of use. And why? Because we have passion, unappeasable passion... I should like to know what he is smiling at?”

“I am not smiling,” protested Razumov gloomily.

“Well! How is one to call it? You made some sort of face. Yes, I know! You men can love here and hate there and desire something or other — and you make a great to-do about it, and you call it passion! Yes! While it lasts. But we women are in love with love, and with hate, with these very things I tell you, and with desire itself. That’s why we can’t be bribed off so easily as you men. In life, you see, there is not much choice. You have either to rot or to burn. And there is not one of us, painted or unpainted, that would not rather burn than rot.”

She spoke with energy, but in a matter-of-fact tone. Razumov’s attention had wandered away on a track of its own — outside the bars of the gate — but not out of earshot. He stuck his hands into the pockets of his coat.

“Rot or burn! Powerfully stated. Painted or unpainted. Very vigorous. Painted or...Do tell me — she would be infernally jealous of him, wouldn’t she?”

“Who? What? The Baroness? Eleanor Maximovna? Jealous of Peter Ivanovitch? Heavens! Are these the questions the man’s mind is running on? Such a thing is not to be thought of.”

“Why? Can’t a wealthy old woman be jealous? Or, are they all pure spirits together?”

“But what put it into your head to ask such a question?” she wondered.

“Nothing. I just asked. Masculine frivolity, if you like.”

"I don't like," she retorted at once. "It is not the time to be frivolous. What are you flinging your very heart against? Or, perhaps, you are only playing a part."

Razumov had felt that woman's observation of him like a physical contact, like a hand resting lightly on his shoulder. At that moment he received the mysterious impression of her having made up her mind for a closer grip. He stiffened himself inwardly to bear it without betraying himself.

"Playing a Part," he repeated, presenting to her an unmoved profile. "It must be done very badly since you see through the assumption."

She watched him, her forehead drawn into perpendicular folds, the thin black eyebrows diverging upwards like the antennae of an insect. He added hardly audibly —

"You are mistaken. I am doing it no more than the rest of us."

"Who is doing it?" she snapped out.

"Who? Everybody," he said impatiently. "You are a materialist, aren't you?"

"Eh! My dear soul, I have outlived all that nonsense."

"But you must remember the definition of Cabanis: 'Man is a digestive tube.' I imagine now..."

"I spit on him."

"What? On Cabanis? All right. But you can't ignore the importance of a good digestion. The joy of life — you know the joy of life? — depends on a sound stomach, whereas a bad digestion inclines one to scepticism, breeds black fancies and thoughts of death. These are facts ascertained by physiologists. Well, I assure you that ever since I came over from Russia I have been stuffed with indigestible foreign concoctions of the most nauseating kind — pah!"

"You are joking," she murmured incredulously. He assented in a detached way.

"Yes. It is all a joke. It's hardly worth while talking to a man like me. Yet for that very reason men have been known to take their own life."

"On the contrary, I think it is worth while talking to you."

He kept her in the corner of his eye. She seemed to be thinking out some scathing retort, but ended by only shrugging her shoulders slightly.

"Shallow talk! I suppose one must pardon this weakness in you," she said, putting a special accent on the last word. There was something anxious in her indulgent conclusion.

Razumov noted the slightest shades in this conversation, which he had not expected, for which he was not prepared. That was it. "I was not prepared," he said to himself. "It has taken me unawares." It seemed to him that if he only could allow himself to pant openly like a dog for a time this oppression would pass away. "I shall never be found prepared," he thought, with despair. He laughed a little, saying as lightly as he could —

"Thanks. I don't ask for mercy." Then affecting a playful uneasiness, "But aren't you afraid Peter Ivanovitch might suspect us of plotting something unauthorized together by the gate here?"

“No, I am not afraid. You are quite safe from suspicions while you are with me, my dear young man.” The humorous gleam in her black eyes went out. “Peter Ivanovitch trusts me,” she went on, quite austere. “He takes my advice. I am his right hand, as it were, in certain most important things... That amuses you what? Do you think I am boasting?”

“God forbid. I was just only saying to myself that Peter Ivanovitch seems to have solved the woman question pretty completely.”

Even as he spoke he reproached himself for his words, for his tone. All day long he had been saying the wrong things. It was folly, worse than folly. It was weakness; it was this disease of perversity overcoming his will. Was this the way to meet speeches which certainly contained the promise of future confidences from that woman who apparently had a great store of secret knowledge and so much influence? Why give her this puzzling impression? But she did not seem inimical. There was no anger in her voice. It was strangely speculative.

“One does not know what to think, Razumov. You must have bitten something bitter in your cradle.” Razumov gave her a sidelong glance.

“H’m! Something bitter? That’s an explanation,” he muttered. “Only it was much later. And don’t you think, Sophia Antonovna, that you and I come from the same cradle?”

The woman, whose name he had forced himself at last to pronounce (he had experienced a strong repugnance in letting it pass his lips), the woman revolutionist murmured, after a pause —

“You mean — Russia?”

He disdained even to nod. She seemed softened, her black eyes very still, as though she were pursuing the simile in her thoughts to all its tender associations. But suddenly she knitted her brows in a Mephistophelian frown.

“Yes. Perhaps no wonder, then. Yes. One lies there lapped up in evils, watched over by beings that are worse than ogres, ghouls, and vampires. They must be driven away, destroyed utterly. In regard of that task nothing else matters if men and women are determined and faithful. That’s how I came to feel in the end. The great thing is not to quarrel amongst ourselves about all sorts of conventional trifles. Remember that, Razumov.”

Razumov was not listening. He had even lost the sense of being watched in a sort of heavy tranquillity. His uneasiness, his exasperation, his scorn were blunted at last by all these trying hours. It seemed to him that now they were blunted for ever. “I am a match for them all,” he thought, with a conviction too firm to be exulting. The woman revolutionist had ceased speaking; he was not looking at her; there was no one passing along the road. He almost forgot that he was not alone. He heard her voice again, curt, businesslike, and yet betraying the hesitation which had been the real reason of her prolonged silence.

“I say, Razumov!”

Razumov, whose face was turned away from her, made a grimace like a man who hears a false note.

“Tell me: is it true that on the very morning of the deed you actually attended the lectures at the University?”

An appreciable fraction of a second elapsed before the real import of the question reached him, like a bullet which strikes some time after the flash of the fired shot. Luckily his disengaged hand was ready to grip a bar of the gate. He held it with a terrible force, but his presence of mind was gone. He could make only a sort of gurgling, grumpy sound.

“Come, Kirylo Sidorovitch!” she urged him. “I know you are not a boastful man. That one must say for you. You are a silent man. Too silent, perhaps. You are feeding on some bitterness of your own. You are not an enthusiast. You are, perhaps, all the stronger for that. But you might tell me. One would like to understand you a little more. I was so immensely struck... Have you really done it?”

He got his voice back. The shot had missed him. It had been fired at random, altogether, more like a signal for coming to close quarters. It was to be a plain struggle for self-preservation. And she was a dangerous adversary too. But he was ready for battle; he was so ready that when he turned towards her not a muscle of his face moved.

“Certainly,” he said, without animation, secretly strung up but perfectly sure of himself. “Lectures — certainly, But what makes you ask?”

It was she who was animated.

“I had it in a letter, written by a young man in Petersburg; one of us, of course. You were seen — you were observed with your notebook, impassible, taking notes...”

He enveloped her with his fixed stare.

“What of that?”

“I call such coolness superb — that’s all. It is a proof of uncommon strength of character. The young man writes that nobody could have guessed from your face and manner the part you had played only some two hours before — the great, momentous, glorious part...”

“Oh no. Nobody could have guessed,” assented Razumov gravely, “because, don’t you see, nobody at that time...”

“Yes, yes. But all the same you are a man of exceptional fortitude, it seems. You looked exactly as usual. It was remembered afterwards with wonder...”

“It cost me no effort,” Razumov declared, with the same staring gravity.

“Then it’s almost more wonderful still!” she exclaimed, and fell silent while Razumov asked himself whether he had not said there something utterly unnecessary — or even worse.

She raised her head eagerly.

“Your intention was to stay in Russia? You had planned...”

“No,” interrupted Razumov without haste. “I had made no plans of any sort.”

“You just simply walked away?” she struck in.

He bowed his head in slow assent. "Simply — yes." He had gradually released his hold on the bar of the gate, as though he had acquired the conviction that no random shot could knock him over now. And suddenly he was inspired to add, "The snow was coming down very thick, you know."

She had a slight appreciative movement of the head, like an expert in such enterprises, very interested, capable of taking every point professionally. Razumov remembered something he had heard.

"I turned into a narrow side street, you understand," he went on negligently, and paused as if it were not worth talking about. Then he remembered another detail and dropped it before her, like a disdainful dole to her curiosity.

"I felt inclined to lie down and go to sleep there."

She clicked her tongue at that symptom, very struck indeed. Then —

"But the notebook! The amazing notebook, man. You don't mean to say you had put it in your pocket beforehand!" she cried.

Razumov gave a start. It might have been a sign of impatience.

"I went home. Straight home to my rooms," he said distinctly.

"The coolness of the man! You dared?"

"Why not? I assure you I was perfectly calm. Ha! Calmer than I am now perhaps."

"I like you much better as you are now than when you indulge that bitter vein of yours, Razumov. And nobody in the house saw you return — eh? That might have appeared queer."

"No one," Razumov said firmly. "Dvornik, landlady, girl, all out of the way. I went up like a shadow. It was a murky morning. The stairs were dark. I glided up like a phantom. Fate? Luck? What do you think?"

"I just see it!" The eyes of the woman revolutionist snapped darkly. "Well — and then you considered..."

Razumov had it all ready in his head.

"No. I looked at my watch, since you want to know. There was just time. I took that notebook, and ran down the stairs on tiptoe. Have you ever listened to the pit-pat of a man running round and round the shaft of a deep staircase? They have a gaslight at the bottom burning night and day. I suppose it's gleaming down there now... The sound dies out — the flame winks..."

He noticed the vacillation of surprise passing over the steady curiosity of the black eyes fastened on his face as if the woman revolutionist received the sound of his voice into her pupils instead of her ears. He checked himself, passed his hand over his forehead, confused, like a man who has been dreaming aloud.

"Where could a student be running if not to his lectures in the morning? At night it's another matter. I did not care if all the house had been there to look at me. But I don't suppose there was anyone. It's best not to be seen or heard. Aha! The people that are neither seen nor heard are the lucky ones — in Russia. Don't you admire my luck?"

“Astonishing,” she said. “If you have luck as well as determination, then indeed you are likely to turn out an invaluable acquisition for the work in hand.”

Her tone was earnest; and it seemed to Razumov that it was speculative, even as though she were already apportioning him, in her mind, his share of the work. Her eyes were cast down. He waited, not very alert now, but with the grip of the ever-present danger giving him an air of attentive gravity. Who could have written about him in that letter from Petersburg? A fellow student, surely — some imbecile victim of revolutionary propoganda, some foolish slave of foreign, subversive ideals. A long, famine-stricken, red-nosed figure presented itself to his mental search. That must have been the fellow!

He smiled inwardly at the absolute wrong-headedness of the whole thing, the self-deception of a criminal idealist shattering his existence like a thunder-clap out of a clear sky, and re-echoing amongst the wreckage in the false assumptions of those other fools. Fancy that hungry and piteous imbecile furnishing to the curiosity of the revolutionist refugees this utterly fantastic detail! He appreciated it as by no means constituting a danger. On the contrary. As things stood it was for his advantage rather, a piece of sinister luck which had only to be accepted with proper caution.

“And yet, Razumov,” he heard the musing voice of the woman, “you have not the face of a lucky man.” She raised her eyes with renewed interest. “And so that was the way of it. After doing your work you simply walked off and made for your rooms. That sort of thing succeeds sometimes. I suppose it was agreed beforehand that, once the business over, each of you would go his own way?”

Razumov preserved the seriousness of his expression and the deliberate, if cautious, manner of speaking.

“Was not that the best thing to do?” he asked, in a dispassionate tone. “And anyway,” he added, after waiting a moment, “we did not give much thought to what would come after. We never discussed formally any line of conduct. It was understood, I think.”

She approved his statement with slight nods.

“You, of course, wished to remain in Russia?”

“In St. Petersburg itself,” emphasized Razumov. “It was the only safe course for me. And, moreover, I had nowhere else to go.”

“Yes! Yes! I know. Clearly. And the other — this wonderful Haldin appearing only to be regretted — you don’t know what he intended?”

Razumov had foreseen that such a question would certainly come to meet him sooner or later. He raised his hands a little and let them fall helplessly by his side — nothing more.

It was the white-haired woman conspirator who was the first to break the silence.

“Very curious,” she pronounced slowly. “And you did not think, Kirylo Sidorovitch, that he might perhaps wish to get in touch with you again?”

Razumov discovered that he could not suppress the trembling of his lips. But he thought that he owed it to himself to speak. A negative sign would not do again. Speak

he must, if only to get at the bottom of what that St. Petersburg letter might have contained.

“I stayed at home next day,” he said, bending down a little and plunging his glance into the black eyes of the woman so that she should not observe the trembling of his lips. “Yes, I stayed at home. As my actions are remembered and written about, then perhaps you are aware that I was not seen at the lectures next day. Eh? You didn’t know? Well, I stopped at home—the live-long day.”

As if moved by his agitated tone, she murmured a sympathetic “I see! It must have been trying enough.”

“You seem to understand one’s feelings,” said Razumov steadily. “It was trying. It was horrible; it was an atrocious day. It was not the last.”

“Yes, I understand. Afterwards, when you heard they had got him. Don’t I know how one feels after losing a comrade in the good fight? One’s ashamed of being left. And I can remember so many. Never mind. They shall be avenged before long. And what is death? At any rate, it is not a shameful thing like some kinds of life.”

Razumov felt something stir in his breast, a sort of feeble and unpleasant tremor.

“Some kinds of life?” he repeated, looking at her searchingly.

“The subservient, submissive life. Life? No! Vegetation on the filthy heap of iniquity which the world is. Life, Razumov, not to be vile must be a revolt — a pitiless protest — all the time.”

She calmed down, the gleam of suffused tears in her eyes dried out instantly by the heat of her passion, and it was in her capable, businesslike manner that she went on

—
“You understand me, Razumov. You are not an enthusiast, but there is an immense force of revolt in you. I felt it from the first, directly I set my eyes on you — you remember — in Zurich. Oh! You are full of bitter revolt. That is good. Indignation flags sometimes, revenge itself may become a weariness, but that uncompromising sense of necessity and justice which armed your and Haldin’s hands to strike down that fanatical brute...for it was that — nothing but that! I have been thinking it out. It could have been nothing else but that.”

Razumov made a slight bow, the irony of which was concealed by an almost sinister immobility of feature.

“I can’t speak for the dead. As for myself, I can assure you that my conduct was dictated by necessity and by the sense of — well — retributive justice.”

“Good, that,” he said to himself, while her eyes rested upon him, black and impenetrable like the mental caverns where revolutionary thought should sit plotting the violent way of its dream of changes. As if anything could be changed! In this world of men nothing can be changed — neither happiness nor misery. They can only be displaced at the cost of corrupted consciences and broken lives — a futile game for arrogant philosophers and sanguinary triflers. Those thoughts darted through Razumov’s head while he stood facing the old revolutionary hand, the respected, trusted, and influential Sophia Antonovna, whose word had such a weight in the “active” section

of every party. She was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of destructive revolution. And she was the personal adversary he had to meet. It gave him a feeling of triumphant pleasure to deceive her out of her own mouth. The epigrammatic saying that speech has been given to us for the purpose of concealing our thoughts came into his mind. Of that cynical theory this was a very subtle and a very scornful application, flouting in its own words the very spirit of ruthless revolution, embodied in that woman with her white hair and black eyebrows, like slightly sinuous lines of Indian ink, drawn together by the perpendicular folds of a thoughtful frown.

“That’s it. Retributive. No pity!” was the conclusion of her silence. And this once broken, she went on impulsively in short, vibrating sentences —

“Listen to my story, Razumov!...” Her father was a clever but unlucky artisan. No joy had lighted up his laborious days. He died at fifty; all the years of his life he had panted under the thumb of masters whose rapacity exacted from him the price of the water, of the salt, of the very air he breathed; taxed the sweat of his brow and claimed the blood of his sons. No protection, no guidance! What had society to say to him? Be submissive and be honest. If you rebel I shall kill you. If you steal I shall imprison you. But if you suffer I have nothing for you — nothing except perhaps a beggarly dole of bread — but no consolation for your trouble, no respect for your manhood, no pity for the sorrows of your miserable life.

And so he laboured, he suffered, and he died. He died in the hospital. Standing by the common grave she thought of his tormented existence — she saw it whole. She reckoned the simple joys of life, the birthright of the humblest, of which his gentle heart had been robbed by the crime of a society which nothing can absolve.

“Yes, Razumov,” she continued, in an impressive, lowered voice, “it was like a lurid light in which I stood, still almost a child, and cursed not the toil, not the misery which had been his lot, but the great social iniquity of the system resting on unrequited toil and unpitied sufferings. From that moment I was a revolutionist.”

Razumov, trying to raise himself above the dangerous weaknesses of contempt or compassion, had preserved an impassive countenance. She, with an unaffected touch of mere bitterness, the first he could notice since he had come in contact with the woman, went on —

“As I could not go to the Church where the priests of the system exhorted such unconsidered vermin as I to resignation, I went to the secret societies as soon as I knew how to find my way. I was sixteen years old — no more, Razumov! And — look at my white hair.”

In these last words there was neither pride nor sadness. The bitterness too was gone.

“There is a lot of it. I had always magnificent hair, even as a chit of a girl. Only, at that time we were cutting it short and thinking that there was the first step towards crushing the social infamy. Crush the Infamy! A fine watchword! I would placard it on the walls of prisons and palaces, carve it on hard rocks, hang it out in letters of fire on that empty sky for a sign of hope and terror — a portent of the end...”

“You are eloquent, Sophia Antonovna,” Razumov interrupted suddenly. “Only, so far you seem to have been writing it in water...”

She was checked but not offended. “Who knows? Very soon it may become a fact written all over that great land of ours,” she hinted meaningly. “And then one would have lived long enough. White hair won’t matter.”

Razumov looked at her white hair: and this mark of so many uneasy years seemed nothing but a testimony to the invincible vigour of revolt. It threw out into an astonishing relief the unwrinkled face, the brilliant black glance, the upright compact figure, the simple, brisk self-possession of the mature personality — as though in her revolutionary pilgrimage she had discovered the secret, not of everlasting youth, but of everlasting endurance.

How un-Russian she looked, thought Razumov. Her mother might have been a Jewess or an Armenian or devil knew what. He reflected that a revolutionist is seldom true to the settled type. All revolt is the expression of strong individualism — ran his thought vaguely. One can tell them a mile off in any society, in any surroundings. It was astonishing that the police...

“We shall not meet again very soon, I think,” she was saying. “I am leaving tomorrow.”

“For Zurich?” Razumov asked casually, but feeling relieved, not from any distinct apprehension, but from a feeling of stress as if after a wrestling match.

“Yes, Zurich — and farther on, perhaps, much farther. Another journey. When I think of all my journeys! The last must come some day. Never mind, Razumov. We had to have a good long talk. I would have certainly tried to see you if we had not met. Peter Ivanovitch knows where you live? Yes. I meant to have asked him — but it’s better like this. You see, we expect two more men; and I had much rather wait here talking with you than up there at the house with...”

Having cast a glance beyond the gate, she interrupted herself. “Here they are,” she said rapidly. “Well, Kirylo Sidorovitch, we shall have to say good-bye, presently.”

Chapter 4

In his incertitude of the ground on which he stood Razumov felt perturbed. Turning his head quickly, he saw two men on the opposite side of the road. Seeing themselves noticed by Sophia Antonovna, they crossed over at once, and passed one after another through the little gate by the side of the empty lodge. They looked hard at the stranger, but without mistrust, the crimson blouse being a flaring safety signal. The first, great white hairless face, double chin, prominent stomach, which he seemed to carry forward consciously within a strongly distended overcoat, only nodded and averted his eyes peevishly; his companion — lean, flushed cheekbones, a military red moustache below a sharp, salient nose — approached at once Sophia Antonovna, greeting her warmly.

His voice was very strong but inarticulate. It sounded like a deep buzzing. The woman revolutionist was quietly cordial.

“This is Razumov,” she announced in a clear voice.

The lean new-comer made an eager half-turn. “He will want to embrace me,” thought our young man with a deep recoil of all his being, while his limbs seemed too heavy to move. But it was a groundless alarm. He had to do now with a generation of conspirators who did not kiss each other on both cheeks; and raising an arm that felt like lead he dropped his hand into a largely-outstretched palm, fleshless and hot as if dried up by fever, giving a bony pressure, expressive, seeming to say, “Between us there’s no need of words.” The man had big, wide-open eyes. Razumov fancied he could see a smile behind their sadness.

“This is Razumov,” Sophia Antonovna repeated loudly for the benefit of the fat man, who at some distance displayed the profile of his stomach.

No one moved. Everything, sounds, attitudes, movements, and immobility seemed to be part of an experiment, the result of which was a thin voice piping with comic peevishness —

“Oh yes! Razumov. We have been hearing of nothing but Mr. Razumov for months. For my part, I confess I would rather have seen Haldin on this spot instead of Mr. Razumov.”

The squeaky stress put on the name “Razumov — Mr. Razumov” pierced the ear ridiculously, like the falsetto of a circus clown beginning an elaborate joke. Astonishment was Razumov’s first response, followed by sudden indignation.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he asked in a stern tone.

“Tut! Silliness. He’s always like that.” Sophia Antonovna was obviously vexed. But she dropped the information, “Necator,” from her lips just loud enough to be heard by Razumov. The abrupt squeaks of the fat man seemed to proceed from that thing like a balloon he carried under his overcoat. The stolidity of his attitude, the big feet, the lifeless, hanging hands, the enormous bloodless cheek, the thin wisps of hair straggling down the fat nape of the neck, fascinated Razumov into a stare on the verge of horror and laughter.

Nikita, surnamed Necator, with a sinister aptness of alliteration! Razumov had heard of him. He had heard so much since crossing the frontier of these celebrities of the militant revolution; the legends, the stories, the authentic chronicle, which now and then peeps out before a half-incredulous world. Razumov had heard of him. He was supposed to have killed more, gendarmes and police agents than any revolutionist living. He had been entrusted with executions.

The paper with the letters N.N., the very pseudonym of murder, found pinned on the stabbed breast of a certain notorious spy (this picturesque detail of a sensational murder case had got into the newspapers), was the mark of his handiwork. “By order of the Committee. — N.N.” A corner of the curtain lifted to strike the imagination of the gaping world. He was said to have been innumerable times in and out of Russia, the Necator of bureaucrats, of provincial governors, of obscure informers. He lived between

whiles, Razumov had heard, on the shores of the Lake of Como, with a charming wife, devoted to the cause, and two young children. But how could that creature, so grotesque as to set town dogs barking at its mere sight, go about on those deadly errands and slip through the meshes of the police?

“What now? what now?” the voice squeaked. “I am only sincere. It’s not denied that the other was the leading spirit. Well, it would have been better if he had been the one spared to us. More useful. I am not a sentimentalist. Say what I think...only natural.”

Squeak, squeak, squeak, without a gesture, without a stir — the horrible squeaky burlesque of professional jealousy — this man of a sinister alliterative nickname, this executioner of revolutionary verdicts, the terrifying N.N. exasperated like a fashionable tenor by the attention attracted to the performance of an obscure amateur. Sophia Antonovna shrugged her shoulders. The comrade with the martial red moustache hurried towards Razumov full of conciliatory intentions in his strong buzzing voice.

“Devil take it! And in this place, too, in the public street, so to speak. But you can see yourself how it is. One of his fantastic sallies. Absolutely of no consequence.”

“Pray don’t concern yourself,” cried Razumov, going off into a long fit of laughter. “Don’t mention it.”

The other, his hectic flush like a pair of burns on his cheek-bones, stared for a moment and burst out laughing too. Razumov, whose hilarity died out all at once, made a step forward.

“Enough of this,” he began in a clear, incisive voice, though he could hardly control the trembling of his legs. “I will have no more of it. I shall not permit anyone... I can see very well what you are at with those allusions... Inquire, investigate! I defy you, but I will not be played with.”

He had spoken such words before. He had been driven to cry them out in the face of other suspicions. It was an infernal cycle bringing round that protest like a fatal necessity of his existence. But it was no use. He would be always played with. Luckily life does not last for ever.

“I won’t have it!” he shouted, striking his fist into the palm of his other hand.

“Kirylo Sidorovitch — what has come to you?” The woman revolutionist interfered with authority. They were all looking at Razumov now; the slayer of spies and gen-darmes had turned about, presenting his enormous stomach in full, like a shield.

“Don’t shout. There are people passing.” Sophia Antonovna was apprehensive of another outburst. A steam-launch from Monrepos had come to the landing-stage opposite the gate, its hoarse whistle and the churning noise alongside all unnoticed, had landed a small bunch of local passengers who were dispersing their several ways. Only a specimen of early tourist in knickerbockers, conspicuous by a brand-new yellow leather glass-case, hung about for a moment, scenting something unusual about these four people within the rusty iron gates of what looked the grounds run wild of an unoccupied private house. Ah! If he had only known what the chance of commonplace travelling had suddenly put in his way! But he was a well-bred person; he averted his gaze and moved off with short steps along the avenue, on the watch for a tramcar.

A gesture from Sophia Antonovna, "Leave him to me," had sent the two men away — the buzzing of the inarticulate voice growing fainter and fainter, and the thin pipe of "What now? what's the matter?" reduced to the proportions of a squeaking toy by the distance. They had left him to her. So many things could be left safely to the experience of Sophia Antonovna. And at once, her black eyes turned to Razumov, her mind tried to get at the heart of that outburst. It had some meaning. No one is born an active revolutionist. The change comes disturbingly, with the force of a sudden vocation, bringing in its train agonizing doubts, assertive violences, an unstable state of the soul, till the final appeasement of the convert in the perfect fierceness of conviction. She had seen — often had only divined — scores of these young men and young women going through an emotional crisis. This young man looked like a moody egotist. And besides, it was a special — a unique case. She had never met an individuality which interested and puzzled her so much.

"Take care, Razumov, my good friend. If you carry on like this you will go mad. You are angry with everybody and bitter with yourself, and on the look out for something to torment yourself with."

"It's intolerable!" Razumov could only speak in gasps. "You must admit that I can have no illusions on the attitude which...it isn't clear...or rather only too clear."

He made a gesture of despair. It was not his courage that failed him. The choking fumes of falsehood had taken him by the throat — the thought of being condemned to struggle on and on in that tainted atmosphere without the hope of ever renewing his strength by a breath of fresh air.

"A glass of cold water is what you want." Sophia Antonovna glanced up the grounds at the house and shook her head, then out of the gate at the brimful placidity of the lake. With a half-comical shrug of the shoulders, she gave the remedy up in the face of that abundance.

"It is you, my dear soul, who are flinging yourself at something which does not exist. What is it? Self-reproach, or what? It's absurd. You couldn't have gone and given yourself up because your comrade was taken."

She remonstrated with him reasonably, at some length too. He had nothing to complain of in his reception. Every new-comer was discussed more or less. Everybody had to be thoroughly understood before being accepted. No one that she could remember had been shown from the first so much confidence. Soon, very soon, perhaps sooner than he expected, he would be given an opportunity of showing his devotion to the sacred task of crushing the Infamy.

Razumov, listening quietly, thought: "It may be that she is trying to lull my suspicions to sleep. On the other hand, it is obvious that most of them are fools." He moved aside a couple of paces and, folding his arms on his breast, leaned back against the stone pillar of the gate.

"As to what remains obscure in the fate of that poor Haldin," Sophia Antonovna dropped into a slowness of utterance which was to Razumov like the falling of molten lead drop by drop; "as to that — though no one ever hinted that either from fear or

neglect your conduct has not been what it should have been — well, I have a bit of intelligence...”

Razumov could not prevent himself from raising his head, and Sophia Antonovna nodded slightly.

“I have. You remember that letter from St. Petersburg I mentioned to you a moment ago?”

“The letter? Perfectly. Some busybody has been reporting my conduct on a certain day. It’s rather sickening. I suppose our police are greatly edified when they open these interesting and — and — superfluous letters.”

“Oh dear no! The police do not get hold of our letters as easily as you imagine. The letter in question did not leave St. Petersburg till the ice broke up. It went by the first English steamer which left the Neva this spring. They have a fireman on board — one of us, in fact. It has reached me from Hull...”

She paused as if she were surprised at the sullen fixity of Razumov’s gaze, but went on at once, and much faster.

“We have some of our people there who...but never mind. The writer of the letter relates an incident which he thinks may possibly be connected with Haldin’s arrest. I was just going to tell you when those two men came along.”

“That also was an incident,” muttered Razumov, “of a very charming kind — for me.”

“Leave off that!” cried Sophia Antonovna. “Nobody cares for Nikita’s barking. There’s no malice in him. Listen to what I have to say. You may be able to throw a light. There was in St. Petersburg a sort of town peasant — a man who owned horses. He came to town years ago to work for some relation as a driver and ended by owning a cab or two.”

She might well have spared herself the slight effort of the gesture: “Wait!” Razumov did not mean to speak; he could not have interrupted her now, not to save his life. The contraction of his facial muscles had been involuntary, a mere surface stir, leaving him sullenly attentive as before.

“He was not a quite ordinary man of his class — it seems,” she went on. “The people of the house — my informant talked with many of them — you know, one of those enormous houses of shame and misery...”

Sophia Antonovna need not have enlarged on the character of the house. Razumov saw clearly, towering at her back, a dark mass of masonry veiled in snowflakes, with the long row of windows of the eating-shop shining greasily very near the ground. The ghost of that night pursued him. He stood up to it with rage and with weariness.

“Did the late Haldin ever by chance speak to you of that house?” Sophia Antonovna was anxious to know.

“Yes.” Razumov, making that answer, wondered whether he were falling into a trap. It was so humiliating to lie to these people that he probably could not have said no. “He mentioned to me once,” he added, as if making an effort of memory, “a house of that sort. He used to visit some workmen there.”

“Exactly.”

Sophia Antonovna triumphed. Her correspondent had discovered that fact quite accidentally from the talk of the people of the house, having made friends with a workman who occupied a room there. They described Haldin’s appearance perfectly. He brought comforting words of hope into their misery. He came irregularly, but he came very often, and — her correspondent wrote — sometimes he spent a night in the house, sleeping, they thought, in a stable which opened upon the inner yard.

“Note that, Razumov! In a stable.”

Razumov had listened with a sort of ferocious but amused acquiescence.

“Yes. In the straw. It was probably the cleanest spot in the whole house.”

“No doubt,” assented the woman with that deep frown which seemed to draw closer together her black eyes in a sinister fashion. No four-footed beast could stand the filth and wretchedness so many human beings were condemned to suffer from in Russia. The point of this discovery was that it proved Haldin to have been familiar with that horse-owning peasant — a reckless, independent, free-living fellow not much liked by the other inhabitants of the house. He was believed to have been the associate of a band of housebreakers. Some of these got captured. Not while he was driving them, however; but still there was a suspicion against the fellow of having given a hint to the police and...

The woman revolutionist checked herself suddenly.

“And you? Have you ever heard your friend refer to a certain Ziemianitch?”

Razumov was ready for the name. He had been looking out for the question. “When it comes I shall own up,” he had said to himself. But he took his time.

“To be sure!” he began slowly. “Ziemianitch, a peasant owning a team of horses. Yes. On one occasion. Ziemianitch! Certainly! Ziemianitch of the horses... How could it have slipped my memory like this? One of the last conversations we had together.”

“That means,” — Sophia Antonovna looked very grave, — ”that means, Razumov, it was very shortly before — eh?”

“Before what?” shouted Razumov, advancing at the woman, who looked astonished but stood her ground. “Before... Oh! Of course, it was before! How could it have been after? Only a few hours before.”

“And he spoke of him favourably?”

“With enthusiasm! The horses of Ziemianitch! The free soul of Ziemianitch!”

Razumov took a savage delight in the loud utterance of that name, which had never before crossed his lips audibly. He fixed his blazing eyes on the woman till at last her fascinated expression recalled him to himself.

“The late Haldin,” he said, holding himself in, with downcast eyes, “was inclined to take sudden fancies to people, on — on — what shall I say — insufficient grounds.”

“There!” Sophia Antonovna clapped her hands. “That, to my mind, settles it. The suspicions of my correspondent were aroused...”

“Aha! Your correspondent,” Razumov said in an almost openly mocking tone. “What suspicions? How aroused? By this Ziemianitch? Probably some drunken, gabbling, plausible...”

“You talk as if you had known him.”

Razumov looked up.

“No. But I knew Haldin.”

Sophia Antonovna nodded gravely.

“I see. Every word you say confirms to my mind the suspicion communicated to me in that very interesting letter. This Ziemianitch was found one morning hanging from a hook in the stable — dead.”

Razumov felt a profound trouble. It was visible, because Sophia Antonovna was moved to observe vivaciously —

“Aha! You begin to see.”

He saw it clearly enough — in the light of a lantern casting spokes of shadow in a cellar-like stable, the body in a sheepskin coat and long boots hanging against the wall. A pointed hood, with the ends wound about up to the eyes, hid the face. “But that does not concern me,” he reflected. “It does not affect my position at all. He never knew who had thrashed him. He could not have known.” Razumov felt sorry for the old lover of the bottle and women.

“Yes. Some of them end like that,” he muttered. “What is your idea, Sophia Antonovna?”

It was really the idea of her correspondent, but Sophia Antonovna had adopted it fully. She stated it in one word — “Remorse.” Razumov opened his eyes very wide at that. Sophia Antonovna’s informant, by listening to the talk of the house, by putting this and that together, had managed to come very near to the truth of Haldin’s relation to Ziemianitch.

“It is I who can tell you what you were not certain of — that your friend had some plan for saving himself afterwards, for getting out of St. Petersburg, at any rate. Perhaps that and no more, trusting to luck for the rest. And that fellow’s horses were part of the plan.”

“They have actually got at the truth,” Razumov marvelled to himself, while he nodded judicially. “Yes, that’s possible, very possible.” But the woman revolutionist was very positive that it was so. First of all, a conversation about horses between Haldin and Ziemianitch had been partly overheard. Then there were the suspicions of the people in the house when their “young gentleman” (they did not know Haldin by his name) ceased to call at the house. Some of them used to charge Ziemianitch with knowing something of this absence. He denied it with exasperation; but the fact was that ever since Haldin’s disappearance he was not himself, growing moody and thin. Finally, during a quarrel with some woman (to whom he was making up), in which most of the inmates of the house took part apparently, he was openly abused by his chief enemy, an athletic pedlar, for an informer, and for having driven “our young gentleman to Siberia, the same as you did those young fellows who broke into houses.”

In consequence of this there was a fight, and Ziemianitch got flung down a flight of stairs. Thereupon he drank and moped for a week, and then hanged himself.

Sophia Antonovna drew her conclusions from the tale. She charged Ziemianitch either with drunken indiscretion as to a driving job on a certain date, overheard by some spy in some low grog-shop — perhaps in the very eating-shop on the ground floor of the house — or, maybe, a downright denunciation, followed by remorse. A man like that would be capable of anything. People said he was a flighty old chap. And if he had been once before mixed up with the police — as seemed certain, though he always denied it — in connexion with these thieves, he would be sure to be acquainted with some police underlings, always on the look out for something to report. Possibly at first his tale was not made anything of till the day that scoundrel de P — - got his deserts. Ah! But then every bit and scrap of hint and information would be acted on, and fatally they were bound to get Haldin.

Sophia Antonovna spread out her hands — "Fatally."

Fatality — chance! Razumov meditated in silent astonishment upon the queer verisimilitude of these inferences. They were obviously to his advantage.

"It is right now to make this conclusive evidence known generally." Sophia Antonovna was very calm and deliberate again. She had received the letter three days ago, but did not write at once to Peter Ivanovitch. She knew then that she would have the opportunity presently of meeting several men of action assembled for an important purpose.

"I thought it would be more effective if I could show the letter itself at large. I have it in my pocket now. You understand how pleased I was to come upon you."

Razumov was saying to himself, "She won't offer to show the letter to me. Not likely. Has she told me everything that correspondent of hers has found out?" He longed to see the letter, but he felt he must not ask.

"Tell me, please, was this an investigation ordered, as it were?"

"No, no," she protested. "There you are again with your sensitiveness. It makes you stupid. Don't you see, there was no starting-point for an investigation even if any one had thought of it. A perfect blank! That's exactly what some people were pointing out as the reason for receiving you cautiously. It was all perfectly accidental, arising from my informant striking an acquaintance with an intelligent skindresser lodging in that particular slum-house. A wonderful coincidence!"

"A pious person," suggested Razumov, with a pale smile, "would say that the hand of God has done it all."

"My poor father would have said that." Sophia Antonovna did not smile. She dropped her eyes. "Not that his God ever helped him. It's a long time since God has done anything for the people. Anyway, it's done."

"All this would be quite final," said Razumov, with every appearance of reflective impartiality, "if there was any certitude that the 'our young gentleman' of these people was Victor Haldin. Have we got that?"

“Yes. There’s no mistake. My correspondent was as familiar with Haldin’s personal appearance as with your own,” the woman affirmed decisively.

“It’s the red-nosed fellow beyond a doubt,” Razumov said to himself, with reawakened uneasiness. Had his own visit to that accursed house passed unnoticed? It was barely possible. Yet it was hardly probable. It was just the right sort of food for the popular gossip that gaunt busybody had been picking up. But the letter did not seem to contain any allusion to that. Unless she had suppressed it. And, if so, why? If it had really escaped the prying of that hunger-stricken democrat with a confounded genius for recognizing people from description, it could only be for a time. He would come upon it presently and hasten to write another letter — and then!

For all the envenomed recklessness of his temper, fed on hate and disdain, Razumov shuddered inwardly. It guarded him from common fear, but it could not defend him from disgust at being dealt with in any way by these people. It was a sort of superstitious dread. Now, since his position had been made more secure by their own folly at the cost of Ziemianitch, he felt the need of perfect safety, with its freedom from direct lying, with its power of moving amongst them silent, unquestioning, listening, impenetrable, like the very fate of their crimes and their folly. Was this advantage his already? Or not yet? Or never would be?

“Well, Sophia Antonovna,” his air of reluctant concession was genuine in so far that he was really loath to part with her without testing her sincerity by a question it was impossible to bring about in any way; “well, Sophia Antonovna, if that is so, then — ”

“The creature has done justice to himself,” the woman observed, as if thinking aloud.

“What? Ah yes! Remorse,” Razumov muttered, with equivocal contempt.

“Don’t be harsh, Kirylo Sidorovitch, if you have lost a friend.” There was no hint of softness in her tone, only the black glitter of her eyes seemed detached for an instant from vengeful visions. “He was a man of the people. The simple Russian soul is never wholly impenitent. It’s something to know that.”

“Consoling?” insinuated Razumov, in a tone of inquiry.

“Leave off railing,” she checked him explosively. “Remember, Razumov, that women, children, and revolutionists hate irony, which is the negation of all saving instincts, of all faith, of all devotion, of all action. Don’t rail! Leave off... I don’t know how it is, but there are moments when you are abhorrent to me...”

She averted her face. A languid silence, as if all the electricity of the situation had been discharged in this flash of passion, lasted for some time. Razumov had not flinched. Suddenly she laid the tips of her fingers on his sleeve.

“Don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind,” he said very quietly.

He was proud to feel that she could read nothing on his face. He was really mollified, relieved, if only for a moment, from an obscure oppression. And suddenly he asked himself, “Why the devil did I go to that house? It was an imbecile thing to do.”

A profound disgust came over him. Sophia Antonovna lingered, talking in a friendly manner with an evident conciliatory intention. And it was still about the famous let-

ter, referring to various minute details given by her informant, who had never seen Ziemianitch. The "victim of remorse" had been buried several weeks before her correspondent began frequenting the house. It — the house — contained very good revolutionary material. The spirit of the heroic Haldin had passed through these dens of black wretchedness with a promise of universal redemption from all the miseries that oppress mankind. Razumov listened without hearing, gnawed by the newborn desire of safety with its independence from that degrading method of direct lying which at times he found it almost impossible to practice.

No. The point he wanted to hear about could never come into this conversation. There was no way of bringing it forward. He regretted not having composed a perfect story for use abroad, in which his fatal connexion with the house might have been owned up to. But when he left Russia he did not know that Ziemianitch had hanged himself. And, anyway, who could have foreseen this woman's "informant" stumbling upon that particular slum, of all the slums awaiting destruction in the purifying flame of social revolution? Who could have foreseen? Nobody! "It's a perfect, diabolic surprise," thought Razumov, calm-faced in his attitude of inscrutable superiority, nodding assent to Sophia Antonovna's remarks upon the psychology of "the people," "Oh yes — certainly," rather coldly, but with a nervous longing in his fingers to tear some sort of confession out of her throat.

Then, at the very last, on the point of separating, the feeling of relaxed tension already upon him, he heard Sophia Antonovna allude to the subject of his uneasiness. How it came about he could only guess, his mind being absent at the moment, but it must have sprung from Sophia Antonovna's complaints of the illogical absurdity of the people. For instance — that Ziemianitch was notoriously irreligious, and yet, in the last weeks of his life, he suffered from the notion that he had been beaten by the devil.

"The devil," repeated Razumov, as though he had not heard aright.

"The actual devil. The devil in person. You may well look astonished, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Early on the very night poor Haldin was taken, a complete stranger turned up and gave Ziemianitch a most fearful thrashing while he was lying dead-drunk in the stable. The wretched creature's body was one mass of bruises. He showed them to the people in the house."

"But you, Sophia Antonovna, you don't believe in the actual devil?"

"Do you?" retorted the woman curtly. "Not but that there are plenty of men worse than devils to make a hell of this earth," she muttered to herself.

Razumov watched her, vigorous and white-haired, with the deep fold between her thin eyebrows, and her black glance turned idly away. It was obvious that she did not make much of the story — unless, indeed, this was the perfection of duplicity. "A dark young man," she explained further. "Never seen there before, never seen afterwards. Why are you smiling, Razumov?"

"At the devil being still young after all these ages," he answered composedly. "But who was able to describe him, since the victim, you say, was dead-drunk at the time?"

“Oh! The eating-house keeper has described him. An overbearing, swarthy young man in a student’s cloak, who came rushing in, demanded Ziemianitch, beat him furiously, and rushed away without a word, leaving the eating-house keeper paralysed with astonishment.”

“Does he, too, believe it was the devil?”

“That I can’t say. I am told he’s very reserved on the matter. Those sellers of spirits are great scoundrels generally. I should think he knows more of it than anybody.”

“Well, and you, Sophia Antonovna, what’s your theory?” asked Razumov in a tone of great interest. “Yours and your informant’s, who is on the spot.”

“I agree with him. Some police-hound in disguise. Who else could beat a helpless man so unmercifully? As for the rest, if they were out that day on every trail, old and new, it is probable enough that they might have thought it just as well to have Ziemianitch at hand for more information, or for identification, or what not. Some scoundrelly detective was sent to fetch him along, and being vexed at finding him so drunk broke a stable fork over his ribs. Later on, after they had the big game safe in the net, they troubled their heads no more about that peasant.”

Such were the last words of the woman revolutionist in this conversation, keeping so close to the truth, departing from it so far in the verisimilitude of thoughts and conclusions as to give one the notion of the invincible nature of human error, a glimpse into the utmost depths of self-deception. Razumov, after shaking hands with Sophia Antonovna, left the grounds, crossed the road, and walking out on the little steamboat pier leaned over the rail.

His mind was at ease; ease such as he had not known for many days, ever since that night...the night. The conversation with the woman revolutionist had given him the view of his danger at the very moment this danger vanished, characteristically enough. “I ought to have foreseen the doubts that would arise in those people’s minds,” he thought. Then his attention being attracted by a stone of peculiar shape, which he could see clearly lying at the bottom, he began to speculate as to the depth of water in that spot. But very soon, with a start of wonder at this extraordinary instance of ill-timed detachment, he returned to his train of thought. “I ought to have told very circumstantial lies from the first,” he said to himself, with a mortal distaste of the mere idea which silenced his mental utterance for quite a perceptible interval. “Luckily, that’s all right now,” he reflected, and after a time spoke to himself, half aloud, “Thanks to the devil,” and laughed a little.

The end of Ziemianitch then arrested his wandering thoughts. He was not exactly amused at the interpretation, but he could not help detecting in it a certain piquancy. He owned to himself that, had he known of that suicide before leaving Russia, he would have been incapable of making such excellent use of it for his own purposes. He ought to be infinitely obliged to the fellow with the red nose for his patience and ingenuity, “A wonderful psychologist apparently,” he said to himself sarcastically. Remorse, indeed! It was a striking example of your true conspirator’s blindness, of the stupid subtlety of people with one idea. This was a drama of love, not of conscience, Razumov continued

to himself mockingly. A woman the old fellow was making up to! A robust pedlar, clearly a rival, throwing him down a flight of stairs... And at sixty, for a lifelong lover, it was not an easy matter to get over. That was a feminist of a different stamp from Peter Ivanovitch. Even the comfort of the bottle might conceivably fail him in this supreme crisis. At such an age nothing but a halter could cure the pangs of an unquenchable passion. And, besides, there was the wild exasperation aroused by the unjust aspersions and the contumely of the house, with the maddening impossibility to account for that mysterious thrashing, added to these simple and bitter sorrows. "Devil, eh?" Razumov exclaimed, with mental excitement, as if he had made an interesting discovery. "Ziemianitch ended by falling into mysticism. So many of our true Russian souls end in that way! Very characteristic." He felt pity for Ziemianitch, a large neutral pity, such as one may feel for an unconscious multitude, a great people seen from above — like a community of crawling ants working out its destiny. It was as if this Ziemianitch could not possibly have done anything else. And Sophia Antonovna's cocksure and contemptuous "some police-hound" was characteristically Russian in another way. But there was no tragedy there. This was a comedy of errors. It was as if the devil himself were playing a game with all of them in turn. First with him, then with Ziemianitch, then with those revolutionists. The devil's own game this... He interrupted his earnest mental soliloquy with a jocular thought at his own expense. "Hallo! I am falling into mysticism too."

His mind was more at ease than ever. Turning about he put his back against the rail comfortably. "All this fits with marvellous aptness," he continued to think. "The brilliance of my reputed exploit is no longer darkened by the fate of my supposed colleague. The mystic Ziemianitch accounts for that. An incredible chance has served me. No more need of lies. I shall have only to listen and to keep my scorn from getting the upper hand of my caution."

He sighed, folded his arms, his chin dropped on his breast, and it was a long time before he started forward from that pose, with the recollection that he had made up his mind to do something important that day. What it was he could not immediately recall, yet he made no effort of memory, for he was uneasily certain that he would remember presently.

He had not gone more than a hundred yards towards the town when he slowed down, almost faltered in his walk, at the sight of a figure walking in the contrary direction, draped in a cloak, under a soft, broad-brimmed hat, picturesque but diminutive, as if seen through the big end of an opera-glass. It was impossible to avoid that tiny man, for there was no issue for retreat.

"Another one going to that mysterious meeting," thought Razumov. He was right in his surmise, only this one, unlike the others who came from a distance, was known to him personally. Still, he hoped to pass on with a mere bow, but it was impossible to ignore the little thin hand with hairy wrist and knuckles protruded in a friendly wave from under the folds of the cloak, worn Spanish-wise, in disregard of a fairly warm day, a corner flung over the shoulder.

“And how is Herr Razumov?” sounded the greeting in German, by that alone made more odious to the object of the affable recognition. At closer quarters the diminutive personage looked like a reduction of an ordinary-sized man, with a lofty brow bared for a moment by the raising of the hat, the great pepper-and salt full beard spread over the proportionally broad chest. A fine bold nose jutted over a thin mouth hidden in the mass of fine hair. All this, accented features, strong limbs in their relative smallness, appeared delicate without the slightest sign of debility. The eyes alone, almond-shaped and brown, were too big, with the whites slightly bloodshot by much pen labour under a lamp. The obscure celebrity of the tiny man was well known to Razumov. Polyglot, of unknown parentage, of indefinite nationality, anarchist, with a pedantic and ferocious temperament, and an amazingly inflammatory capacity for invective, he was a power in the background, this violent pamphleteer clamouring for revolutionary justice, this Julius Laspara, editor of the Living Word, confidant of conspirators, inditer of sanguinary menaces and manifestos, suspected of being in the secret of every plot. Laspara lived in the old town in a sombre, narrow house presented to him by a naive middle-class admirer of his humanitarian eloquence. With him lived his two daughters, who overtopped him head and shoulders, and a pasty-faced, lean boy of six, languishing in the dark rooms in blue cotton overalls and clumsy boots, who might have belonged to either one of them or to neither. No stranger could tell. Julius Laspara no doubt knew which of his girls it was who, after casually vanishing for a few years, had as casually returned to him possessed of that child; but, with admirable pedantry, he had refrained from asking her for details — no, not so much as the name of the father, because maternity should be an anarchist function. Razumov had been admitted twice to that suite of several small dark rooms on the top floor: dusty window-panes, litter of all sorts of sweepings all over the place, half-full glasses of tea forgotten on every table, the two Laspara daughters prowling about enigmatically silent, sleepy-eyed, corsetless, and generally, in their want of shape and the disorder of their rumpled attire, resembling old dolls; the great but obscure Julius, his feet twisted round his three-legged stool, always ready to receive the visitors, the pen instantly dropped, the body screwed round with a striking display of the lofty brow and of the great austere beard. When he got down from his stool it was as though he had descended from the heights of Olympus. He was dwarfed by his daughters, by the furniture, by any caller of ordinary stature. But he very seldom left it, and still more rarely was seen walking in broad daylight.

It must have been some matter of serious importance which had driven him out in that direction that afternoon. Evidently he wished to be amiable to that young man whose arrival had made some sensation in the world of political refugees. In Russian now, which he spoke, as he spoke and wrote four or five other European languages, without distinction and without force (other than that of invective), he inquired if Razumov had taken his inscriptions at the University as yet. And the young man, shaking his head negatively —

“There’s plenty of time for that. But, meantime, are you not going to write something for us?”

He could not understand how any one could refrain from writing on anything, social, economic, historical — anything. Any subject could be treated in the right spirit, and for the ends of social revolution. And, as it happened, a friend of his in London had got in touch with a review of advanced ideas. “We must educate, educate everybody — develop the great thought of absolute liberty and of revolutionary justice.”

Razumov muttered rather surlily that he did not even know English.

“Write in Russian. We’ll have it translated There can be no difficulty. Why, without seeking further, there is Miss Haldin. My daughters go to see her sometimes.” He nodded significantly. “She does nothing, has never done anything in her life. She would be quite competent, with a little assistance. Only write. You know you must. And so good-bye for the present.”

He raised his arm and went on. Razumov backed against the low wall, looked after him, spat violently, and went on his way with an angry mutter —

“Cursed Jew!”

He did not know anything about it. Julius Laspara might have been a Transylvanian, a Turk, an Andalusian, or a citizen of one of the Hanse towns for anything he could tell to the contrary. But this is not a story of the West, and this exclamation must be recorded, accompanied by the comment that it was merely an expression of hate and contempt, best adapted to the nature of the feelings Razumov suffered from at the time. He was boiling with rage, as though he had been grossly insulted. He walked as if blind, following instinctively the shore of the diminutive harbour along the quay, through a pretty, dull garden, where dull people sat on chairs under the trees, till, his fury abandoning him, he discovered himself in the middle of a long, broad bridge. He slowed down at once. To his right, beyond the toy-like jetties, he saw the green slopes framing the Petit Lac in all the marvellous banality of the picturesque made of painted cardboard, with the more distant stretch of water inanimate and shining like a piece of tin.

He turned his head away from that view for the tourists, and walked on slowly, his eyes fixed on the ground. One or two persons had to get out of his way, and then turned round to give a surprised stare to his profound absorption. The insistence of the celebrated subversive journalist rankled in his mind strangely. Write. Must write! He! Write! A sudden light flashed upon him. To write was the very thing he had made up his mind to do that day. He had made up his mind irrevocably to that step and then had forgotten all about it. That incorrigible tendency to escape from the grip of the situation was fraught with serious danger. He was ready to despise himself for it. What was it? Levity, or deep-seated weakness? Or an unconscious dread?

“Is it that I am shrinking? It can’t be! It’s impossible. To shrink now would be worse than moral suicide; it would be nothing less than moral damnation,” he thought. “Is it possible that I have a conventional conscience?”

He rejected that hypothesis with scorn, and, checked on the edge of the pavement, made ready to cross the road and proceed up the wide street facing the head of the bridge; and that for no other reason except that it was there before him. But at the moment a couple of carriages and a slow-moving cart interposed, and suddenly he turned sharp to the left, following the quay again, but now away from the lake.

“It may be just my health,” he thought, allowing himself a very unusual doubt of his soundness; for, with the exception of a childish ailment or two, he had never been ill in his life. But that was a danger, too. Only, it seemed as though he were being looked after in a specially remarkable way. “If I believed in an active Providence,” Razumov said to himself, amused grimly, “I would see here the working of an ironical finger. To have a Julius Laspara put in my way as if expressly to remind me of my purpose is — Write, he had said. I must write — I must, indeed! I shall write — never fear. Certainly. That’s why I am here. And for the future I shall have something to write about.”

He was exciting himself by this mental soliloquy. But the idea of writing evoked the thought of a place to write in, of shelter, of privacy, and naturally of his lodgings, mingled with a distaste for the necessary exertion of getting there, with a mistrust as of some hostile influence awaiting him within those odious four walls.

“Suppose one of these revolutionists,” he asked himself, “were to take a fancy to call on me while I am writing?” The mere prospect of such an interruption made him shudder. One could lock one’s door, or ask the tobacconist downstairs (some sort of a refugee himself) to tell inquirers that one was not in. Not very good precautions those. The manner of his life, he felt, must be kept clear of every cause for suspicion or even occasion for wonder, down to such trifling occurrences as a delay in opening a locked door. “I wish I were in the middle of some field miles away from everywhere,” he thought.

He had unconsciously turned to the left once more and now was aware of being on a bridge again. This one was much narrower than the other, and instead of being straight, made a sort of elbow or angle. At the point of that angle a short arm joined it to a hexagonal islet with a soil of gravel and its shores faced with dressed stone, a perfection of puerile neatness. A couple of tall poplars and a few other trees stood grouped on the clean, dark gravel, and under them a few garden benches and a bronze effigy of Jean Jacques Rousseau seated on its pedestal.

On setting his foot on it Razumov became aware that, except for the woman in charge of the refreshment chalet, he would be alone on the island. There was something of naive, odious, and inane simplicity about that unfrequented tiny crumb of earth named after Jean Jacques Rousseau. Something pretentious and shabby, too. He asked for a glass of milk, which he drank standing, at one draught (nothing but tea had passed his lips since the morning), and was going away with a weary, lagging step when a thought stopped him short. He had found precisely what he needed. If solitude could ever be secured in the open air in the middle of a town, he would have it there on this absurd island, together with the faculty of watching the only approach.

He went back heavily to a garden seat, dropped into it. This was the place for making a beginning of that writing which had to be done. The materials he had on him. "I shall always come here," he said to himself, and afterwards sat for quite a long time motionless, without thought and sight and hearing, almost without life. He sat long enough for the declining sun to dip behind the roofs of the town at his back, and throw the shadow of the houses on the lake front over the islet, before he pulled out of his pocket a fountain pen, opened a small notebook on his knee, and began to write quickly, raising his eyes now and then at the connecting arm of the bridge. These glances were needless; the people crossing over in the distance seemed unwilling even to look at the islet where the exiled effigy of the author of the Social Contract sat enthroned above the bowed head of Razumov in the sombre immobility of bronze. After finishing his scribbling, Razumov, with a sort of feverish haste, put away the pen, then rammed the notebook into his pocket, first tearing out the written pages with an almost convulsive brusqueness. But the folding of the flimsy batch on his knee was executed with thoughtful nicety. That done, he leaned back in his seat and remained motionless, the papers holding in his left hand. The twilight had deepened. He got up and began to pace to and fro slowly under the trees.

"There can be no doubt that now I am safe," he thought. His fine ear could detect the faintly accentuated murmurs of the current breaking against the point of the island, and he forgot himself in listening to them with interest. But even to his acute sense of hearing the sound was too elusive.

"Extraordinary occupation I am giving myself up to," he murmured. And it occurred to him that this was about the only sound he could listen to innocently, and for his own pleasure, as it were. Yes, the sound of water, the voice of the wind — completely foreign to human passions. All the other sounds of this earth brought contamination to the solitude of a soul.

This was Mr. Razumov's feeling, the soul, of course, being his own, and the word being used not in the theological sense, but standing, as far as I can understand it, for that part of Mr. Razumov which was not his body, and more specially in danger from the fires of this earth. And it must be admitted that in Mr. Razumov's case the bitterness of solitude from which he suffered was not an altogether morbid phenomenon.

Part 4

Chapter 1

That I should, at the beginning of this retrospect, mention again that Mr. Razumov's youth had no one in the world, as literally no one as it can be honestly affirmed of any human being, is but a statement of fact from a man who believes in the psychological value of facts. There is also, perhaps, a desire of punctilious fairness. Unidentified with anyone in this narrative where the aspects of honour and shame are remote from the ideas of the Western world, and taking my stand on the ground of common humanity, it is for that very reason that I feel a strange reluctance to state baldly here what every reader has most likely already discovered himself. Such reluctance may appear absurd if it were not for the thought that because of the imperfection of language there is always something ungracious (and even disgraceful) in the exhibition of naked truth. But the time has come when Councillor of State Mikulin can no longer be ignored. His simple question "Where to?" on which we left Mr. Razumov in St. Petersburg, throws a light on the general meaning of this individual case.

"Where to?" was the answer in the form of a gentle question to what we may call Mr. Razumov's declaration of independence. The question was not menacing in the least and, indeed, had the ring of innocent inquiry. Had it been taken in a merely topographical sense, the only answer to it would have appeared sufficiently appalling to Mr. Razumov. Where to? Back to his rooms, where the Revolution had sought him out to put to a sudden test his dormant instincts, his half-conscious thoughts and almost wholly unconscious ambitions, by the touch as of some furious and dogmatic religion, with its call to frantic sacrifices, its tender resignations, its dreams and hopes uplifting the soul by the side of the most sombre moods of despair. And Mr. Razumov had let go the door-handle and had come back to the middle of the room, asking Councillor Mikulin angrily, "What do you mean by it?"

As far as I can tell, Councillor Mikulin did not answer that question. He drew Mr. Razumov into familiar conversation. It is the peculiarity of Russian natures that, however strongly engaged in the drama of action, they are still turning their ear to the murmur of abstract ideas. This conversation (and others later on) need not be recorded. Suffice it to say that it brought Mr. Razumov as we know him to the test of another faith. There was nothing official in its expression, and Mr. Razumov was led to defend his attitude of detachment. But Councillor Mikulin would have none of his arguments. "For a man like you," were his last weighty words in the discussion, "such

a position is impossible. Don't forget that I have seen that interesting piece of paper. I understand your liberalism. I have an intellect of that kind myself. Reform for me is mainly a question of method. But the principle of revolt is a physical intoxication, a sort of hysteria which must be kept away from the masses. You agree to this without reserve, don't you? Because, you see, Kirylo Sidorovitch, abstention, reserve, in certain situations, come very near to political crime. The ancient Greeks understood that very well."

Mr. Razumov, listening with a faint smile, asked Councillor Mikulin point-blank if this meant that he was going to have him watched.

The high official took no offence at the cynical inquiry.

"No, Kirylo Sidorovitch," he answered gravely. "I don't mean to have you watched."

Razumov, suspecting a lie, affected yet the greatest liberty of mind during the short remainder of that interview. The older man expressed himself throughout in familiar terms, and with a sort of shrewd simplicity. Razumov concluded that to get to the bottom of that mind was an impossible feat. A great disquiet made his heart beat quicker. The high official, issuing from behind the desk, was actually offering to shake hands with him.

"Good-bye, Mr Razumov. An understanding between intelligent men is always a satisfactory occurrence. Is it not? And, of course, these rebel gentlemen have not the monopoly of intelligence."

"I presume that I shall not be wanted any more?" Razumov brought out that question while his hand was still being grasped. Councillor Mikulin released it slowly.

"That, Mr. Razumov," he said with great earnestness, "is as it may be. God alone knows the future. But you may rest assured that I never thought of having you watched. You are a young man of great independence. Yes. You are going away free as air, but you shall end by coming back to us."

"I! I!" Razumov exclaimed in an appalled murmur of protest. "What for?" he added feebly.

"Yes! You yourself, Kirylo Sidorovitch," the high police functionary insisted in a low, severe tone of conviction. "You shall be coming back to us. Some of our greatest minds had to do that in the end."

"You have no better friend than Prince K — -, and as to myself it is a long time now since I've been honoured by his..."

He glanced down his beard.

"I won't detain you any longer. We live in difficult times, in times of monstrous chimeras and evil dreams and criminal follies. We shall certainly meet once more. It may be some little time, though, before we do. Till then may Heaven send you fruitful reflections!" Once in the street, Razumov started off rapidly, without caring for the direction. At first he thought of nothing; but in a little while the consciousness of his position presented itself to him as something so ugly, dangerous, and absurd, the difficulty of ever freeing himself from the toils of that complication so insoluble, that

the idea of going back and, as he termed it to himself, confessing to Councillor Mikulin flashed through his mind.

Go back! What for? Confess! To what? "I have been speaking to him with the greatest openness," he said to himself with perfect truth. "What else could I tell him? That I have undertaken to carry a message to that brute Ziemianitch? Establish a false complicity and destroy what chance of safety I have won for nothing — what folly!"

Yet he could not defend himself from fancying that Councillor Mikulin was, perhaps, the only man in the world able to understand his conduct. To be understood appeared extremely fascinating.

On the way home he had to stop several times; all his strength seemed to run out of his limbs; and in the movement of the busy streets, isolated as if in a desert, he remained suddenly motionless for a minute or so before he could proceed on his way. He reached his rooms at last.

Then came an illness, something in the nature of a low fever, which all at once removed him to a great distance from the perplexing actualities, from his very room, even. He never lost consciousness; he only seemed to himself to be existing languidly somewhere very far away from everything that had ever happened to him. He came out of this state slowly, with an effect, that is to say, of extreme slowness, though the actual number of days was not very great. And when he had got back into the middle of things they were all changed, subtly and provokingly in their nature: inanimate objects, human faces, the landlady, the rustic servant-girl, the staircase, the streets, the very air. He tackled these changed conditions in a spirit of severity. He walked to and fro to the University, ascended stairs, paced the passages, listened to lectures, took notes, crossed courtyards in angry aloofness, his teeth set hard till his jaws ached.

He was perfectly aware of madcap Kostia gazing like a young retriever from a distance, of the famished student with the red drooping nose, keeping scrupulously away as desired; of twenty others, perhaps, he knew well enough to speak to. And they all had an air of curiosity and concern as if they expected something to happen. "This can't last much longer," thought Razumov more than once. On certain days he was afraid that anyone addressing him suddenly in a certain way would make him scream out insanely a lot of filthy abuse. Often, after returning home, he would drop into a chair in his cap and cloak and remain still for hours holding some book he had got from the library in his hand; or he would pick up the little penknife and sit there scraping his nails endlessly and feeling furious all the time — simply furious. "This is impossible," he would mutter suddenly to the empty room.

Fact to be noted: this room might conceivably have become physically repugnant to him, emotionally intolerable, morally uninhabitable. But no. Nothing of the sort (and he had himself dreaded it at first), nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary, he liked his lodgings better than any other shelter he, who had never known a home, had ever hired before. He liked his lodgings so well that often, on that very account, he found a certain difficulty in making up his mind to go out. It resembled a physical

seduction such as, for instance, makes a man reluctant to leave the neighbourhood of a fire on a cold day.

For as, at that time, he seldom stirred except to go to the University (what else was there to do?) it followed that whenever he went abroad he felt himself at once closely involved in the moral consequences of his act. It was there that the dark prestige of the Haldin mystery fell on him, clung to him like a poisoned robe it was impossible to fling off. He suffered from it exceedingly, as well as from the conversational, commonplace, unavoidable intercourse with the other kind of students. "They must be wondering at the change in me," he reflected anxiously. He had an uneasy recollection of having savagely told one or two innocent, nice enough fellows to go to the devil. Once a married professor he used to call upon formerly addressed him in passing: "How is it we never see you at our Wednesdays now, Kirylo Sidorovitch?" Razumov was conscious of meeting this advance with odious, muttering boorishness. The professor was obviously too astonished to be offended. All this was bad. And all this was Haldin, always Haldin — nothing but Haldin — everywhere Haldin: a moral spectre infinitely more effective than any visible apparition of the dead. It was only the room through which that man had blundered on his way from crime to death that his spectre did not seem to be able to haunt. Not, to be exact, that he was ever completely absent from it, but that there he had no sort of power. There it was Razumov who had the upper hand, in a composed sense of his own superiority. A vanquished phantom — nothing more. Often in the evening, his repaired watch faintly ticking on the table by the side of the lighted lamp, Razumov would look up from his writing and stare at the bed with an expectant, dispassionate attention. Nothing was to be seen there. He never really supposed that anything ever could be seen there. After a while he would shrug his shoulders slightly and bend again over his work. For he had gone to work and, at first, with some success. His unwillingness to leave that place where he was safe from Haldin grew so strong that at last he ceased to go out at all. From early morning till far into the night he wrote, he wrote for nearly a week; never looking at the time, and only throwing himself on the bed when he could keep his eyes open no longer. Then, one afternoon, quite casually, he happened to glance at his watch. He laid down his pen slowly.

"At this very hour," was his thought, "the fellow stole unseen into this room while I was out. And there he sat quiet as a mouse — perhaps in this very chair." Razumov got up and began to pace the floor steadily, glancing at the watch now and then. "This is the time when I returned and found him standing against the stove," he observed to himself. When it grew dark he lit his lamp. Later on he interrupted his tramping once more, only to wave away angrily the girl who attempted to enter the room with tea and something to eat on a tray. And presently he noted the watch pointing at the hour of his own going forth into the falling snow on that terrible errand.

"Complicity," he muttered faintly, and resumed his pacing, keeping his eye on the hands as they crept on slowly to the time of his return.

“And, after all,” he thought suddenly, “I might have been the chosen instrument of Providence. This is a manner of speaking, but there may be truth in every manner of speaking. What if that absurd saying were true in its essence?”

He meditated for a while, then sat down, his legs stretched out, with stony eyes, and with his arms hanging down on each side of the chair like a man totally abandoned by Providence — desolate.

He noted the time of Haldin’s departure and continued to sit still for another half-hour; then muttering, “And now to work,” drew up to the table, seized the pen and instantly dropped it under the influence of a profoundly disquieting reflection: “There’s three weeks gone by and no word from Mikulin.”

What did it mean! Was he forgotten? Possibly. Then why not remain forgotten — creep in somewhere? Hide. But where? How? With whom? In what hole? And was it to be for ever, or what?

But a retreat was big with shadowy dangers. The eye of the social revolution was on him, and Razumov for a moment felt an unnamed and despairing dread, mingled with an odious sense of humiliation. Was it possible that he no longer belonged to himself? This was damnable. But why not simply keep on as before? Study. Advance. Work hard as if nothing had happened (and first of all win the Silver Medal), acquire distinction, become a great reforming servant of the greatest of States. Servant, too, of the mightiest homogeneous mass of mankind with a capability for logical, guided development in a brotherly solidarity of force and aim such as the world had never dreamt of... the Russian nation!

Calm, resolved, steady in his great purpose, he was stretching his hand towards the pen when he happened to glance towards the bed. He rushed at it, enraged, with a mental scream: “it’s you, crazy fanatic, who stands in the way!” He flung the pillow on the floor violently, tore the blankets aside... Nothing there. And, turning away, he caught for an instant in the air, like a vivid detail in a dissolving view of two heads, the eyes of General T — - and of Privy-Councillor Mikulin side by side fixed upon him, quite different in character, but with the same unflinching and weary and yet purposeful expression...servants of the nation!

Razumov tottered to the washstand very alarmed about himself, drank some water and bathed his forehead. “This will pass and leave no trace,” he thought confidently. “I am all right.” But as to supposing that he had been forgotten it was perfect nonsense. He was a marked man on that side. And that was nothing. It was what that miserable phantom stood for which had to be got out of the way... “If one only could go and spit it all out at some of them — and take the consequences.”

He imagined himself accosting the red-nosed student and suddenly shaking his fist in his face. “From that one, though,” he reflected, “there’s nothing to be got, because he has no mind of his own. He’s living in a red democratic trance. Ah! you want to smash your way into universal happiness, my boy. I will give you universal happiness, you silly, hypnotized ghoul, you! And what about my own happiness, eh? Haven’t I got any right to it, just because I can think for myself?...”

And again, but with a different mental accent, Razumov said to himself, "I am young. Everything can be lived down." At that moment he was crossing the room slowly, intending to sit down on the sofa and try to compose his thoughts. But before he had got so far everything abandoned him — hope, courage, belief in himself trust in men. His heart had, as it were, suddenly emptied itself. It was no use struggling on. Rest, work, solitude, and the frankness of intercourse with his kind were alike forbidden to him. Everything was gone. His existence was a great cold blank, something like the enormous plain of the whole of Russia levelled with snow and fading gradually on all sides into shadows and mists.

He sat down, with swimming head, closed his eyes, and remained like that, sitting bolt upright on the sofa and perfectly awake for the rest of the night; till the girl bustling into the outer room with the samovar thumped with her fist on the door, calling out, "Kiryló Sidorovitch, please! It is time for you to get up!"

Then, pale like a corpse obeying the dread summons of judgement, Razumov opened his eyes and got up.

Nobody will be surprised to hear, I suppose, that when the summons came he went to see Councillor Mikulin. It came that very morning, while, looking white and shaky, like an invalid just out of bed, he was trying to shave himself. The envelope was addressed in the little attorney's handwriting. That envelope contained another, superscribed to Razumov, in Prince K — 's hand, with the request "Please forward under cover at once" in a corner. The note inside was an autograph of Councillor Mikulin. The writer stated candidly that nothing had arisen which needed clearing up, but nevertheless appointed a meeting with Mr. Razumov at a certain address in town which seemed to be that of an oculist.

Razumov read it, finished shaving, dressed, looked at the note again, and muttered gloomily, "Oculist." He pondered over it for a time, lit a match, and burned the two envelopes and the enclosure carefully. Afterwards he waited, sitting perfectly idle and not even looking at anything in particular till the appointed hour drew near — and then went out.

Whether, looking at the unofficial character of the summons, he might have refrained from attending to it is hard to say. Probably not. At any rate, he went; but, what's more, he went with a certain eagerness, which may appear incredible till it is remembered that Councillor Mikulin was the only person on earth with whom Razumov could talk, taking the Haldin adventure for granted. And Haldin, when once taken for granted, was no longer a haunting, falsehood-breeding spectre. Whatever troubling power he exercised in all the other places of the earth, Razumov knew very well that at this oculist's address he would be merely the hanged murderer of M. de P — - and nothing more. For the dead can live only with the exact intensity and quality of the life imparted to them by the living. So Mr. Razumov, certain of relief, went to meet Councillor Mikulin with he eagerness of a pursued person welcoming any sort of shelter.

This much said, there is no need to tell anything more of that first interview and of the several others. To the morality of a Western reader an account of these meetings

would wear perhaps the sinister character of old legendary tales where the Enemy of Mankind is represented holding subtly mendacious dialogues with some tempted soul. It is not my part to protest. Let me but remark that the Evil One, with his single passion of satanic pride for the only motive, is yet, on a larger, modern view, allowed to be not quite so black as he used to be painted. With what greater latitude, then, should we appraise the exact shade of mere mortal man, with his many passions and his miserable ingenuity in error, always dazzled by the base glitter of mixed motives, everlastingly betrayed by a short-sighted wisdom.

Councillor Mikulin was one of those powerful officials who, in a position not obscure, not occult, but simply inconspicuous, exercise a great influence over the methods rather than over the conduct of affairs. A devotion to Church and Throne is not in itself a criminal sentiment; to prefer the will of one to the will of many does not argue the possession of a black heart or prove congenital idiocy. Councillor Mikulin was not only a clever but also a faithful official. Privately he was a bachelor with a love of comfort, living alone in an apartment of five rooms luxuriously furnished; and was known by his intimates to be an enlightened patron of the art of female dancing. Later on the larger world first heard of him in the very hour of his downfall, during one of those State trials which astonish and puzzle the average plain man who reads the newspapers, by a glimpse of unsuspected intrigues. And in the stir of vaguely seen monstrosities, in that momentary, mysterious disturbance of muddy waters, Councillor Mikulin went under, dignified, with only a calm, emphatic protest of his innocence — nothing more. No disclosures damaging to a harassed autocracy, complete fidelity to the secrets of the miserable *arcana imperii* deposited in his patriotic breast, a display of bureaucratic stoicism in a Russian official's ineradicable, almost sublime contempt for truth; stoicism of silence understood only by the very few of the initiated, and not without a certain cynical grandeur of self-sacrifice on the part of a sybarite. For the terribly heavy sentence turned Councillor Mikulin civilly into a corpse, and actually into something very much like a common convict.

It seems that the savage autocracy, no more than the divine democracy, does not limit its diet exclusively to the bodies of its enemies. It devours its friends and servants as well. The downfall of His Excellency Gregory Gregorievitch Mikulin (which did not occur till some years later) completes all that is known of the man. But at the time of M. de P — -'s murder (or execution) Councillor Mikulin, under the modest style of Head of Department at the General Secretariat, exercised a wide influence as the confidant and right-hand man of his former schoolfellow and lifelong friend, General T — -. One can imagine them talking over the case of Mr. Razumov, with the full sense of their unbounded power over all the lives in Russia, with cursory disdain, like two Olympians glancing at a worm. The relationship with Prince K — - was enough to save Razumov from some carelessly arbitrary proceeding, and it is also very probable that after the interview at the Secretariat he would have been left alone. Councillor Mikulin would not have forgotten him (he forgot no one who ever fell under his observation), but would have simply dropped him for ever. Councillor Mikulin was a good-natured man

and wished no harm to anyone. Besides (with his own reforming tendencies) he was favourably impressed by that young student, the son of Prince K — -, and apparently no fool.

But as fate would have it, while Mr. Razumov was finding that no way of life was possible to him, Councillor Mikulin's discreet abilities were rewarded by a very responsible post — nothing less than the direction of the general police supervision over Europe. And it was then, and then only, when taking in hand the perfecting of the service which watches the revolutionist activities abroad, that he thought again of Mr. Razumov. He saw great possibilities of special usefulness in that uncommon young man on whom he had a hold already, with his peculiar temperament, his unsettled mind and shaken conscience, a struggling in the toils of a false position... It was as if the revolutionists themselves had put into his hand that tool so much finer than the common base instruments, so perfectly fitted, if only vested with sufficient credit, to penetrate into places inaccessible to common informers. Providential! Providential! And Prince K — -, taken into the secret, was ready enough to adopt that mystical view too. "It will be necessary, though, to make a career for him afterwards," he had stipulated anxiously. "Oh! absolutely. We shall make that our affair," Mikulin had agreed. Prince K — -'s mysticism was of an artless kind; but Councillor Mikulin was astute enough for two.

Things and men have always a certain sense, a certain side by which they must be got hold of if one wants to obtain a solid grasp and a perfect command. The power of Councillor Mikulin consisted in the ability to seize upon that sense, that side in the men he used. It did not matter to him what it was — vanity, despair, love, hate, greed, intelligent pride or stupid conceit, it was all one to him as long as the man could be made to serve. The obscure, unrelated young student Razumov, in the moment of great moral loneliness, was allowed to feel that he was an object of interest to a small group of people of high position. Prince K — - was persuaded to intervene personally, and on a certain occasion gave way to a manly emotion which, all unexpected as it was, quite upset Mr. Razumov. The sudden embrace of that man, agitated by his loyalty to a throne and by suppressed paternal affection, was a revelation to Mr. Razumov of something within his own breast.

"So that was it!" he exclaimed to himself. A sort of contemptuous tenderness softened the young man's grim view of his position as he reflected upon that agitated interview with Prince K — -. This simpleminded, worldly ex-Guardsman and senator whose soft grey official whiskers had brushed against his cheek, his aristocratic and convinced father, was he a whit less estimable or more absurd than that famine-stricken, fanatical revolutionist, the red-nosed student?

And there was some pressure, too, besides the persuasiveness. Mr. Razumov was always being made to feel that he had committed himself. There was no getting away from that feeling, from that soft, unanswerable, "Where to?" of Councillor Mikulin. But no susceptibilities were ever hurt. It was to be a dangerous mission to Geneva for obtaining, at a critical moment, absolutely reliable information from a very inaccessible

quarter of the inner revolutionary circle. There were indications that a very serious plot was being matured... The repose indispensable to a great country was at stake... A great scheme of orderly reforms would be endangered... The highest personages in the land were patriotically uneasy, and so on. In short, Councillor Mikulin knew what to say. This skill is to be inferred clearly from the mental and psychological self-confession, self-analysis of Mr. Razumov's written journal — the pitiful resource of a young man who had near him no trusted intimacy, no natural affection to turn to.

How all this preliminary work was concealed from observation need not be recorded. The expedient of the oculist gives a sufficient instance. Councillor Mikulin was resourceful, and the task not very difficult. Any fellow-student, even the red-nosed one, was perfectly welcome to see Mr. Razumov entering a private house to consult an oculist. Ultimate success depended solely on the revolutionary self-delusion which credited Razumov with a mysterious complicity in the Haldin affair. To be compromised in it was credit enough-and it was their own doing. It was precisely that which stamped Mr. Razumov as a providential man, wide as poles apart from the usual type of agent for "European supervision."

And it was that which the Secretariat set itself the task to foster by a course of calculated and false indiscretions.

It came at last to this, that one evening Mr. Razumov was unexpectedly called upon by one of the "thinking" students whom formerly, before the Haldin affair, he used to meet at various private gatherings; a big fellow with a quiet, unassuming manner and a pleasant voice.

Recognizing his voice raised in the ante-room, "May one come in?" Razumov, lounging idly on his couch, jumped up. "Suppose he were coming to stab me?" he thought sardonically, and, assuming a green shade over his left eye, said in a severe tone, "Come in."

The other was embarrassed; hoped he was not intruding.

"You haven't been seen for several days, and I've wondered." He coughed a little. "Eye better?"

"Nearly well now."

"Good. I won't stop a minute; but you see I, that is, we — anyway, I have undertaken the duty to warn you, Kirylo Sidorovitch, that you are living in false security maybe."

Razumov sat still with his head leaning on his hand, which nearly concealed the unshaded eye.

"I have that idea, too."

"That's all right, then. Everything seems quiet now, but those people are preparing some move of general repression. That's of course. But it isn't that I came to tell you." He hitched his chair closer, dropped his voice. "You will be arrested before long — we fear."

An obscure scribe in the Secretariat had overheard a few words of a certain conversation, and had caught a glimpse of a certain report. This intelligence was not to be neglected.

Razumov laughed a little, and his visitor became very anxious.

“Ah! Kirylo Sidorovitch, this is no laughing matter. They have left you alone for a while, but...! Indeed, you had better try to leave the country, Kirylo Sidorovitch, while there’s yet time.”

Razumov jumped up and began to thank him for the advice with mocking effusiveness, so that the other, colouring up, took himself off with the notion that this mysterious Razumov was not a person to be warned or advised by inferior mortals.

Councillor Mikulin, informed the next day of the incident, expressed his satisfaction. “H’m! Ha! Exactly what was wanted to...” and glanced down his beard.

“I conclude,” said Razumov, “that the moment has come for me to start on my mission.”

“The psychological Moment,” Councillor Mikulin insisted softly — very gravely — as if awed.

All the arrangements to give verisimilitude to the appearance of a difficult escape were made. Councillor Mikulin did not expect to see Mr. Razumov again before his departure. These meetings were a risk, and there was nothing more to settle.

“We have said everything to each other by now, Kirylo Sidorovitch,” said the high official feelingly, pressing Razumov’s hand with that unreserved heartiness a Russian can convey in his manner. “There is nothing obscure between us. And I will tell you what! I consider myself fortunate in having — h’m — your...”

He glanced down his beard, and, after a moment of thoughtful silence, handed to Razumov a half-sheet of notepaper — an abbreviated note of matters already discussed, certain points of inquiry, the line of conduct agreed on, a few hints as to personalities, and so on. It was the only compromising document in the case, but, as Councillor Mikulin observed, “it could be easily destroyed. Mr. Razumov had better not see any one now — till on the other side of the frontier, when, of course, it will be just that... See and hear and...”

He glanced down his beard; but when Razumov declared his intention to see one person at least before leaving St. Petersburg, Councillor Mikulin failed to conceal a sudden uneasiness. The young man’s studious, solitary, and austere existence was well known to him. It was the greatest guarantee of fitness. He became deprecatory. Had his dear Kirylo Sidorovitch considered whether, in view of such a momentous enterprise, it wasn’t really advisable to sacrifice every sentiment...

Razumov interrupted the remonstrance scornfully. It was not a young woman, it was a young fool he wished to see for a certain purpose. Councillor Mikulin was relieved, but surprised.

“Ah! And what for — precisely?”

“For the sake of improving the aspect of verisimilitude,” said Razumov curtly, in a desire to affirm his independence. “I must be trusted in what I do.”

Councillor Mikulin gave way tactfully, murmuring, “Oh, certainly, certainly. Your judgment...”

And with another handshake they parted.

The fool of whom Mr. Razumov had thought was the rich and festive student known as madcap Kostia. Feather-headed, loquacious, excitable, one could make certain of his utter and complete indiscretion. But that riotous youth, when reminded by Razumov of his offers of service some time ago, passed from his usual elation into boundless dismay.

“Oh, Kirylo Sidorovitch, my dearest friend — my saviour — what shall I do? I’ve blown last night every rouble I had from my dad the other day. Can’t you give me till Thursday? I shall rush round to all the usurers I know... No, of course, you can’t! Don’t look at me like that. What shall I do? No use asking the old man. I tell you he’s given me a fistful of big notes three days ago. Miserable wretch that I am.”

He wrung his hands in despair. Impossible to confide in the old man. “They” had given him a decoration, a cross on the neck only last year, and he had been cursing the modern tendencies ever since. Just then he would see all the intellectuals in Russia hanged in a row rather than part with a single rouble.

“Kirylo Sidorovitch, wait a moment. Don’t despise me. I have it. I’ll, yes — I’ll do it — I’ll break into his desk. There’s no help for it. I know the drawer where he keeps his plunder, and I can buy a chisel on my way home. He will be terribly upset, but, you know, the dear old duffer really loves me. He’ll have to get over it — and I, too. Kirylo, my dear soul, if you can only wait for a few hours-till this evening — I shall steal all the blessed lot I can lay my hands on! You doubt me! Why? You’ve only to say the word.”

“Steal, by all means,” said Razumov, fixing him stonily.

“To the devil with the ten commandments!” cried the other, with the greatest animation. “It’s the new future now.”

But when he entered Razumov’s room late in the evening it was with an unaccustomed soberness of manner, almost solemnly.

“It’s done,” he said.

Razumov sitting bowed, his clasped hands hanging between his knees, shuddered at the familiar sound of these words. Kostia deposited slowly in the circle of lamplight a small brown-paper parcel tied with a piece of string.

“As I’ve said — all I could lay my hands on. The old boy’ll think the end of the world has come.” Razumov nodded from the couch, and contemplated the hare-brained fellow’s gravity with a feeling of malicious pleasure.

“I’ve made my little sacrifice,” sighed mad Kostia. “And I’ve to thank you, Kirylo Sidorovitch, for the opportunity.”

“It has cost you something?”

“Yes, it has. You see, the dear old duffer really loves me. He’ll be hurt.”

“And you believe all they tell you of the new future and the sacred will of the people?”

“Implicitly. I would give my life... Only, you see, I am like a pig at a trough. I am no good. It’s my nature.”

Razumov, lost in thought, had forgotten his existence till the youth's voice, entreating him to fly without loss of time, roused him unpleasantly.

"All right. Well — good-bye."

"I am not going to leave you till I've seen you out of St. Petersburg," declared Kostia unexpectedly, with calm determination. "You can't refuse me that now. For God's sake, Kirylo, my soul, the police may be here any moment, and when they get you they'll immure you somewhere for ages — till your hair turns grey. I have down there the best trotter of dad's stables and a light sledge. We shall do thirty miles before the moon sets, and find some roadside station..."

Razumov looked up amazed. The journey was decided — unavoidable. He had fixed the next day for his departure on the mission. And now he discovered suddenly that he had not believed in it. He had gone about listening, speaking, thinking, planning his simulated flight, with the growing conviction that all this was preposterous. As if anybody ever did such things! It was like a game of make-believe. And now he was amazed! Here was somebody who believed in it with desperate earnestness. "If I don't go now, at once," thought Razumov, with a start of fear, "I shall never go." He rose without a word, and the anxious Kostia thrust his cap on him, helped him into his cloak, or else he would have left the room bareheaded as he stood. He was walking out silently when a sharp cry arrested him.

"Kirylo!"

"What?" He turned reluctantly in the doorway. Upright, with a stiffly extended arm, Kostia, his face set and white, was pointing an eloquent forefinger at the brown little packet lying forgotten in the circle of bright light on the table. Razumov hesitated, came back for it under the severe eyes of his companion, at whom he tried to smile. But the boyish, mad youth was frowning. "It's a dream," thought Razumov, putting the little parcel into his pocket and descending the stairs; "nobody does such things." The other held him under the arm, whispering of dangers ahead, and of what he meant to do in certain contingencies. "Preposterous," murmured Razumov, as he was being tucked up in the sledge. He gave himself up to watching the development of the dream with extreme attention. It continued on foreseen lines, inexorably logical — the long drive, the wait at the small station sitting by a stove. They did not exchange half a dozen words altogether. Kostia, gloomy himself, did not care to break the silence. At parting they embraced twice — it had to be done; and then Kostia vanished out of the dream.

When dawn broke, Razumov, very still in a hot, stuffy railway-car full of bedding and of sleeping people in all its dimly lighted length, rose quietly, lowered the glass a few inches, and flung out on the great plain of snow a small brown-paper parcel. Then he sat down again muffled up and motionless. "For the people," he thought, staring out of the window. The great white desert of frozen, hard earth glided past his eyes without a sign of human habitation.

That had been a waking act; and then the dream had him again: Prussia, Saxony, Wurtemberg, faces, sights, words — all a dream, observed with an angry, compelled

attention. Zurich, Geneva — still a dream, minutely followed, wearing one into harsh laughter, to fury, to death — with the fear of awakening at the end.

Chapter 2

“Perhaps life is just that,” reflected Razumov, pacing to and fro under the trees of the little island, all alone with the bronze statue of Rousseau. “A dream and a fear.” The dusk deepened. The pages written over and torn out of his notebook were the first-fruit of his “mission.” No dream that. They contained the assurance that he was on the eve of real discoveries. “I think there is no longer anything in the way of my being completely accepted.”

He had resumed his impressions in those pages, some of the conversations. He even went so far as to write: “By the by, I have discovered the personality of that terrible N.N. A horrible, paunchy brute. If I hear anything of his future movements I shall send a warning.”

The futility of all this overcame him like a curse. Even then he could not believe in the reality of his mission. He looked round despairingly, as if for some way to redeem his existence from that unconquerable feeling. He crushed angrily in his hand the pages of the notebook. “This must be posted,” he thought.

He gained the bridge and returned to the north shore, where he remembered having seen in one of the narrower streets a little obscure shop stocked with cheap wood carvings, its walls lined with extremely dirty cardboard-bound volumes of a small circulating library. They sold stationery there, too. A morose, shabby old man dozed behind the counter. A thin woman in black, with a sickly face, produced the envelope he had asked for without even looking at him. Razumov thought that these people were safe to deal with because they no longer cared for anything in the world. He addressed the envelope on the counter with the German name of a certain person living in Vienna. But Razumov knew that this, his first communication for Councillor Mikulin, would find its way to the Embassy there, be copied in cypher by somebody trustworthy, and sent on to its destination, all safe, along with the diplomatic correspondence. That was the arrangement contrived to cover up the track of the information from all unfaithful eyes, from all indiscretions, from all mishaps and treacheries. It was to make him safe — absolutely safe.

He wandered out of the wretched shop and made for the post office. It was then that I saw him for the second time that day. He was crossing the Rue Mont Blanc with every appearance of an aimless stroller. He did not recognize me, but I made him out at some distance. He was very good-looking, I thought, this remarkable friend of Miss Haldin’s brother. I watched him go up to the letter-box and then retrace his steps. Again he passed me very close, but I am certain he did not see me that time, either. He carried his head well up, but he had the expression of a somnambulist struggling with the very dream which drives him forth to wander in dangerous places. My thoughts

reverted to Natalia Haldin, to her mother. He was all that was left to them of their son and brother.

The westerner in me was discomposed. There was something shocking in the expression of that face. Had I been myself a conspirator, a Russian political refugee, I could have perhaps been able to draw some practical conclusion from this chance glimpse. As it was, it only discomposed me strongly, even to the extent of awakening an indefinite apprehension in regard to Natalia Haldin. All this is rather inexplicable, but such was the origin of the purpose I formed there and then to call on these ladies in the evening, after my solitary dinner. It was true that I had met Miss Haldin only a few hours before, but Mrs. Haldin herself I had not seen for some considerable time. The truth is, I had shirked calling of late.

Poor Mrs. Haldin! I confess she frightened me a little. She was one of those natures, rare enough, luckily, in which one cannot help being interested, because they provoke both terror and pity. One dreads their contact for oneself, and still more for those one cares for, so clear it is that they are born to suffer and to make others suffer, too. It is strange to think that, I won't say liberty, but the mere liberalism of outlook which for us is a matter of words, of ambitions, of votes (and if of feeling at all, then of the sort of feeling which leaves our deepest affections untouched), may be for other beings very much like ourselves and living under the same sky, a heavy trial of fortitude, a matter of tears and anguish and blood. Mrs. Haldin had felt the pangs of her own generation. There was that enthusiast brother of hers — the officer they shot under Nicholas. A faintly ironic resignation is no armour for a vulnerable heart. Mrs. Haldin, struck at through her children, was bound to suffer afresh from the past, and to feel the anguish of the future. She was of those who do not know how to heal themselves, of those who are too much aware of their heart, who, neither cowardly nor selfish, look passionately at its wounds — and count the cost.

Such thoughts as these seasoned my modest, lonely bachelor's meal. If anybody wishes to remark that this was a roundabout way of thinking of Natalia Haldin, I can only retort that she was well worth some concern. She had all her life before her. Let it be admitted, then, that I was thinking of Natalia Haldin's life in terms of her mother's character, a manner of thinking about a girl permissible for an old man, not too old yet to have become a stranger to pity. There was almost all her youth before her; a youth robbed arbitrarily of its natural lightness and joy, overshadowed by an un-European despotism; a terribly sombre youth given over to the hazards of a furious strife between equally ferocious antagonisms.

I lingered over my thoughts more than I should have done. One felt so helpless, and even worse — so unrelated, in a way. At the last moment I hesitated as to going there at all. What was the good?

The evening was already advanced when, turning into the Boulevard des Philosophes, I saw the light in the window at the corner. The blind was down, but I could imagine behind it Mrs. Haldin seated in the chair, in her usual attitude,

looking out for some one, which had lately acquired the poignant quality of mad expectation.

I thought that I was sufficiently authorized by the light to knock at the door. The ladies had not retired as yet. I only hoped they would not have any visitors of their own nationality. A broken-down, retired Russian official was to be found there sometimes in the evening. He was infinitely forlorn and wearisome by his mere dismal presence. I think these ladies tolerated his frequent visits because of an ancient friendship with Mr. Haldin, the father, or something of that sort. I made up my mind that if I found him prozing away there in his feeble voice I should remain but a very few minutes.

The door surprised me by swinging open before I could ring the bell. I was confronted by Miss Haldin, in hat and jacket, obviously on the point of going out. At that hour! For the doctor, perhaps?

Her exclamation of welcome reassured me. It sounded as if I had been the very man she wanted to see. My curiosity was awakened. She drew me in, and the faithful Anna, the elderly German maid, closed the door, but did not go away afterwards. She remained near it as if in readiness to let me out presently. It appeared that Miss Haldin had been on the point of going out to find me.

She spoke in a hurried manner very unusual with her. She would have gone straight and rung at Mrs. Ziegler's door, late as it was, for Mrs. Ziegler's habits...

Mrs. Ziegler, the widow of a distinguished professor who was an intimate friend of mine, lets me have three rooms out of her very large and fine apartment, which she didn't give up after her husband's death; but I have my own entrance opening on the same landing. It was an arrangement of at least ten years' standing. I said that I was very glad that I had the idea to...

Miss Haldin made no motion to take off her outdoor things. I observed her heightened colour, something pronouncedly resolute in her tone. Did I know where Mr. Razumov lived?

Where Mr. Razumov lived? Mr. Razumov? At this hour — so urgently? I threw my arms up in sign of utter ignorance. I had not the slightest idea where he lived. If I could have foreseen her question only three hours ago, I might have ventured to ask him on the pavement before the new post office building, and possibly he would have told me, but very possibly, too, he would have dismissed me rudely to mind my own business. And possibly, I thought, remembering that extraordinary hallucinated, anguished, and absent expression, he might have fallen down in a fit from the shock of being spoken to. I said nothing of all this to Miss Haldin, not even mentioning that I had a glimpse of the young man so recently. The impression had been so extremely unpleasant that I would have been glad to forget it myself.

"I don't see where I could make inquiries," I murmured helplessly. I would have been glad to be of use in any way, and would have set off to fetch any man, young or old, for I had the greatest confidence in her common sense. "What made you think of coming to me for that information?" I asked.

"It wasn't exactly for that," she said, in a low voice. She had the air of some one confronted by an unpleasant task.

"Am I to understand that you must communicate with Mr. Razumov this evening?"

Natalia Haldin moved her head affirmatively; then, after a glance at the door of the drawing-room, said in French —

"C'est maman," and remained perplexed for a moment. Always serious, not a girl to be put out by any imaginary difficulties, my curiosity was suspended on her lips, which remained closed for a moment. What was Mr. Razumov's connexion with this mention of her mother? Mrs. Haldin had not been informed of her son's friend's arrival in Geneva.

"May I hope to see your mother this evening?" I inquired.

Miss Haldin extended her hand as if to bar the way.

"She is in a terrible state of agitation. Oh, you would not be able to detect... It's inward, but I who know mother, I am appalled. I haven't the courage to face it any longer. It's all my fault; I suppose I cannot play a part; I've never before hidden anything from mother. There has never been an occasion for anything of that sort between us. But you know yourself the reason why I refrained from telling her at once of Mr. Razumov's arrival here. You understand, don't you? Owing to her unhappy state. And — there — I am no actress. My own feelings being strongly engaged, I somehow... I don't know. She noticed something in my manner. She thought I was concealing something from her. She noticed my longer absences, and, in fact, as I have been meeting Mr. Razumov daily, I used to stay away longer than usual when I went out. Goodness knows what suspicions arose in her mind. You know that she has not been herself ever since... So this evening she — who has been so awfully silent: for weeks-began to talk all at once. She said that she did not want to reproach me; that I had my character as she had her own; that she did not want to pry into my affairs or even into my thoughts; for her part, she had never had anything to conceal from her children...cruel things to listen to. And all this in her quiet voice, with that poor, wasted face as calm as a stone. It was unbearable."

Miss Haldin talked in an undertone and more rapidly than I had ever heard her speak before. That in itself was disturbing. The ante-room being strongly lighted, I could see under the veil the heightened colour of her face. She stood erect, her left hand was resting lightly on a small table. The other hung by her side without stirring. Now and then she caught her breath slightly.

"It was too startling. Just fancy! She thought that I was making preparations to leave her without saying anything. I knelt by the side of her chair and entreated her to think of what she was saying! She put her hand on my head, but she persists in her delusion all the same. She had always thought that she was worthy of her children's confidence, but apparently it was not so. Her son could not trust her love nor yet her understanding — and now I was planning to abandon her in the same cruel and unjust manner, and so on, and so on. Nothing I could say... It is morbid obstinacy... She said that she felt there was something, some change in me... If my convictions were calling

me away, why this secrecy, as though she had been a coward or a weakling not safe to trust? 'As if my heart could play traitor to my children,' she said... It was hardly to be borne. And she was smoothing my head all the time... It was perfectly useless to protest. She is ill. Her very soul is..."

I did not venture to break the silence which fell between us. I looked into her eyes, glistening through the veil.

"I! Changed!" she exclaimed in the same low tone. "My convictions calling me away! It was cruel to hear this, because my trouble is that I am weak and cannot see what I ought to do. You know that. And to end it all I did a selfish thing. To remove her suspicions of myself I told her of Mr. Razumov. It was selfish of me. You know we were completely right in agreeing to keep the knowledge away from her. Perfectly right. Directly I told her of our poor Victor's friend being here I saw how right we have been. She ought to have been prepared; but in my distress I just blurted it out. Mother got terribly excited at once. How long has he been here? What did he know, and why did he not come to see us at once, this friend of her Victor? What did that mean? Was she not to be trusted even with such memories as there were left of her son?... Just think how I felt seeing her, white like a sheet, perfectly motionless, with her thin hands gripping the arms of the chair. I told her it was all my fault."

I could imagine the motionless dumb figure of the mother in her chair, there, behind the door, near which the daughter was talking to me. The silence in there seemed to call aloud for vengeance against an historical fact and the modern instances of its working. That view flashed through my mind, but I could not doubt that Miss Haldin had had an atrocious time of it. I quite understood when she said that she could not face the night upon the impression of that scene. Mrs. Haldin had given way to most awful imaginings, to most fantastic and cruel suspicions. All this had to be lulled at all costs and without loss of time. It was no shock to me to learn that Miss Haldin had said to her, "I will go and bring him here at once." There was nothing absurd in that cry, no exaggeration of sentiment. I was not even doubtful in my "Very well, but how?"

It was perfectly right that she should think of me, but what could I do in my ignorance of Mr. Razumov's quarters.

"And to think he may be living near by, within a stone's-throw, perhaps!" she exclaimed.

I doubted it; but I would have gone off cheerfully to fetch him from the other end of Geneva. I suppose she was certain of my readiness, since her first thought was to come to me. But the service she meant to ask of me really was to accompany her to the Chateau Borel.

I had an unpleasant mental vision of the dark road, of the sombre grounds, and the desolately suspicious aspect of that home of necromancy and intrigue and feminist adoration. I objected that Madame de S — most likely would know nothing of what we wanted to find out. Neither did I think it likely that the young man would be found there. I remembered my glimpse of his face, and somehow gained the conviction that

a man who looked worse than if he had seen the dead would want to shut himself up somewhere where he could be alone. I felt a strange certitude that Mr. Razumov was going home when I saw him.

"It is really of Peter Ivanovitch that I was thinking," said Miss Haldin quietly.

Ah! He, of course, would know. I looked at my watch. It was twenty minutes past nine only... Still.

"I would try his hotel, then," I advised. "He has rooms at the Cosmopolitan, somewhere on the top floor."

I did not offer to go by myself, simply from mistrust of the reception I should meet with. But I suggested the faithful Anna, with a note asking for the information.

Anna was still waiting by the door at the other end of the room, and we two discussed the matter in whispers. Miss Haldin thought she must go herself. Anna was timid and slow. Time would be lost in bringing back the answer, and from that point of view it was getting late, for it was by no means certain that Mr. Razumov lived near by.

"If I go myself," Miss Haldin argued, "I can go straight to him from the hotel. And in any case I should have to go out, because I must explain to Mr. Razumov personally — prepare him in a way. You have no idea of mother's state of mind."

Her colour came and went. She even thought that both for her mother's sake and for her own it was better that they should not be together for a little time. Anna, whom her mother liked, would be at hand.

"She could take her sewing into the room," Miss Haldin continued, leading the way to the door. Then, addressing in German the maid who opened it before us, "You may tell my mother that this gentleman called and is gone with me to find Mr. Razumov. She must not be uneasy if I am away for some length of time."

We passed out quickly into the street, and she took deep breaths of the cool night air. "I did not even ask you," she murmured.

"I should think not," I said, with a laugh. The manner of my reception by the great feminist could not be considered now. That he would be annoyed to see me, and probably treat me to some solemn insolence, I had no doubt, but I supposed that he would not absolutely dare to throw me out. And that was all I cared for. "Won't you take my arm?" I asked.

She did so in silence, and neither of us said anything worth recording till I let her go first into the great hall of the hotel. It was brilliantly lighted, and with a good many people lounging about.

"I could very well go up there without you," I suggested.

"I don't like to be left waiting in this place," she said in a low voice.

"I will come too."

I led her straight to the lift then. At the top floor the attendant directed us to the right: "End of the corridor."

The walls were white, the carpet red, electric lights blazed in profusion, and the emptiness, the silence, the closed doors all alike and numbered, made me think of the

perfect order of some severely luxurious model penitentiary on the solitary confinement principle. Up there under the roof of that enormous pile for housing travellers no sound of any kind reached us, the thick crimson felt muffled our footsteps completely. We hastened on, not looking at each other till we found ourselves before the very last door of that long passage. Then our eyes met, and we stood thus for a moment lending ear to a faint murmur of voices inside.

“I suppose this is it,” I whispered unnecessarily. I saw Miss Haldin’s lips move without a sound, and after my sharp knock the murmur of voices inside ceased. A profound stillness lasted for a few seconds, and then the door was brusquely opened by a short, black-eyed woman in a red blouse, with a great lot of nearly white hair, done up negligently in an untidy and unpicturesque manner. Her thin, jetty eyebrows were drawn together. I learned afterwards with interest that she was the famous — or the notorious — Sophia Antonovna, but I was struck then by the quaint Mephistophelian character of her inquiring glance, because it was so curiously evil-less, so — I may say — un-devilish. It got softened still more as she looked up at Miss Haldin, who stated, in her rich, even voice, her wish to see Peter Ivanovitch for a moment.

“I am Miss Haldin,” she added.

At this, with her brow completely smoothed out now, but without a word in answer, the woman in the red blouse walked away to a sofa and sat down, leaving the door wide open.

And from the sofa, her hands lying on her lap, she watched us enter, with her black, glittering eyes.

Miss Haldin advanced into the middle of the room; I, faithful to my part of mere attendant, remained by the door after closing it behind me. The room, quite a large one, but with a low ceiling, was scantily furnished, and an electric bulb with a porcelain shade pulled low down over a big table (with a very large map spread on it) left its distant parts in a dim, artificial twilight. Peter Ivanovitch was not to be seen, neither was Mr. Razumov present. But, on the sofa, near Sophia Antonovna, a bony-faced man with a goatee beard leaned forward with his hands on his knees, staring hard with a kindly expression. In a remote corner a broad, pale face and a bulky shape could be made out, uncouth, and as if insecure on the low seat on which it rested. The only person known to me was little Julius Laspara, who seemed to have been poring over the map, his feet twined tightly round the chair-legs. He got down briskly and bowed to Miss Haldin, looking absurdly like a hooknosed boy with a beautiful false pepper-and-salt beard. He advanced, offering his seat, which Miss Haldin declined. She had only come in for a moment to say a few words to Peter Ivanovitch.

His high-pitched voice became painfully audible in the room.

“Strangely enough, I was thinking of you this very afternoon, Natalia Victorovna. I met Mr. Razumov. I asked him to write me an article on anything he liked. You could translate it into English — with such a teacher.”

He nodded complimentarily in my direction. At the name of Razumov an indescribable sound, a sort of feeble squeak, as of some angry small animal, was heard in the

corner occupied by the man who seemed much too large for the chair on which he sat. I did not hear what Miss Haldin said. Laspara spoke again.

“It’s time to do something, Natalia Victorovna. But I suppose you have your own ideas. Why not write something yourself? Suppose you came to see us soon? We could talk it over. Any advice...”

Again I did not catch Miss Haldin’s words. It was Laspara’s voice once more.

“Peter Ivanovitch? He’s retired for a moment into the other room. We are all waiting for him.” The great man, entering at that moment, looked bigger, taller, quite imposing in a long dressing-gown of some dark stuff. It descended in straight lines down to his feet. He suggested a monk or a prophet, a robust figure of some desert-dweller — something Asiatic; and the dark glasses in conjunction with this costume made him more mysterious than ever in the subdued light.

Little Laspara went back to his chair to look at the map, the only brilliantly lit object in the room. Even from my distant position by the door I could make out, by the shape of the blue part representing the water, that it was a map of the Baltic provinces. Peter Ivanovitch exclaimed slightly, advancing towards Miss Haldin, checked himself on perceiving me, very vaguely no doubt; and peered with his dark, bespectacled stare. He must have recognized me by my grey hair, because, with a marked shrug of his broad shoulders, he turned to Miss Haldin in benevolent indulgence. He seized her hand in his thick cushioned palm, and put his other big paw over it like a lid.

While those two standing in the middle of the floor were exchanging a few inaudible phrases no one else moved in the room: Laspara, with his back to us, kneeling on the chair, his elbows propped on the big-scale map, the shadowy enormity in the corner, the frankly staring man with the goatee on the sofa, the woman in the red blouse by his side — not one of them stirred. I suppose that really they had no time, for Miss Haldin withdrew her hand immediately from Peter Ivanovitch and before I was ready for her was moving to the door. A disregarded Westerner, I threw it open hurriedly and followed her out, my last glance leaving them all motionless in their varied poses: Peter Ivanovitch alone standing up, with his dark glasses like an enormous blind teacher, and behind him the vivid patch of light on the coloured map, pored over by the diminutive Laspara.

Later on, much later on, at the time of the newspaper rumours (they were vague and soon died out) of an abortive military conspiracy in Russia, I remembered the glimpse I had of that motionless group with its central figure. No details ever came out, but it was known that the revolutionary parties abroad had given their assistance, had sent emissaries in advance, that even money was found to dispatch a steamer with a cargo of arms and conspirators to invade the Baltic provinces. And while my eyes scanned the imperfect disclosures (in which the world was not much interested) I thought that the old, settled Europe had been given in my person attending that Russian girl something like a glimpse behind the scenes. A short, strange glimpse on the top floor of a great hotel of all places in the world: the great man himself; the motionless great bulk in the corner of the slayer of spies and gendarmes; Yakovlitch,

the veteran of ancient terrorist campaigns; the woman, with her hair as white as mine and the lively black eyes, all in a mysterious half-light, with the strongly lighted map of Russia on the table. The woman I had the opportunity to see again. As we were waiting for the lift she came hurrying along the corridor, with her eyes fastened on Miss Haldin's face, and drew her aside as if for a confidential communication. It was not long. A few words only.

Going down in the lift, Natalia Haldin did not break the silence. It was only when out of the hotel and as we moved along the quay in the fresh darkness spangled by the quay lights, reflected in the black water of the little port on our left hand, and with lofty piles of hotels on our right, that she spoke.

"That was Sophia Antonovna — you know the woman?..."

"Yes, I know — the famous..."

"The same. It appears that after we went out Peter Ivanovitch told them why I had come. That was the reason she ran out after us. She named herself to me, and then she said, 'You are the sister of a brave man who shall be remembered. You may see better times.' I told her I hoped to see the time when all this would be forgotten, even if the name of my brother were to be forgotten too. Something moved me to say that, but you understand?"

"Yes," I said. "You think of the era of concord and justice."

"Yes. There is too much hate and revenge in that work. It must be done. It is a sacrifice — and so let it be all the greater. Destruction is the work of anger. Let the tyrants and the slayers be forgotten together, and only the reconstructors be remembered."

"And did Sophia Antonovna agree with you?" I asked sceptically.

"She did not say anything except, 'It is good for you to believe in love.' I should think she understood me. Then she asked me if I hoped to see Mr. Razumov presently. I said I trusted I could manage to bring him to see my mother this evening, as my mother had learned of his being here and was morbidly impatient to learn if he could tell us something of Victor. He was the only friend of my brother we knew of, and a great intimate. She said, 'Oh! Your brother — yes. Please tell Mr. Razumov that I have made public the story which came to me from St. Petersburg. It concerns your brother's arrest,' she added. 'He was betrayed by a man of the people who has since hanged himself. Mr. Razumov will explain it all to you. I gave him the full information this afternoon. And please tell Mr. Razumov that Sophia Antonovna sends him her greetings. I am going away early in the morning — far away.'"

And Miss Haldin added, after a moment of silence — "I was so moved by what I heard so unexpectedly that I simply could not speak to you before... A man of the people! Oh, our poor people!"

She walked slowly, as if tired out suddenly. Her head drooped; from the windows of a building with terraces and balconies came the banal sound of hotel music; before the low mean portals of the Casino two red posters blazed under the electric lamps, with a cheap provincial effect. — and the emptiness of the quays, the desert aspect of the streets, had an air of hypocritical respectability and of inexpressible dreariness.

I had taken for granted she had obtained the address, and let myself be guided by her. On the Mont Blanc bridge, where a few dark figures seemed lost in the wide and long perspective defined by the lights, she said —

“It isn’t very far from our house. I somehow thought it couldn’t be. The address is Rue de Carouge. I think it must be one of those big new houses for artisans.”

She took my arm confidently, familiarly, and accelerated her pace. There was something primitive in our proceedings. We did not think of the resources of civilization. A late tramcar overtook us; a row of fiacres stood by the railing of the gardens. It never entered our heads to make use of these conveyances. She was too hurried, perhaps, and as to myself — well, she had taken my arm confidently. As we were ascending the easy incline of the Corraterie, all the shops shuttered and no light in any of the windows (as if all the mercenary population had fled at the end of the day), she said tentatively —

“I could run in for a moment to have a look at mother. It would not be much out of the way.”

I dissuaded her. If Mrs. Haldin really expected to see Razumov that night it would have been unwise to show herself without him. The sooner we got hold of the young man and brought him along to calm her mother’s agitation the better. She assented to my reasoning, and we crossed diagonally the Place de Theatre, bluish grey with its floor of slabs of stone, under the electric light, and the lonely equestrian statue all black in the middle. In the Rue de Carouge we were in the poorer quarters and approaching the outskirts of the town. Vacant building plots alternated with high, new houses. At the corner of a side street the crude light of a whitewashed shop fell into the night, fan-like, through a wide doorway. One could see from a distance the inner wall with its scantily furnished shelves, and the deal counter painted brown. That was the house. Approaching it along the dark stretch of a fence of tarred planks, we saw the narrow pallid face of the cut angle, five single windows high, without a gleam in them, and crowned by the heavy shadow of a jutting roof slope.

“We must inquire in the shop,” Miss Haldin directed me.

A sallow, thinly whiskered man, wearing a dingy white collar and a frayed tie, laid down a newspaper, and, leaning familiarly on both elbows far over the bare counter, answered that the person I was inquiring for was indeed his locataire on the third floor, but that for the moment he was out.

“For the moment,” I repeated, after a glance at Miss Haldin. “Does this mean that you expect him back at once?”

He was very gentle, with ingratiating eyes and soft lips. He smiled faintly as though he knew all about everything. Mr. Razumov, after being absent all day, had returned early in the evening. He was very surprised about half an hour or a little more since to see him come down again. Mr. Razumov left his key, and in the course of some words which passed between them had remarked that he was going out because he needed air.

From behind the bare counter he went on smiling at us, his head held between his hands. Air. Air. But whether that meant a long or a short absence it was difficult to say. The night was very close, certainly.

After a pause, his ingratiating eyes turned to the door, he added —

“The storm shall drive him in.”

“There’s going to be a storm?” I asked.

“Why, yes!”

As if to confirm his words we heard a very distant, deep rumbling noise.

Consulting Miss Haldin by a glance, I saw her so reluctant to give up her quest that I asked the shopkeeper, in case Mr. Razumov came home within half an hour, to beg him to remain downstairs in the shop. We would look in again presently.

For all answer he moved his head imperceptibly. The approval of Miss Haldin was expressed by her silence. We walked slowly down the street, away from the town; the low garden walls of the modest villas doomed to demolition were overhung by the boughs of trees and masses of foliage, lighted from below by gas lamps. The violent and monotonous noise of the icy waters of the Arve falling over a low dam swept towards us with a chilly draught of air across a great open space, where a double line of lamp-lights outlined a street as yet without houses. But on the other shore, overhung by the awful blackness of the thunder-cloud, a solitary dim light seemed to watch us with a weary stare. When we had strolled as far as the bridge, I said —

“We had better get back...”

In the shop the sickly man was studying his smudgy newspaper, now spread out largely on the counter. He just raised his head when I looked in and shook it negatively, pursing up his lips. I rejoined Miss Haldin outside at once, and we moved off at a brisk pace. She remarked that she would send Anna with a note the first thing in the morning. I respected her taciturnity, silence being perhaps the best way to show my concern.

The semi-rural street we followed on our return changed gradually to the usual town thoroughfare, broad and deserted. We did not meet four people altogether, and the way seemed interminable, because my companion’s natural anxiety had communicated itself sympathetically to me. At last we turned into the Boulevard des Philosophes, more wide, more empty, more dead — the very desolation of slumbering respectability. At the sight of the two lighted windows, very conspicuous from afar, I had the mental vision of Mrs. Haldin in her armchair keeping a dreadful, tormenting vigil under the evil spell of an arbitrary rule: a victim of tyranny and revolution, a sight at once cruel and absurd.

Chapter 3

“You will come in for a moment?” said Natalia Haldin.

I demurred on account of the late hour. “You know mother likes you so much,” she insisted.

"I will just come in to hear how your mother is."

She said, as if to herself, "I don't even know whether she will believe that I could not find Mr. Razumov, since she has taken it into her head that I am concealing something from her. You may be able to persuade her..."

"Your mother may mistrust me too," I observed.

"You! Why? What could you have to conceal from her? You are not a Russian nor a conspirator."

I felt profoundly my European remoteness, and said nothing, but I made up my mind to play my part of helpless spectator to the end. The distant rolling of thunder in the valley of the Rhone was coming nearer to the sleeping town of prosaic virtues and universal hospitality. We crossed the street opposite the great dark gateway, and Miss Haldin rang at the door of the apartment. It was opened almost instantly, as if the elderly maid had been waiting in the ante-room for our return. Her flat physiognomy had an air of satisfaction. The gentleman was there, she declared, while closing the door.

Neither of us understood. Miss Haldin turned round brusquely to her. "Who?"

"Herr Razumov," she explained.

She had heard enough of our conversation before we left to know why her young mistress was going out. Therefore, when the gentleman gave his name at the door, she admitted him at once.

"No one could have foreseen that," Miss Haldin murmured, with her serious grey eyes fixed upon mine. And, remembering the expression of the young man's face seen not much more than four hours ago, the look of a haunted somnambulist, I wondered with a sort of awe.

"You asked my mother first?" Miss Haldin inquired of the maid.

"No. I announced the gentleman," she answered, surprised at our troubled faces.

"Still," I said in an undertone, "your mother was prepared."

"Yes. But he has no idea..."

It seemed to me she doubted his tact. To her question how long the gentleman had been with her mother, the maid told us that Der Herr had been in the drawing-room no more than a short quarter of an hour.

She waited a moment, then withdrew, looking a little scared. Miss Haldin gazed at me in silence.

"As things have turned out," I said, "you happen to know exactly what your brother's friend has to tell your mother. And surely after that..."

"Yes," said Natalia Haldin slowly. "I only wonder, as I was not here when he came, if it wouldn't be better not to interrupt now."

We remained silent, and I suppose we both strained our ears, but no sound reached us through the closed door. The features of Miss Haldin expressed a painful irresolution; she made a movement as if to go in, but checked herself. She had heard footsteps on the other side of the door. It came open, and Razumov, without pausing, stepped out into the ante-room. The fatigue of that day and the struggle with himself had

changed him so much that I would have hesitated to recognize that face which, only a few hours before, when he brushed against me in front of the post office, had been startling enough but quite different. It had been not so livid then, and its eyes not so sombre. They certainly looked more sane now, but there was upon them the shadow of something consciously evil.

I speak of that, because, at first, their glance fell on me, though without any sort of recognition or even comprehension. I was simply in the line of his stare. I don't know if he had heard the bell or expected to see anybody. He was going out, I believe, and I do not think that he saw Miss Haldin till she advanced towards him a step or two. He disregarded the hand she put out.

"It's you, Natalia Victorovna... Perhaps you are surprised...at this late hour. But, you see, I remembered our conversations in that garden. I thought really it was your wish that I should — without loss of time...so I came. No other reason. Simply to tell..."

He spoke with difficulty. I noticed that, and remembered his declaration to the man in the shop that he was going out because he "needed air." If that was his object, then it was clear that he had miserably failed. With downcast eyes and lowered head he made an effort to pick up the strangled phrase.

"To tell what I have heard myself only to-day — to-day..."

Through the door he had not closed I had a view of the drawing-room. It was lighted only by a shaded lamp — Mrs. Haldin's eyes could not support either gas or electricity. It was a comparatively big room, and in contrast with the strongly lighted ante-room its length was lost in semi-transparent gloom backed by heavy shadows; and on that ground I saw the motionless figure of Mrs. Haldin, inclined slightly forward, with a pale hand resting on the arm of the chair.

She did not move. With the window before her she had no longer that attitude suggesting expectation. The blind was down; and outside there was only the night sky harbouring a thunder-cloud, and the town indifferent and hospitable in its cold, almost scornful, toleration — a respectable town of refuge to which all these sorrows and hopes were nothing. Her white head was bowed.

The thought that the real drama of autocracy is not played on the great stage of politics came to me as, fated to be a spectator, I had this other glimpse behind the scenes, something more profound than the words and gestures of the public play. I had the certitude that this mother, refused in her heart to give her son up after all. It was more than Rachel's inconsolable mourning, it was something deeper, more inaccessible in its frightful tranquillity. Lost in the ill-defined mass of the high-backed chair, her white, inclined profile suggested the contemplation of something in her lap, as though a beloved head were resting there.

I had this glimpse behind the scenes, and then Miss Haldin, passing by the young man, shut the door. It was not done without hesitation. For a moment I thought that she would go to her mother, but she sent in only an anxious glance. Perhaps if Mrs.

Haldin had moved...but no. There was in the immobility of that bloodless face the dreadful aloofness of suffering without remedy.

Meantime the young man kept his eyes fixed on the floor. The thought that he would have to repeat the story he had told already was intolerable to him. He had expected to find the two women together. And then, he had said to himself, it would be over for all time — for all time. “It’s lucky I don’t believe in another world,” he had thought cynically.

Alone in his room after having posted his secret letter, he had regained a certain measure of composure by writing in his secret diary. He was aware of the danger of that strange self-indulgence. He alludes to it himself, but he could not refrain. It calmed him — it reconciled him to his existence. He sat there scribbling by the light of a solitary candle, till it occurred to him that having heard the explanation of Haldin’s arrest, as put forward by Sophia Antonovna, it behoved him to tell these ladies himself. They were certain to hear the tale through some other channel, and then his abstention would look strange, not only to the mother and sister of Haldin, but to other people also. Having come to this conclusion, he did not discover in himself any marked reluctance to face the necessity, and very soon an anxiety to be done with it began to torment him. He looked at his watch. No; it was not absolutely too late.

The fifteen minutes with Mrs. Haldin were like the revenge of the unknown: that white face, that weak, distinct voice; that head, at first turned to him eagerly, then, after a while, bowed again and motionless — in the dim, still light of the room in which his words which he tried to subdue resounded so loudly — had troubled him like some strange discovery. And there seemed to be a secret obstinacy in that sorrow, something he could not understand; at any rate, something he had not expected. Was it hostile? But it did not matter. Nothing could touch him now; in the eyes of the revolutionists there was now no shadow on his past. The phantom of Haldin had been indeed walked over, was left behind lying powerless and passive on the pavement covered with snow. And this was the phantom’s mother consumed with grief and white as a ghost. He had felt a pitying surprise. But that, of course, was of no importance. Mothers did not matter. He could not shake off the poignant impression of that silent, quiet, white-haired woman, but a sort of sternness crept into his thoughts. These were the consequences. Well, what of it? “Am I then on a bed of roses?” he had exclaimed to himself, sitting at some distance with his eyes fixed upon that figure of sorrow. He had said all he had to say to her, and when he had finished she had not uttered a word. She had turned away her head while he was speaking. The silence which had fallen on his last words had lasted for five minutes or more. What did it mean? Before its incomprehensible character he became conscious of anger in his stern mood, the old anger against Haldin reawakened by the contemplation of Haldin’s mother. And was it not something like enviousness which gripped his heart, as if of a privilege denied to him alone of all the men that had ever passed through this world? It was the other who had attained to repose and yet continued to exist in the affection of that mourning old woman, in the thoughts of all these people posing for lovers of humanity. It was

impossible to get rid of him. "It's myself whom I have given up to destruction," thought Razumov. "He has induced me to do it. I can't shake him off."

Alarmed by that discovery, he got up and strode out of the silent, dim room with its silent old woman in the chair, that mother! He never looked back. It was frankly a flight. But on opening the door he saw his retreat cut off: There was the sister. He had never forgotten the sister, only he had not expected to see her then — or ever any more, perhaps. Her presence in the ante-room was as unforeseen as the apparition of her brother had been. Razumov gave a start as though he had discovered himself cleverly trapped. He tried to smile, but could not manage it, and lowered his eyes. "Must I repeat that silly story now?" he asked himself, and felt a sinking sensation. Nothing solid had passed his lips since the day before, but he was not in a state to analyse the origins of his weakness. He meant to take up his hat and depart with as few words as possible, but Miss Haldin's swift movement to shut the door took him by surprise. He half turned after her, but without raising his eyes, passively, just as a feather might stir in the disturbed air. The next moment she was back in the place she had started from, with another half-turn on his part, so that they came again into the same relative positions.

"Yes, yes," she said hurriedly. "I am very grateful to you, Kirylo Sidorovitch, for coming at once — like this... Only, I wish I had... Did mother tell you?"

"I wonder what she could have told me that I did not know before," he said, obviously to himself, but perfectly audible. "Because I always did know it," he added louder, as if in despair.

He hung his head. He had such a strong sense of Natalia Haldin's presence that to look at her he felt would be a relief. It was she who had been haunting him now. He had suffered that persecution ever since she had suddenly appeared before him in the garden of the Villa Borel with an extended hand and the name of her brother on her lips... The ante-room had a row of hooks on the wall nearest to the outer door, while against the wall opposite there stood a small dark table and one chair. The paper, bearing a very faint design, was all but white. The light of an electric bulb high up under the ceiling searched that clear square box into its four bare corners, crudely, without shadows — a strange stage for an obscure drama.

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Haldin. "What is it that you knew always?"

He raised his face, pale, full of unexpressed suffering. But that look in his eyes of dull, absent obstinacy, which struck and surprised everybody he was talking to, began to pass away. It was as though he were coming to himself in the awakened consciousness of that marvellous harmony of feature, of lines, of glances, of voice, which made of the girl before him a being so rare, outside, and, as it were, above the common notion of beauty. He looked at her so long that she coloured slightly.

"What is it that you knew?" she repeated vaguely.

That time he managed to smile.

"Indeed, if it had not been for a word of greeting or two, I would doubt whether your mother was aware at all of my existence. You understand?"

Natalia Haldin nodded; her hands moved slightly by her side.

“Yes. Is it not heart-breaking? She has not shed a tear yet — not a single tear.”

“Not a tear! And you, Natalia Victorovna? You have been able to cry?”

“I have. And then I am young enough, Kirylo Sidorovitch, to believe in the future. But when I see my mother so terribly distracted, I almost forget everything. I ask myself whether one should feel proud — or only resigned. We had such a lot of people coming to see us. There were utter strangers who wrote asking for permission to call to present their respects. It was impossible to keep our door shut for ever. You know that Peter Ivanovitch himself... Oh yes, there was much sympathy, but there were persons who exulted openly at that death. Then, when I was left alone with poor mother, all this seemed so wrong in spirit, something not worth the price she is paying for it. But directly I heard you were here in Geneva, Kirylo Sidorovitch, I felt that you were the only person who could assist me...”

“In comforting a bereaved mother? Yes!” he broke in in a manner which made her open her clear unsuspecting eyes. “But there is a question of fitness. Has this occurred to you?”

There was a breathlessness in his utterance which contrasted with the monstrous hint of mockery in his intention.

“Why!” whispered Natalia Haldin with feeling. “Who more fit than you?”

He had a convulsive movement of exasperation, but controlled himself.

“Indeed! Directly you heard that I was in Geneva, before even seeing me? It is another proof of that confidence which...”

All at once his tone changed, became more incisive and more detached.

“Men are poor creatures, Natalia Victorovna. They have no intuition of sentiment. In order to speak fittingly to a mother of her lost son one must have had some experience of the filial relation. It is not the case with me — if you must know the whole truth. Your hopes have to deal here with ‘a breast unwarmed by any affection,’ as the poet says... That does not mean it is insensible,” he added in a lower tone.

“I am certain your heart is not unfeeling,” said Miss Haldin softly.

“No. It is not as hard as a stone,” he went on in the same introspective voice, and looking as if his heart were lying as heavy as a stone in that unwarmed breast of which he spoke. “No, not so hard. But how to prove what you give me credit for — ah! that’s another question. No one has ever expected such a thing from me before. No one whom my tenderness would have been of any use to. And now you come. You! Now! No, Natalia Victorovna. It’s too late. You come too late. You must expect nothing from me.”

She recoiled from him a little, though he had made no movement, as if she had seen some change in his face, charging his words with the significance of some hidden sentiment they shared together. To me, the silent spectator, they looked like two people becoming conscious of a spell which had been lying on them ever since they first set eyes on each other. Had either of them cast a glance then in my direction, I would have opened the door quietly and gone out. But neither did; and I remained, every fear of

indiscretion lost in the sense of my enormous remoteness from their captivity within the sombre horizon of Russian problems, the boundary of their eyes, of their feelings — the prison of their souls.

Frank, courageous, Miss Haldin controlled her voice in the midst of her trouble.

“What can this mean?” she asked, as if speaking to herself.

“It may mean that you have given yourself up to vain imaginings while I have managed to remain amongst the truth of things and the realities of life — our Russian life — such as they are.”

“They are cruel,” she murmured.

“And ugly. Don’t forget that — and ugly. Look where you like. Look near you, here abroad where you are, and then look back at home, whence you came.”

“One must look beyond the present.” Her tone had an ardent conviction.

“The blind can do that best. I have had the misfortune to be born clear-eyed. And if you only knew what strange things I have seen! What amazing and unexpected apparitions!... But why talk of all this?”

“On the contrary, I want to talk of all this with you,” she protested with earnest serenity. The sombre humours of her brother’s friend left her unaffected, as though that bitterness, that suppressed anger, were the signs of an indignant rectitude. She saw that he was not an ordinary person, and perhaps she did not want him to be other than he appeared to her trustful eyes. “Yes, with you especially,” she insisted. “With you of all the Russian people in the world...” A faint smile dwelt for a moment on her lips. “I am like poor mother in a way. I too seem unable to give up our beloved dead, who, don’t forget, was all in all to us. I don’t want to abuse your sympathy, but you must understand that it is in you that we can find all that is left of his generous soul.”

I was looking at him; not a muscle of his face moved in the least. And yet, even at the time, I did not suspect him of insensibility. It was a sort of rapt thoughtfulness. Then he stirred slightly.

“You are going, Kirylo Sidorovitch?” she asked.

“I! Going? Where? Oh yes, but I must tell you first...” His voice was muffled and he forced himself to produce it with visible repugnance, as if speech were something disgusting or deadly. “That story, you know — the story I heard this afternoon...”

“I know the story already,” she said sadly.

“You know it! Have you correspondents in St. Petersburg too?”

“No. It’s Sophia Antonovna. I have seen her just now. She sends you her greetings. She is going away to-morrow.”

He had lowered at last his fascinated glance; she too was looking down, and standing thus before each other in the glaring light, between the four bare walls, they seemed brought out from the confused immensity of the Eastern borders to be exposed cruelly to the observation of my Western eyes. And I observed them. There was nothing else to do. My existence seemed so utterly forgotten by these two that I dared not now make a movement. And I thought to myself that, of course, they had to come together, the sister and the friend of that dead man. The ideas, the hopes, the aspirations, the cause

of Freedom, expressed in their common affection for Victor Haldin, the moral victim of autocracy, — all this must draw them to each other fatally. Her very ignorance and his loneliness to which he had alluded so strangely must work to that end. And, indeed, I saw that the work was done already. Of course. It was manifest that they must have been thinking of each other for a long time before they met. She had the letter from that beloved brother kindling her imagination by the severe praise attached to that one name; and for him to see that exceptional girl was enough. The only cause for surprise was his gloomy aloofness before her clearly expressed welcome. But he was young, and however austere and devoted to his revolutionary ideals, he was not blind. The period of reserve was over; he was coming forward in his own way. I could not mistake the significance of this late visit, for in what he had to say there was nothing urgent. The true cause dawned upon me: he had discovered that he needed her and she was moved by the same feeling. It was the second time that I saw them together, and I knew that next time they met I would not be there, either remembered or forgotten. I would have virtually ceased to exist for both these young people.

I made this discovery in a very few moments. Meantime, Natalia Haldin was telling Razumov briefly of our peregrinations from one end of Geneva to the other. While speaking she raised her hands above her head to untie her veil, and that movement displayed for an instant the seductive grace of her youthful figure, clad in the simplest of mourning. In the transparent shadow the hat rim threw on her face her grey eyes had an enticing lustre. Her voice, with its unfeminine yet exquisite timbre, was steady, and she spoke quickly, frank, unembarrassed. As she justified her action by the mental state of her mother, a spasm of pain marred the generously confiding harmony of her features. I perceived that with his downcast eyes he had the air of a man who is listening to a strain of music rather than to articulated speech. And in the same way, after she had ceased, he seemed to listen yet, motionless, as if under the spell of suggestive sound. He came to himself, muttering —

“Yes, yes. She has not shed a tear. She did not seem to hear what I was saying. I might have told her anything. She looked as if no longer belonging to this world.”

Miss Haldin gave signs of profound distress. Her voice faltered. “You don’t know how bad it has come to be. She expects now to see him!” The veil dropped from her fingers and she clasped her hands in anguish. “It shall end by her seeing him,” she cried.

Razumov raised his head sharply and attached on her a prolonged thoughtful glance.

“H’m. That’s very possible,” he muttered in a peculiar tone, as if giving his opinion on a matter of fact. “I wonder what...” He checked himself.

“That would be the end. Her mind shall be gone then, and her spirit will follow.”

Miss Haldin unclasped her hands and let them fall by her side.

“You think so?” he queried profoundly. Miss Haldin’s lips were slightly parted. Something unexpected and unfathomable in that young man’s character had fascinated her from the first. “No! There’s neither truth nor consolation to be got from the phantoms of the dead,” he added after a weighty pause. “I might have told her something true;

for instance, that your brother meant to save his life — to escape. There can be no doubt of that. But I did not.”

“You did not! But why?”

“I don’t know. Other thoughts came into my head,” he answered. He seemed to me to be watching himself inwardly, as though he were trying to count his own heart-beats, while his eyes never for a moment left the face of the girl. “You were not there,” he continued. “I had made up my mind never to see you again.”

This seemed to take her breath away for a moment.

“You... How is it possible?”

“You may well ask... However, I think that I refrained from telling your mother from prudence. I might have assured her that in the last conversation he held as a free man he mentioned you both...”

“That last conversation was with you,” she struck in her deep, moving voice. “Some day you must...”

“It was with me. Of you he said that you had trustful eyes. And why I have not been able to forget that phrase I don’t know. It meant that there is in you no guile, no deception, no falsehood, no suspicion — nothing in your heart that could give you a conception of a living, acting, speaking lie, if ever it came in your way. That you are a predestined victim... Ha! what a devilish suggestion!”

The convulsive, uncontrolled tone of the last words disclosed the precarious hold he had over himself. He was like a man defying his own dizziness in high places and tottering suddenly on the very edge of the precipice. Miss Haldin pressed her hand to her breast. The dropped black veil lay on the floor between them. Her movement steadied him. He looked intently on that hand till it descended slowly, and then raised again his eyes to her face. But he did not give her time to speak.

“No? You don’t understand? Very well.” He had recovered his calm by a miracle of will. “So you talked with Sophia Antonovna?”

“Yes. Sophia Antonovna told me...” Miss Haldin stopped, wonder growing in her wide eyes.

“H’m. That’s the respectable enemy,” he muttered, as though he were alone.

“The tone of her references to you was extremely friendly,” remarked Miss Haldin, after waiting for a while.

“Is that your impression? And she the most intelligent of the lot, too. Things then are going as well as possible. Everything conspires to...Ah! these conspirators,” he said slowly, with an accent of scorn; “they would get hold of you in no time! You know, Natalia Victorovna, I have the greatest difficulty in saving myself from the superstition of an active Providence. It’s irresistible... The alternative, of course, would be the personal Devil of our simple ancestors. But, if so, he has overdone it altogether — the old Father of Lies — our national patron — our domestic god, whom we take with us when we go abroad. He has overdone it. It seems that I am not simple enough... That’s it! I ought to have known... And I did know it,” he added in a tone of poignant distress which overcame my astonishment.

“This man is deranged,” I said to myself, very much frightened.

The next moment he gave me a very special impression beyond the range of commonplace definitions. It was as though he had stabbed himself outside and had come in there to show it; and more than that — as though he were turning the knife in the wound and watching the effect. That was the impression, rendered in physical terms. One could not defend oneself from a certain amount of pity. But it was for Miss Haldin, already so tried in her deepest affections, that I felt a serious concern. Her attitude, her face, expressed compassion struggling with doubt on the verge of terror.

“What is it, Kirylo Sidorovitch?” There was a hint of tenderness in that cry. He only stared at her in that complete surrender of all his faculties which in a happy lover would have had the name of ecstasy.

“Why are you looking at me like this, Kirylo Sidorovitch? I have approached you frankly. I need at this time to see clearly in myself...” She ceased for a moment as if to give him an opportunity to utter at last some word worthy of her exalted trust in her brother’s friend. His silence became impressive, like a sign of a momentous resolution.

In the end Miss Haldin went on, appealingly —

“I have waited for you anxiously. But now that you have been moved to come to us in your kindness, you alarm me. You speak obscurely. It seems as if you were keeping back something from me.”

“Tell me, Natalia Victorovna,” he was heard at last in a strange unringing voice, “whom did you see in that place?”

She was startled, and as if deceived in her expectations.

“Where? In Peter Ivanovitch’s rooms? There was Mr. Laspara and three other people.”

“Ha! The vanguard — the forlorn hope of the great plot,” he commented to himself. “Bearers of the spark to start an explosion which is meant to change fundamentally the lives of so many millions in order that Peter Ivanovitch should be the head of a State.”

“You are teasing me,” she said. “Our dear one told me once to remember that men serve always something greater than themselves — the idea.”

“Our dear one,” he repeated slowly. The effort he made to appear unmoved absorbed all the force of his soul. He stood before her like a being with hardly a breath of life. His eyes, even as under great physical suffering, had lost all their fire. “Ah! your brother... But on your lips, in your voice, it sounds...and indeed in you everything is divine... I wish I could know the innermost depths of your thoughts, of your feelings.”

“But why, Kirylo Sidorovitch?” she cried, alarmed by these words coming out of strangely lifeless lips.

“Have no fear. It is not to betray you. So you went there?... And Sophia Antonovna, what did she tell you, then?”

“She said very little, really. She knew that I should hear everything from you. She had no time for more than a few words.” Miss Haldin’s voice dropped and she became silent for a moment. “The man, it appears, has taken his life,” she said sadly.

“Tell me, Natalia Victorovna,” he asked after a pause, “do you believe in remorse?”

“What a question!”

“What can you know of it?” he muttered thickly. “It is not for such as you... What I meant to ask was whether you believed in the efficacy of remorse?”

She hesitated as though she had not understood, then her face lighted up.

“Yes,” she said firmly.

“So he is absolved. Moreover, that Ziemianitch was a brute, a drunken brute.”

A shudder passed through Natalia Haldin.

“But a man of the people,” Razumov went on, “to whom they, the revolutionists, tell a tale of sublime hopes. Well, the people must be forgiven... And you must not believe all you’ve heard from that source, either,” he added, with a sort of sinister reluctance.

“You are concealing something from me,” she exclaimed.

“Do you, Natalia Victorovna, believe in the duty of revenge?”

“Listen, Kirylo Sidorovitch. I believe that the future shall be merciful to us all. Revolutionist and reactionary, victim and executioner, betrayer and betrayed, they shall all be pitied together when the light breaks on our black sky at last. Pitied and forgotten; for without that there can be no union and no love.”

“I hear. No revenge for you, then? Never? Not the least bit?” He smiled bitterly with his colourless lips. “You yourself are like the very spirit of that merciful future. Strange that it does not make it easier... No! But suppose that the real betrayer of your brother — Ziemianitch had a part in it too, but insignificant and quite involuntary — suppose that he was a young man, educated, an intellectual worker, thoughtful, a man your brother might have trusted lightly, perhaps, but still — suppose... But there’s a whole story there.”

“And you know the story! But why, then — ”

“I have heard it. There is a staircase in it, and even phantoms, but that does not matter if a man always serves something greater than himself — the idea. I wonder who is the greatest victim in that tale?”

“In that tale!” Miss Haldin repeated. She seemed turned into stone.

“Do you know why I came to you? It is simply because there is no one anywhere in the whole great world I could go to. Do you understand what I say? Not one to go to. Do you conceive the desolation of the thought — no one — to — go — to?”

Utterly misled by her own enthusiastic interpretation of two lines in the letter of a visionary, under the spell of her own dread of lonely days, in their overshadowed world of angry strife, she was unable to see the truth struggling on his lips. What she was conscious of was the obscure form of his suffering. She was on the point of extending her hand to him impulsively when he spoke again.

“An hour after I saw you first I knew how it would be. The terrors of remorse, revenge, confession, anger, hate, fear, are like nothing to the atrocious temptation which you put in my way the day you appeared before me with your voice, with your face, in the garden of that accursed villa.”

She looked utterly bewildered for a moment; then, with a sort of despairing insight went straight to the point.

“The story, Kirylo Sidorovitch, the story!”

“There is no more to tell!” He made a movement forward, and she actually put her hand on his shoulder to push him away; but her strength failed her, and he kept his ground, though trembling in every limb. “It ends here — on this very spot.” He pressed a denunciatory finger to his breast with force, and became perfectly still.

I ran forward, snatching up the chair, and was in time to catch hold of Miss Haldin and lower her down. As she sank into it she swung half round on my arm, and remained averted from us both, drooping over the back. He looked at her with an appalling expressionless tranquillity. Incredulity, struggling with astonishment, anger, and disgust, deprived me for a time of the power of speech. Then I turned on him, whispering from very rage —

“This is monstrous. What are you staying for? Don’t let her catch sight of you again. Go away!...” He did not budge. “Don’t you understand that your presence is intolerable — even to me? If there’s any sense of shame in you...”

Slowly his sullen eyes moved ill my direction. “How did this old man come here?” he muttered, astounded.

Suddenly Miss Haldin sprang up from the chair, made a few steps, and tottered. Forgetting my indignation, and even the man himself, I hurried to her assistance. I took her by the arm, and she let me lead her into the drawing-room. Away from the lamp, in the deeper dusk of the distant end, the profile of Mrs. Haldin, her hands, her whole figure had the stillness of a sombre painting. Miss Haldin stopped, and pointed mournfully at the tragic immobility of her mother, who seemed to watch a beloved head lying in her lap.

That gesture had an unequalled force of expression, so far-reaching in its human distress that one could not believe that it pointed out merely the ruthless working of political institutions. After assisting Miss Haldin to the sofa, I turned round to go back and shut the door. Framed in the opening, in the searching glare of the white anteroom, my eyes fell on Razumov, still there, standing before the empty chair, as if rooted for ever to the spot of his atrocious confession. A wonder came over me that the mysterious force which had torn it out of him had failed to destroy his life, to shatter his body. It was there unscathed. I stared at the broad line of his shoulders, his dark head, the amazing immobility of his limbs. At his feet the veil dropped by Miss Haldin looked intensely black in the white crudity of the light. He was gazing at it spell-bound. Next moment, stooping with an incredible, savage swiftness, he snatched it up and pressed it to his face with both hands. Something, extreme astonishment perhaps, dimmed my eyes, so that he seemed to vanish before he moved.

The slamming of the outer door restored my sight, and I went on contemplating the empty chair in the empty ante-room. The meaning of what I had seen reached my mind with a staggering shock. I seized Natalia Haldin by the shoulder.

“That miserable wretch has carried off your veil!” I cried, in the scared, deadened voice of an awful discovery. “He...”

The rest remained unspoken. I stepped back and looked down at her, in silent horror. Her hands were lying lifelessly, palms upwards, on her lap. She raised her grey eyes slowly. Shadows seemed to come and go in them as if the steady flame of her soul had been made to vacillate at last in the cross-currents of poisoned air from the corrupted dark immensity claiming her for its own, where virtues themselves fester into crimes in the cynicism of oppression and revolt.

“It is impossible to be more unhappy...” The languid whisper of her voice struck me with dismay. “It is impossible... I feel my heart becoming like ice.”

Chapter 4

Razumov walked straight home on the wet glistening pavement. A heavy shower passed over him; distant lightning played faintly against the fronts of the dumb houses with the shuttered shops all along the Rue de Carouge; and now and then, after the faint flash, there was a faint, sleepy rumble; but the main forces of the thunderstorm remained massed down the Rhone valley as if loath to attack the respectable and passionless abode of democratic liberty, the serious-minded town of dreary hotels, tendering the same indifferent, hospitality to tourists of all nations and to international conspirators of every shade.

The owner of the shop was making ready to close when Razumov entered and without a word extended his hand for the key of his room. On reaching it for him, from a shelf, the man was about to pass a small joke as to taking the air in a thunderstorm, but, after looking at the face of his lodger, he only observed, just to say something — “You’ve got very wet.”

“Yes, I am washed clean,” muttered Razumov, who was dripping from head to foot, and passed through the inner door towards the staircase leading to his room.

He did not change his clothes, but, after lighting the candle, took off his watch and chain, laid them on the table, and sat down at once to write. The book of his compromising record was kept in a locked drawer, which he pulled out violently, and did not even trouble to push back afterwards.

In this queer pedantism of a man who had read, thought, lived, pen in hand, there is the sincerity of the attempt to grapple by the same means with another profounder knowledge. After some passages which have been already made use of in the building up of this narrative, or add nothing new to the psychological side of this disclosure (there is even one more allusion to the silver medal in this last entry), comes a page and a half of incoherent writing where his expression is baffled by the novelty and the mysteriousness of that side of our emotional life to which his solitary existence had been a stranger. Then only he begins to address directly the reader he had in his mind, trying to express in broken sentences, full of wonder and awe, the sovereign (he uses

that very word) power of her person over his imagination, in which lay the dormant seed of her brother's words.

“... The most trustful eyes in the world — your brother said of you when he was as well as a dead man already. And when you stood before me with your hand extended, I remembered the very sound of his voice, and I looked into your eyes — and that was enough. I knew that something had happened, but I did not know then what... But don't be deceived, Natalia Victorovna. I believed that I had in my breast nothing but an inexhaustible fund of anger and hate for you both. I remembered that he had looked to you for the perpetuation of his visionary soul. He, this man who had robbed me of my hard-working, purposeful existence. I, too, had my guiding idea; and remember that, amongst us, it is more difficult to lead a life of toil and self-denial than to go out in the street and kill from conviction. But enough of that. Hate or no hate, I felt at once that, while shunning the sight of you, I could never succeed in driving away your image. I would say, addressing that dead man, ‘Is this the way you are going to haunt me?’ It is only later on that I understood — only to-day, only a few hours ago. What could I have known of what was tearing me to pieces and dragging the secret for ever to my lips? You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace. You! And you have done it in the same way, too, in which he ruined me: by forcing upon me your confidence. Only what I detested him for, in you ended by appearing noble and exalted. But, I repeat, be not deceived. I was given up to evil. I exulted in having induced that silly innocent fool to steal his father's money. He was a fool, but not a thief. I made him one. It was necessary. I had to confirm myself in my contempt and hate for what I betrayed. I have suffered from as many vipers in my heart as any social democrat of them all — vanity, ambitions, jealousies, shameful desires, evil passions of envy and revenge. I had my security stolen from me, years of good work, my best hopes. Listen — now comes the true confession. The other was nothing. To save me, your trustful eyes had to entice my thought to the very edge of the blackest treachery. I could see them constantly looking at me with the confidence of your pure heart which had not been touched by evil things. Victor Haldin had stolen the truth of my life from me, who had nothing else in the world, and he boasted of living on through you on this earth where I had no place to lay my head on. She will marry some day, he had said — and your eyes were trustful. And do you know what I said to myself? I shall steal his sister's soul from her. When we met that first morning in the gardens, and you spoke to me confidingly in the generosity of your spirit, I was thinking, ‘Yes, he himself by talking of her trustful eyes has delivered her into my hands!’ If you could have looked then into my heart, you would have cried out aloud with terror and disgust.

“Perhaps no one will believe the baseness of such an intention to be possible. It's certain that, when we parted that morning, I gloated over it. I brooded upon the best way. The old man you introduced me to insisted on walking with me. I don't know who he is. He talked of you, of your lonely, helpless state, and every word of that friend of yours was egging me on to the unpardonable sin of stealing a soul. Could he

have been the devil himself in the shape of an old Englishman? Natalia Victorovna, I was possessed! I returned to look at you every day, and drink in your presence the poison of my infamous intention. But I foresaw difficulties. Then Sophia Antonovna, of whom I was not thinking — I had forgotten her existence — appears suddenly with that tale from St. Petersburg... The only thing needed to make me safe — a trusted revolutionist for ever.

“It was as if Ziemianitch had hanged himself to help me on to further crime. The strength of falsehood seemed irresistible. These people stood doomed by the folly and the illusion that was in them — they being themselves the slaves of lies. Natalia Victorovna, I embraced the might of falsehood, I exulted in it — I gave myself up to it for a time. Who could have resisted! You yourself were the prize of it. I sat alone in my room, planning a life, the very thought of which makes me shudder now, like a believer who had been tempted to an atrocious sacrilege. But I brooded ardently over its images. The only thing was that there seemed to be no air in it. And also I was afraid of your mother. I never knew mine. I’ve never known any kind of love. There is something in the mere word... Of you, I was not afraid — forgive me for telling you this. No, not of you. You were truth itself. You could not suspect me. As to your mother, you yourself feared already that her mind had given way from grief. Who could believe anything against me? Had not Ziemianitch hanged himself from remorse? I said to myself, ‘Let’s put it to the test, and be done with it once for all.’ I trembled when I went in; but your mother hardly listened to what I was saying to her, and, in a little while, seemed to have forgotten my very existence. I sat looking at her. There was no longer anything between you and me. You were defenceless — and soon, very soon, you would be alone... I thought of you. Defenceless. For days you have talked with me — opening your heart. I remembered the shadow of your eyelashes over your grey trustful eyes. And your pure forehead! It is low like the forehead of statues — calm, unstained. It was as if your pure brow bore a light which fell on me, searched my heart and saved me from ignominy, from ultimate undoing. And it saved you too. Pardon my presumption. But there was that in your glances which seemed to tell me that you... Your light! your truth! I felt that I must tell you that I had ended by loving you. And to tell you that I must first confess. Confess, go out — and perish.

“Suddenly you stood before me! You alone in all the world to whom I must confess. You fascinated me — you have freed me from the blindness of anger and hate — the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me. Now I have done it; and as I write here, I am in the depths depths of anguish, but there is air to breathe at last — air! And, by the by, that old man sprang up from somewhere as I was speaking to you, and raged at me like a disappointed devil. I suffer horribly, but I am not in despair. There is only one more thing to do for me. After that — if they let me — I shall go away and bury myself in obscure misery. In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely. You must believe what I say now, you can’t refuse to believe this. Most basely. It is through you that I came to feel this so deeply. After all, it is they and not I who have the right on their side? — theirs is the

strength of invisible powers. So be it. Only don't be deceived, Natalia Victorovna, I am not converted. Have I then the soul of a slave? No! I am independent — and therefore perdition is my lot."

On these words, he stopped writing, shut the book, and wrapped it in the black veil he had carried off. He then ransacked the drawers for paper and string, made up a parcel which he addressed to Miss Haldin, Boulevard des Philosophes, and then flung the pen away from him into a distant corner.

This done, he sat down with the watch before him. He could have gone out at once, but the hour had not struck yet. The hour would be midnight. There was no reason for that choice except that the facts and the words of a certain evening in his past were timing his conduct in the present. The sudden power Natalia Haldin had gained over him he ascribed to the same cause. "You don't walk with impunity over a phantom's breast," he heard himself mutter. "Thus he saves me," he thought suddenly. "He himself, the betrayed man." The vivid image of Miss Haldin seemed to stand by him, watching him relentlessly. She was not disturbing. He had done with life, and his thought even in her presence tried to take an impartial survey. Now his scorn extended to himself. "I had neither the simplicity nor the courage nor the self-possession to be a scoundrel, or an exceptionally able man. For who, with us in Russia, is to tell a scoundrel from an exceptionally able man?..."

He was the puppet of his past, because at the very stroke of midnight he jumped up and ran swiftly downstairs as if confident that, by the power of destiny, the house door would fly open before the absolute necessity of his errand. And as a matter of fact, just as he got to the bottom of the stairs, it was opened for him by some people of the house coming home late — two men and a woman. He slipped out through them into the street, swept then by a fitful gust of wind. They were, of course, very much startled. A flash of lightning enabled them to observe him walking away quickly. One of the men shouted, and was starting in pursuit, but the woman had recognized him. "It's all right. It's only that young Russian from the third floor." The darkness returned with a single clap of thunder, like a gun fired for a warning of his escape from the prison of lies.

He must have heard at some time or other and now remembered unconsciously that there was to be a gathering of revolutionists at the house of Julius Laspara that evening. At any rate, he made straight for the Laspara house, and found himself without surprise ringing at its street door, which, of course, was closed. By that time the thunderstorm had attacked in earnest. The steep incline of the street ran with water, the thick fall of rain enveloped him like a luminous veil in the play of lightning. He was perfectly calm, and, between the crashes, listened attentively to the delicate tinkling of the doorbell somewhere within the house.

There was some difficulty before he was admitted. His person was not known to that one of the guests who had volunteered to go downstairs and see what was the matter. Razumov argued with him patiently. There could be no harm in admitting a caller. He had something to communicate to the company upstairs.

“Something of importance?”

“That’ll be for the hearers to judge.”

“Urgent?”

“Without a moment’s delay.”

Meantime, one of the Laspara daughters descended the stairs, small lamp in hand, in a grimy and crumpled gown, which seemed to hang on her by a miracle, and looking more than ever like an old doll with a dusty brown wig, dragged from under a sofa. She recognized Razumov at once.

“How do you do? Of course you may come in.”

Following her light, Razumov climbed two flights of stairs from the lower darkness. Leaving the lamp on a bracket on the landing, she opened a door, and went in, accompanied by the sceptical guest. Razumov entered last. He closed the door behind him, and stepping on one side, put his back against the wall.

The three little rooms en suite, with low, smoky ceilings and lit by paraffin lamps, were crammed with people. Loud talking was going on in all three, and tea-glasses, full, half-full, and empty, stood everywhere, even on the floor. The other Laspara girl sat, dishevelled and languid, behind an enormous samovar. In the inner doorway Razumov had a glimpse of the protuberance of a large stomach, which he recognized. Only a few feet from him Julius Laspara was getting down hurriedly from his high stool.

The appearance of the midnight visitor caused no small sensation. Laspara is very summary in his version of that night’s happenings. After some words of greeting, disregarded by Razumov, Laspara (ignoring purposely his guest’s soaked condition and his extraordinary manner of presenting himself) mentioned something about writing an article. He was growing uneasy, and Razumov appeared absent-minded. “I have written already all I shall ever write,” he said at last, with a little laugh.

The whole company’s attention was riveted on the new-comer, dripping with water, deady pale, and keeping his position against the wall. Razumov put Laspara gently aside, as though he wished to be seen from head to foot by everybody. By then the buzz of conversations had died down completely, even in the most distant of the three rooms. The doorway facing Razumov became blocked by men and women, who craned their necks and certainly seemed to expect something startling to happen.

A squeaky, insolent declaration was heard from that group.

“I know this ridiculously conceited individual.”

“What individual?” asked Razumov, raising his bowed head, and searching with his eyes all the eyes fixed upon him. An intense surprised silence lasted for a time. “If it’s me...”

He stopped, thinking over the form of his confession, and found it suddenly, unavoidably suggested by the fateful evening of his life.

“I am come here,” he began, in a clear voice, “to talk of an individual called Ziemianitch. Sophia Antonovna has informed me that she would make public a certain letter from St. Petersburg...”

“Sophia Antonovna has left us early in the evening,” said Laspara. “It’s quite correct. Everybody here has heard...”

“Very well,” Razumov interrupted, with a shade of impatience, for his heart was beating strongly. Then, mastering his voice so far that there was even a touch of irony in his clear, forcible enunciation —

“In justice to that individual, the much ill-used peasant, Ziemianitch, I now declare solemnly that the conclusions of that letter calumniate a man of the people — a bright Russian soul. Ziemianitch had nothing to do with the actual arrest of Victor Haldin.”

Razumov dwelt on the name heavily, and then waited till the faint, mournful murmur which greeted it had died out.

“Victor Victorovitch Haldin,” he began again, “acting with, no doubt, noble-minded imprudence, took refuge with a certain student of whose opinions he knew nothing but what his own illusions suggested to his generous heart. It was an unwise display of confidence. But I am not here to appreciate the actions of Victor Haldin. Am I to tell you of the feelings of that student, sought out in his obscure solitude, and menaced by the complicity forced upon him? Am I to tell you what he did? It’s a rather complicated story. In the end the student went to General T — - himself, and said, ‘I have the man who killed de P — - locked up in my room, Victor Haldin — a student like myself.’”

A great buzz arose, in which Razumov raised his voice.

“Observe — that man had certain honest ideals in view. But I didn’t come here to explain him.”

“No. But you must explain how you know all this,” came in grave tones from somebody.

“A vile coward!” This simple cry vibrated with indignation. “Name him!” shouted other voices.

“What are you clamouring for?” said Razumov disdainfully, in the profound silence which fell on the raising of his hand. “Haven’t you all understood that I am that man?”

Laspara went away brusquely from his side and climbed upon his stool. In the first forward surge of people towards him, Razumov expected to be torn to pieces, but they fell back without touching him, and nothing came of it but noise. It was bewildering. His head ached terribly. In the confused uproar he made out several times the name of Peter Ivanovitch, the word “judgement,” and the phrase, “But this is a confession,” uttered by somebody in a desperate shriek. In the midst of the tumult, a young man, younger than himself, approached him with blazing eyes.

“I must beg you,” he said, with venomous politeness, “to be good enough not to move from this spot till you are told what you are to do.”

Razumov shrugged his shoulders. “I came in voluntarily.”

“Maybe. But you won’t go out till you are permitted,” retorted the other.

He beckoned with his hand, calling out, “Louisa! Louisa! come here, please”; and, presently, one of the Laspara girls (they had been staring at Razumov from behind the samovar) came along, trailing a bedraggled tail of dirty flounces, and dragging with her a chair, which she set against the door, and, sitting down on it, crossed her legs.

The young man thanked her effusively, and rejoined a group carrying on an animated discussion in low tones. Razumov lost himself for a moment.

A squeaky voice screamed, "Confession or no confession, you are a police spy!"

The revolutionist Nikita had pushed his way in front of Razumov, and faced him with his big, livid cheeks, his heavy paunch, bull neck, and enormous hands. Razumov looked at the famous slayer of gendarmes in silent disgust.

"And what are you?" he said, very low, then shut his eyes, and rested the back of his head against the wall.

"It would be better for you to depart now." Razumov heard a mild, sad voice, and opened his eyes. The gentle speaker was an elderly man, with a great brush of fine hair making a silvery halo all round his keen, intelligent face. "Peter Ivanovitch shall be informed of your confession — and you shall be directed..."

Then, turning to Nikita, nicknamed Necator, standing by, he appealed to him in a murmur —

"What else can we do? After this piece of sincerity he cannot be dangerous any longer."

The other muttered, "Better make sure of that before we let him go. Leave that to me. I know how to deal with such gentlemen."

He exchanged meaning glances with two or three men, who nodded slightly, then turning roughly to Razumov, "You have heard? You are not wanted here. Why don't you get out?"

The Laspara girl on guard rose, and pulled the chair out of the way unemotionally. She gave a sleepy stare to Razumov, who started, looked round the room and passed slowly by her as if struck by some sudden thought.

"I beg you to observe," he said, already on the landing, "that I had only to hold my tongue. To-day, of all days since I came amongst you, I was made safe, and to-day I made myself free from falsehood, from remorse — independent of every single human being on this earth."

He turned his back on the room, and walked towards the stairs, but, at the violent crash of the door behind him, he looked over his shoulder and saw that Nikita, with three others, had followed him out. "They are going to kill me, after all," he thought.

Before he had time to turn round and confront them fairly, they set on him with a rush. He was driven headlong against the wall. "I wonder how," he completed his thought. Nikita cried, with a shrill laugh right in his face, "We shall make you harmless. You wait a bit."

Razumov did not struggle. The three men held him pinned against the wall, while Nikita, taking up a position a little on one side, deliberately swung off his enormous arm. Razumov, looking for a knife in his hand, saw it come at him open, unarmed, and received a tremendous blow on the side of his head over his ear. At the same time he heard a faint, dull detonating sound, as if some one had fired a pistol on the other side of the wall. A raging fury awoke in him at this outrage. The people in Laspara's rooms, holding their breath, listened to the desperate scuffling of four men all over

the landing; thuds against the walls, a terrible crash against the very door, then all of them went down together with a violence which seemed to shake the whole house. Razumov, overpowered, breathless, crushed under the weight of his assailants, saw the monstrous Nikita squatting on his heels near his head, while the others held him down, kneeling on his chest, gripping his throat, lying across his legs.

“Turn his face the other way,” the paunchy terrorist directed, in an excited, gleeful squeak.

Razumov could struggle no longer. He was exhausted; he had to watch passively the heavy open hand of the brute descend again in a degrading blow over his other ear. It seemed to split his head in two, and all at once the men holding him became perfectly silent — soundless as shadows. In silence they pulled him brutally to his feet, rushed with him noiselessly down the staircase, and, opening the door, flung him out into the street.

He fell forward, and at once rolled over and over helplessly, going down the short slope together with the rush of running rain water. He came to rest in the roadway of the street at the bottom, lying on his back, with a great flash of lightning over his face — a vivid, silent flash of lightning which blinded him utterly. He picked himself up, and put his arm over his eyes to recover his sight. Not a sound reached him from anywhere, and he began to walk, staggering, down a long, empty street. The lightning waved and darted round him its silent flames, the water of the deluge fell, ran, leaped, drove — noiseless like the drift of mist. In this unearthly stillness his footsteps fell silent on the pavement, while a dumb wind drove him on and on, like a lost mortal in a phantom world ravaged by a soundless thunderstorm. God only knows where his noiseless feet took him to that night, here and there, and back again without pause or rest. Of one place, at least, where they did lead him, we heard afterwards; and, in the morning, the driver of the first south-shore tramcar, clanging his bell desperately, saw a bedraggled, soaked man without a hat, and walking in the roadway unsteadily with his head down, step right in front of his car, and go under.

When they picked him up, with two broken limbs and a crushed side, Razumov had not lost consciousness. It was as though he had tumbled, smashing himself, into a world of mutes. Silent men, moving unheard, lifted him up, laid him on the sidewalk, gesticulating and grimacing round him their alarm, horror, and compassion. A red face with moustaches stooped close over him, lips moving, eyes rolling. Razumov tried hard to understand the reason of this dumb show. To those who stood around him, the features of that stranger, so grievously hurt, seemed composed in meditation. Afterwards his eyes sent out at them a look of fear and closed slowly. They stared at him. Razumov made an effort to remember some French words.

“Je suis sourd,” he had time to utter feebly, before he fainted.

“He is deaf,” they exclaimed to each other. “That’s why he did not hear the car.”

They carried him off in that same car. Before it started on its journey, a woman in a shabby black dress, who had run out of the iron gate of some private grounds up the road, clambered on to the rear platform and would not be put off.

“I am a relation,” she insisted, in bad French. “This young man is a Russian, and I am his relation.” On this plea they let her have her way. She sat down calmly, and took his head on her lap; her scared faded eyes avoided looking at his deathlike face. At the corner of a street, on the other side of the town, a stretcher met the car. She followed it to the door of the hospital, where they let her come in and see him laid on a bed. Razumov’s new-found relation never shed a tear, but the officials had some difficulty in inducing her to go away. The porter observed her lingering on the opposite pavement for a long time. Suddenly, as though she had remembered something, she ran off.

The ardent hater of all Finance ministers, the slave of Madame de S — , had made up her mind to offer her resignation as lady companion to the Egeria of Peter Ivanovitch. She had found work to do after her own heart.

But hours before, while the thunderstorm still raged in the night, there had been in the rooms of Julius Laspara a great sensation. The terrible Nikita, coming in from the landing, uplifted his squeaky voice in horrible glee before all the company —

“Razumov! Mr. Razumov! The wonderful Razumov! He shall never be any use as a spy on any one. He won’t talk, because he will never hear anything in his life — not a thing! I have burst the drums of his ears for him. Oh, you may trust me. I know the trick. Ha! Ha! Ha! I know the trick.”

Chapter 5

It was nearly a fortnight after her mother’s funeral that I saw Natalia Haldin for the last time.

In those silent, sombre days the doors of the appartement on the Boulevard des Philosophes were closed to every one but myself. I believe I was of some use, if only in this, that I alone was aware of the incredible part of the situation. Miss Haldin nursed her mother alone to the last moment. If Razumov’s visit had anything to do with Mrs. Haldin’s end (and I cannot help thinking that it hastened it considerably), it is because the man, trusted impulsively by the ill-fated Victor Haldin, had failed to gain the confidence of Victor Haldin’s mother. What tale, precisely, he told her cannot be known — at any rate, I do not know it — but to me she seemed to die from the shock of an ultimate disappointment borne in silence. She had not believed him. Perhaps she could not longer believe any one, and consequently had nothing to say to any one — not even to her daughter. I suspect that Miss Haldin lived the heaviest hours of her life by that silent death-bed. I confess I was angry with the broken-hearted old woman passing away in the obstinacy of her mute distrust of her daughter.

When it was all over I stood aside. Miss Haldin had her compatriots round her then. A great number of them attended the funeral. I was there too, but afterwards managed to keep away from Miss Haldin, till I received a short note rewarding my self-denial.

“It is as you would have it. I am going back to Russia at once. My mind is made up. Come and see me.”

Verily, it was a reward of discretion. I went without delay to receive it. The appartement of the Boulevard des Philosophes presented the dreary signs of impending abandonment. It looked desolate and as if already empty to my eyes.

Standing, we exchanged a few words about her health, mine, remarks as to some people of the Russian colony, and then Natalia Haldin, establishing me on the sofa, began to talk openly of her future work, of her plans. It was all to be as I had wished it. And it was to be for life. We should never see each other again. Never!

I gathered this success to my breast. Natalia Haldin looked matured by her open and secret experiences. With her arms folded she walked up and down the whole length of the room, talking slowly, smooth-browed, with a resolute profile. She gave me a new view of herself, and I marvelled at that something grave and measured in her voice, in her movements, in her manner. It was the perfection of collected independence. The strength of her nature had come to surface because the obscure depths had been stirred.

“We two can talk of it now,” she observed, after a silence and stopping short before me. “Have you been to inquire at the hospital lately?”

“Yes, I have.” And as she looked at me fixedly, “He will live, the doctors say. But I thought that Tekla...”

“Tekla has not been near me for several days,” explained Miss Haldin quickly. “As I never offered to go to the hospital with her, she thinks that I have no heart. She is disillusioned about me.”

And Miss Haldin smiled faintly.

“Yes. She sits with him as long and as often as they will let her,” I said. “She says she must never abandon him — never as long as she lives. He’ll need somebody — a hopeless cripple, and stone deaf with that.”

“Stone deaf? I didn’t know,” murmured Natalia Haldin.

“He is. It seems strange. I am told there were no apparent injuries to the head. They say, too, that it is not very likely that he will live so very long for Tekla to take care of him.”

Miss Haldin shook her head.

“While there are travellers ready to fall by the way our Tekla shall never be idle. She is a good Samaritan by an irresistible vocation. The revolutionists didn’t understand her. Fancy a devoted creature like that being employed to carry about documents sewn in her dress, or made to write from dictation.”

“There is not much perspicacity in the world.”

No sooner uttered, I regretted that observation. Natalia Haldin, looking me straight in the face, assented by a slight movement of her head. She was not offended, but turning away began to pace the room again. To my western eyes she seemed to be getting farther and farther from me, quite beyond my reach now, but undiminished in

the increasing distance. I remained silent as though it were hopeless to raise my voice. The sound of hers, so close to me, made me start a little.

“Tekla saw him picked up after the accident. The good soul never explained to me really how it came about. She affirms that there was some understanding between them — some sort of compact — that in any sore need, in misfortune, or difficulty, or pain, he was to come to her.”

“Was there?” I said. “It is lucky for him that there was, then. He’ll need all the devotion of the good Samaritan.”

It was a fact that Tekla, looking out of her window at five in the morning, for some reason or other, had beheld Razumov in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, standing stockstill, bare-headed in the rain, at the foot of the terrace. She had screamed out to him, by name, to know what was the matter. He never even raised his head. By the time she had dressed herself sufficiently to run downstairs he was gone. She started in pursuit, and rushing out into the road, came almost directly upon the arrested tramcar and the small knot of people picking up Razumov. That much Tekla had told me herself one afternoon we happened to meet at the door of the hospital, and without any kind of comment. But I did not want to meditate very long on the inwardness of this peculiar episode.

“Yes, Natalia Victorovna, he shall need somebody when they dismiss him, on crutches and stone deaf from the hospital. But I do not think that when he rushed like an escaped madman into the grounds of the Chateau Borel it was to seek the help of that good Tekla.”

“No,” said Natalia, stopping short before me, “perhaps not.” She sat down and leaned her head on her hand thoughtfully. The silence lasted for several minutes. During that time I remembered the evening of his atrocious confession — the plaint she seemed to have hardly enough life left in her to utter, “It is impossible to be more unhappy...” The recollection would have given me a shudder if I had not been lost in wonder at her force and her tranquillity. There was no longer any Natalia Haldin, because she had completely ceased to think of herself. It was a great victory, a characteristically Russian exploit in self-suppression.

She recalled me to myself by getting up suddenly like a person who has come to a decision. She walked to the writing-table, now stripped of all the small objects associated with her by daily use — a mere piece of dead furniture; but it contained something living, still, since she took from a recess a flat parcel which she brought to me.

“It’s a book,” she said rather abruptly. “It was sent to me wrapped up in my veil. I told you nothing at the time, but now I’ve decided to leave it with you. I have the right to do that. It was sent to me. It is mine. You may preserve it, or destroy it after you have read it. And while you read it, please remember that I was defenceless. And that he..”

“Defenceless!” I repeated, surprised, looking hard at her.

“You’ll find the very word written there,” she whispered. “Well, it’s true! I was defenceless — but perhaps you were able to see that for yourself.” Her face coloured, then went deadly pale. “In justice to the man, I want you to remember that I was. Oh, I was, I was!”

I rose, a little shakily.

“I am not likely to forget anything you say at this our last parting.”

Her hand fell into mine.

“It’s difficult to believe that it must be good-bye with us.”

She returned my pressure and our hands separated.

“Yes. I am leaving here to-morrow. My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now. As for the rest — which of us can fail to hear the stifled cry of our great distress? It may be nothing to the world.”

“The world is more conscious of your discordant voices,” I said. “It is the way of the world.”

“Yes.” She bowed her head in assent, and hesitated for a moment. “I must own to you that I shall never give up looking forward to the day when all discord shall be silenced. Try to imagine its dawn! The tempest of blows and of execrations is over; all is still; the new sun is rising, and the weary men united at last, taking count in their conscience of the ended contest, feel saddened by their victory, because so many ideas have perished for the triumph of one, so many beliefs have abandoned them without support. They feel alone on the earth and gather close together. Yes, there must be many bitter hours! But at last the anguish of hearts shall be extinguished in love.”

And on this last word of her wisdom, a word so sweet, so bitter, so cruel sometimes, I said good-bye to Natalia Haldin. It is hard to think I shall never look any more into the trustful eyes of that girl — wedded to an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men’s earth, soaked in blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears.

It must be understood that at that time I didn’t know anything of Mr. Razumov’s confession to the assembled revolutionists. Natalia Haldin might have guessed what was the “one thing more” which remained for him to do; but this my western eyes had failed to see.

Tekla, the ex-lady companion of Madame de S — , haunted his bedside at the hospital. We met once or twice at the door of that establishment, but on these occasions she was not communicative. She gave me news of Mr. Razumov as concisely as possible. He was making a slow recovery, but would remain a hopeless cripple all his life. Personally, I never went near him: I never saw him again, after the awful evening when I stood by, a watchful but ignored spectator of his scene with Miss Haldin. He was in due course discharged from the hospital, and his “relative” — so I was told — had carried him off somewhere.

My information was completed nearly two years later. The opportunity, certainly, was not of my seeking; it was quite accidentally that I met a much-trusted woman

revolutionist at the house of a distinguished Russian gentleman of liberal convictions, who came to live in Geneva for a time.

He was a quite different sort of celebrity from Peter Ivanovitch — a dark-haired man with kind eyes, high-shouldered, courteous, and with something hushed and circumspect in his manner. He approached me, choosing the moment when there was no one near, followed by a grey-haired, alert lady in a crimson blouse.

“Our Sophia Antonovna wishes to be made known to you,” he addressed me, in his guarded voice. “And so I leave you two to have a talk together.”

“I would never have intruded myself upon your notice,” the grey-haired lady began at once, “if I had not been charged with a message for you.”

It was a message of a few friendly words from Natalia Haldin. Sophia Antonovna had just returned from a secret excursion into Russia, and had seen Miss Haldin. She lived in a town “in the centre,” sharing her compassionate labours between the horrors of overcrowded jails, and the heartrending misery of bereaved homes. She did not spare herself in good service, Sophia Antonovna assured me.

“She has a faithful soul, an undaunted spirit and an indefatigable body,” the woman revolutionist summed it all up, with a touch of enthusiasm.

A conversation thus engaged was not likely to drop from want of interest on my side. We went to sit apart in a corner where no one interrupted us. In the course of our talk about Miss Haldin, Sophia Antonovna remarked suddenly —

“I suppose you remember seeing me before? That evening when Natalia came to ask Peter Ivanovitch for the address of a certain Razumov, that young man who...”

“I remember perfectly,” I said. When Sophia Antonovna learned that I had in my possession that young man’s journal given me by Miss Haldin she became intensely interested. She did not conceal her curiosity to see the document.

I offered to show it to her, and she at once volunteered to call on me next day for that purpose.

She turned over the pages greedily for an hour or more, and then handed me the book with a faint sigh. While moving about Russia, she had seen Razumov too. He lived, not “in the centre,” but “in the south.” She described to me a little two-roomed wooden house, in the suburb of some very small town, hiding within the high plank-fence of a yard overgrown with nettles. He was crippled, ill, getting weaker every day, and Tekla the Samaritan tended him unweariedly with the pure joy of unselfish devotion. There was nothing in that task to become disillusioned about.

I did not hide from Sophia Antonovna my surprise that she should have visited Mr. Razumov. I did not even understand the motive. But she informed me that she was not the only one.

“Some of us always go to see him when passing through. He is intelligent. We has ideas... He talks well, too.”

Presently I heard for the first time of Razumov’s public confession in Laspara’s house. Sophia Antonovna gave me a detailed relation of what had occurred there. Razumov himself had told her all about it, most minutely.

Then, looking hard at me with her brilliant black eyes —

“There are evil moments in every life. A false suggestion enters one’s brain, and then fear is born — fear of oneself, fear for oneself. Or else a false courage — who knows? Well, call it what you like; but tell me, how many of them would deliver themselves up deliberately to perdition (as he himself says in that book) rather than go on living, secretly debased in their own eyes? How many?... And please mark this — he was safe when he did it. It was just when he believed himself safe and more — infinitely more — when the possibility of being loved by that admirable girl first dawned upon him, that he discovered that his bitterest railings, the worst wickedness, the devil work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the ignominy of the existence before him. There’s character in such a discovery.”

I accepted her conclusion in silence. Who would care to question the grounds of forgiveness or compassion? However, it appeared later on, that there was some compunction, too, in the charity extended by the revolutionary world to Razumov the betrayer. Sophia Antonovna continued uneasily —

“And then, you know, he was the victim of an outrage. It was not authorized. Nothing was decided as to what was to be done with him. He had confessed voluntarily. And that Nikita who burst the drums of his ears purposely, out on the landing, you know, as if carried away by indignation — well, he has turned out to be a scoundrel of the worst kind — a traitor himself, a betrayer — a spy! Razumov told me he had charged him with it by a sort of inspiration...”

“I had a glimpse of that brute,” I said. “How any of you could have been deceived for half a day passes my comprehension!”

She interrupted me.

“There! There! Don’t talk of it. The first time I saw him, I, too, was appalled. They cried me down. We were always telling each other, ‘Oh! you mustn’t mind his appearance.’ And then he was always ready to kill. There was no doubt of it. He killed — yes! in both camps. The fiend...”

Then Sophia Antonovna, after mastering the angry trembling of her lips, told me a very queer tale. It went that Councillor Mikulin, travelling in Germany (shortly after Razumov’s disappearance from Geneva), happened to meet Peter Ivanovitch in a railway carriage. Being alone in the compartment, these two talked together half the night, and it was then that Mikulin the Police Chief gave a hint to the Arch-Revolutionist as to the true character of the arch-slayer of gendarmes. It looks as though Mikulin had wanted to get rid of that particular agent of his own! He might have grown tired of him, or frightened of him. It must also be said that Mikulin had inherited the sinister Nikita from his predecessor in office.

And this story, too, I received without comment in my character of a mute witness of things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes. But I permitted myself a question —

“Tell me, please, Sophia Antonovna, did Madame de S — leave all her fortune to Peter Ivanovitch?”

“Not a bit of it.” The woman revolutionist shrugged her shoulders in disgust. “She died without making a will. A lot of nephews and nieces came down from St. Petersburg, like a flock of vultures, and fought for her money amongst themselves. All beastly Kammerherrns and Maids of Honour — abominable court flunkeys. Tfui!”

“One does not hear much of Peter Ivanovitch now,” I remarked, after a pause.

“Peter Ivanovitch,” said Sophia Antonovna gravely, “has united himself to a peasant girl.”

I was truly astonished.

“What! On the Riviera?”

“What nonsense! Of course not.”

Sophia Antonovna’s tone was slightly tart.

“Is he, then, living actually in Russia? It’s a tremendous risk — isn’t it?” I cried. “And all for the sake of a peasant girl. Don’t you think it’s very wrong of him?”

Sophia Antonovna preserved a mysterious silence for a while, then made a statement. “He just simply adores her.”

“Does he? Well, then, I hope that she won’t hesitate to beat him.”

Sophia Antonovna got up and wished me good-bye, as though she had not heard a word of my impious hope; but, in the very doorway, where I attended her, she turned round for an instant, and declared in a firm voice —

“Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man.”

Chance

A TALE IN TWO PARTS

Those that hold that all things are governed by Fortune had not erred, had they not persisted there

Sir Thomas Browne

To sir hugh clifford, k.C.M.G. Who steadfast friendship is responsible for the existence of these pages

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Part 1 — The Damsel

Chapter 1 — Young Powell and His Chance

I believe he had seen us out of the window coming off to dine in the dinghy of a fourteen-ton yawl belonging to Marlow my host and skipper. We helped the boy we had with us to haul the boat up on the landing-stage before we went up to the riverside inn, where we found our new acquaintance eating his dinner in dignified loneliness at the head of a long table, white and inhospitable like a snow bank.

The red tint of his clear-cut face with trim short black whiskers under a cap of curly iron-grey hair was the only warm spot in the dinginess of that room cooled by the cheerless tablecloth. We knew him already by sight as the owner of a little five-ton cutter, which he sailed alone apparently, a fellow yachtsman in the unpretending band of fanatics who cruise at the mouth of the Thames. But the first time he addressed the waiter sharply as ‘steward’ we knew him at once for a sailor as well as a yachtsman.

Presently he had occasion to reprove that same waiter for the slovenly manner in which the dinner was served. He did it with considerable energy and then turned to us.

“If we at sea,” he declared, “went about our work as people ashore high and low go about theirs we should never make a living. No one would employ us. And moreover no ship navigated and sailed in the happy-go-lucky manner people conduct their business on shore would ever arrive into port.”

Since he had retired from the sea he had been astonished to discover that the educated people were not much better than the others. No one seemed to take any proper pride in his work: from plumbers who were simply thieves to, say, newspaper men (he seemed to think them a specially intellectual class) who never by any chance gave a correct version of the simplest affair. This universal inefficiency of what he called “the shore gang” he ascribed in general to the want of responsibility and to a sense of security.

“They see,” he went on, “that no matter what they do this tight little island won’t turn turtle with them or spring a leak and go to the bottom with their wives and children.”

From this point the conversation took a special turn relating exclusively to sea-life. On that subject he got quickly in touch with Marlow who in his time had followed the sea. They kept up a lively exchange of reminiscences while I listened. They agreed that the happiest time in their lives was as youngsters in good ships, with no care in

the world but not to lose a watch below when at sea and not a moment's time in going ashore after work hours when in harbour. They agreed also as to the proudest moment they had known in that calling which is never embraced on rational and practical grounds, because of the glamour of its romantic associations. It was the moment when they had passed successfully their first examination and left the seamanship Examiner with the little precious slip of blue paper in their hands.

"That day I wouldn't have called the Queen my cousin," declared our new acquaintance enthusiastically.

At that time the Marine Board examinations took place at the St. Katherine's Dock House on Tower Hill, and he informed us that he had a special affection for the view of that historic locality, with the Gardens to the left, the front of the Mint to the right, the miserable tumble-down little houses farther away, a cabstand, boot-blacks squatting on the edge of the pavement and a pair of big policemen gazing with an air of superiority at the doors of the Black Horse public-house across the road. This was the part of the world, he said, his eyes first took notice of, on the finest day of his life. He had emerged from the main entrance of St. Katherine's Dock House a full-fledged second mate after the hottest time of his life with Captain R-, the most dreaded of the three seamanship Examiners who at the time were responsible for the merchant service officers qualifying in the Port of London.

"We all who were preparing to pass," he said, "used to shake in our shoes at the idea of going before him. He kept me for an hour and a half in the torture chamber and behaved as though he hated me. He kept his eyes shaded with one of his hands. Suddenly he let it drop saying, "You will do!" Before I realised what he meant he was pushing the blue slip across the table. I jumped up as if my chair had caught fire.

"Thank you, sir," says I, grabbing the paper.

"Good morning, good luck to you," he growls at me.

"The old doorkeeper fussed out of the cloak-room with my hat. They always do. But he looked very hard at me before he ventured to ask in a sort of timid whisper: "Got through all right, sir?" For all answer I dropped a half-crown into his soft broad palm. "Well," says he with a sudden grin from ear to ear, "I never knew him keep any of you gentlemen so long. He failed two second mates this morning before your turn came. Less than twenty minutes each: that's about his usual time."

"I found myself downstairs without being aware of the steps as if I had floated down the staircase. The finest day in my life. The day you get your first command is nothing to it. For one thing a man is not so young then and for another with us, you know, there is nothing much more to expect. Yes, the finest day of one's life, no doubt, but then it is just a day and no more. What comes after is about the most unpleasant time for a youngster, the trying to get an officer's berth with nothing much to show but a brand-new certificate. It is surprising how useless you find that piece of ass's skin that you have been putting yourself in such a state about. It didn't strike me at the time that a Board of Trade certificate does not make an officer, not by a long long way. But the slippers of the ships I was haunting with demands for a job knew that very well.

I don't wonder at them now, and I don't blame them either. But this 'trying to get a ship' is pretty hard on a youngster all the same . . . “

He went on then to tell us how tired he was and how discouraged by this lesson of disillusion following swiftly upon the finest day of his life. He told us how he went the round of all the ship-owners' offices in the City where some junior clerk would furnish him with printed forms of application which he took home to fill up in the evening. He used to run out just before midnight to post them in the nearest pillar-box. And that was all that ever came of it. In his own words: he might just as well have dropped them all properly addressed and stamped into the sewer grating.

Then one day, as he was wending his weary way to the docks, he met a friend and former shipmate a little older than himself outside the Fenchurch Street Railway Station.

He craved for sympathy but his friend had just “got a ship” that very morning and was hurrying home in a state of outward joy and inward uneasiness usual to a sailor who after many days of waiting suddenly gets a berth. This friend had the time to condole with him but briefly. He must be moving. Then as he was running off, over his shoulder as it were, he suggested: “Why don't you go and speak to Mr. Powell in the Shipping Office.” Our friend objected that he did not know Mr. Powell from Adam. And the other already pretty near round the corner shouted back advice: “Go to the private door of the Shipping Office and walk right up to him. His desk is by the window. Go up boldly and say I sent you.”

Our new acquaintance looking from one to the other of us declared: “Upon my word, I had grown so desperate that I'd have gone boldly up to the devil himself on the mere hint that he had a second mate's job to give away.”

It was at this point that interrupting his flow of talk to light his pipe but holding us with his eye he inquired whether we had known Powell. Marlow with a slight reminiscent smile murmured that he “remembered him very well.”

Then there was a pause. Our new acquaintance had become involved in a vexatious difficulty with his pipe which had suddenly betrayed his trust and disappointed his anticipation of self-indulgence. To keep the ball rolling I asked Marlow if this Powell was remarkable in any way.

“He was not exactly remarkable,” Marlow answered with his usual nonchalance. “In a general way it's very difficult for one to become remarkable. People won't take sufficient notice of one, don't you know. I remember Powell so well simply because as one of the Shipping Masters in the Port of London he dispatched me to sea on several long stages of my sailor's pilgrimage. He resembled Socrates. I mean he resembled him genuinely: that is in the face. A philosophical mind is but an accident. He reproduced exactly the familiar bust of the immortal sage, if you will imagine the bust with a high top hat riding far on the back of the head, and a black coat over the shoulders. As I never saw him except from the other side of the long official counter bearing the five writing desks of the five Shipping Masters, Mr. Powell has remained a bust to me.”

Our new acquaintance advanced now from the mantelpiece with his pipe in good working order.

“What was the most remarkable about Powell,” he enunciated dogmatically with his head in a cloud of smoke, “is that he should have had just that name. You see, my name happens to be Powell too.”

It was clear that this intelligence was not imparted to us for social purposes. It required no acknowledgment. We continued to gaze at him with expectant eyes.

He gave himself up to the vigorous enjoyment of his pipe for a silent minute or two. Then picking up the thread of his story he told us how he had started hot foot for Tower Hill. He had not been that way since the day of his examination — the finest day of his life — the day of his overweening pride. It was very different now. He would not have called the Queen his cousin, still, but this time it was from a sense of profound abasement. He didn't think himself good enough for anybody's kinship. He envied the purple-nosed old cab-drivers on the stand, the boot-black boys at the edge of the pavement, the two large bobbies pacing slowly along the Tower Gardens railings in the consciousness of their infallible might, and the bright scarlet sentries walking smartly to and fro before the Mint. He envied them their places in the scheme of world's labour. And he envied also the miserable sallow, thin-faced loafers blinking their obscene eyes and rubbing their greasy shoulders against the door-jambes of the Black Horse pub, because they were too far gone to feel their degradation.

I must render the man the justice that he conveyed very well to us the sense of his youthful hopelessness surprised at not finding its place in the sun and no recognition of its right to live.

He went up the outer steps of St. Katherine's Dock House, the very steps from which he had some six weeks before surveyed the cabstand, the buildings, the policemen, the boot-blacks, the paint, gilt, and plateglass of the Black Horse, with the eye of a Conqueror. At the time he had been at the bottom of his heart surprised that all this had not greeted him with songs and incense, but now (he made no secret of it) he made his entry in a slinking fashion past the doorkeeper's glass box. “I hadn't any half-crowns to spare for tips,” he remarked grimly. The man, however, ran out after him asking: “What do you require?” but with a grateful glance up at the first floor in remembrance of Captain R-'s examination room (how easy and delightful all that had been) he bolted down a flight leading to the basement and found himself in a place of dusk and mystery and many doors. He had been afraid of being stopped by some rule of no-admittance. However he was not pursued.

The basement of St. Katherine's Dock House is vast in extent and confusing in its plan. Pale shafts of light slant from above into the gloom of its chilly passages. Powell wandered up and down there like an early Christian refugee in the catacombs; but what little faith he had in the success of his enterprise was oozing out at his finger-tips. At a dark turn under a gas bracket whose flame was half turned down his self-confidence abandoned him altogether.

“I stood there to think a little,” he said. “A foolish thing to do because of course I got scared. What could you expect? It takes some nerve to tackle a stranger with a request for a favour. I wished my namesake Powell had been the devil himself. I felt somehow it would have been an easier job. You see, I never believed in the devil enough to be scared of him; but a man can make himself very unpleasant. I looked at a lot of doors, all shut tight, with a growing conviction that I would never have the pluck to open one of them. Thinking’s no good for one’s nerve. I concluded I would give up the whole business. But I didn’t give up in the end, and I’ll tell you what stopped me. It was the recollection of that confounded doorkeeper who had called after me. I felt sure the fellow would be on the look-out at the head of the stairs. If he asked me what I had been after, as he had the right to do, I wouldn’t know what to answer that wouldn’t make me look silly if no worse. I got very hot. There was no chance of slinking out of this business.

“I had lost my bearings somehow down there. Of the many doors of various sizes, right and left, a good few had glazed lights above; some however must have led merely into lumber rooms or such like, because when I brought myself to try one or two I was disconcerted to find that they were locked. I stood there irresolute and uneasy like a baffled thief. The confounded basement was as still as a grave and I became aware of my heart beats. Very uncomfortable sensation. Never happened to me before or since. A bigger door to the left of me, with a large brass handle looked as if it might lead into the Shipping Office. I tried it, setting my teeth. “Here goes!”

“It came open quite easily. And lo! the place it opened into was hardly any bigger than a cupboard. Anyhow it wasn’t more than ten feet by twelve; and as I in a way expected to see the big shadowy cellar-like extent of the Shipping Office where I had been once or twice before, I was extremely startled. A gas bracket hung from the middle of the ceiling over a dark, shabby writing-desk covered with a litter of yellowish dusty documents. Under the flame of the single burner which made the place ablaze with light, a plump, little man was writing hard, his nose very near the desk. His head was perfectly bald and about the same drab tint as the papers. He appeared pretty dusty too.

“I didn’t notice whether there were any cobwebs on him, but I shouldn’t wonder if there were because he looked as though he had been imprisoned for years in that little hole. The way he dropped his pen and sat blinking my way upset me very much. And his dungeon was hot and musty; it smelt of gas and mushrooms, and seemed to be somewhere 120 feet below the ground. Solid, heavy stacks of paper filled all the corners half-way up to the ceiling. And when the thought flashed upon me that these were the premises of the Marine Board and that this fellow must be connected in some way with ships and sailors and the sea, my astonishment took my breath away. One couldn’t imagine why the Marine Board should keep that bald, fat creature slaving down there. For some reason or other I felt sorry and ashamed to have found him out in his wretched captivity. I asked gently and sorrowfully: “The Shipping Office, please.”

He piped up in a contemptuous squeaky voice which made me start: "Not here. Try the passage on the other side. Street side. This is the Dock side. You've lost your way . . ."

He spoke in such a spiteful tone that I thought he was going to round off with the words: "You fool" . . . and perhaps he meant to. But what he finished sharply with was: "Shut the door quietly after you."

And I did shut it quietly — you bet. Quick and quiet. The indomitable spirit of that chap impressed me. I wonder sometimes whether he has succeeded in writing himself into liberty and a pension at last, or had to go out of his gas-lighted grave straight into that other dark one where nobody would want to intrude. My humanity was pleased to discover he had so much kick left in him, but I was not comforted in the least. It occurred to me that if Mr. Powell had the same sort of temper . . . However, I didn't give myself time to think and scuttled across the space at the foot of the stairs into the passage where I'd been told to try. And I tried the first door I came to, right away, without any hanging back, because coming loudly from the hall above an amazed and scandalized voice wanted to know what sort of game I was up to down there. "Don't you know there's no admittance that way?" it roared. But if there was anything more I shut it out of my hearing by means of a door marked Private on the outside. It let me into a six-foot wide strip between a long counter and the wall, taken off a spacious, vaulted room with a grated window and a glazed door giving daylight to the further end. The first thing I saw right in front of me were three middle-aged men having a sort of romp together round about another fellow with a thin, long neck and sloping shoulders who stood up at a desk writing on a large sheet of paper and taking no notice except that he grinned quietly to himself. They turned very sour at once when they saw me. I heard one of them mutter 'Hullo! What have we here?'

"'I want to see Mr. Powell, please,' I said, very civil but firm; I would let nothing scare me away now. This was the Shipping Office right enough. It was after 3 o'clock and the business seemed over for the day with them. The long-necked fellow went on with his writing steadily. I observed that he was no longer grinning. The three others tossed their heads all together towards the far end of the room where a fifth man had been looking on at their antics from a high stool. I walked up to him as boldly as if he had been the devil himself. With one foot raised up and resting on the cross-bar of his seat he never stopped swinging the other which was well clear of the stone floor. He had unbuttoned the top of his waistcoat and he wore his tall hat very far at the back of his head. He had a full unwrinkled face and such clear-shining eyes that his grey beard looked quite false on him, stuck on for a disguise. You said just now he resembled Socrates — didn't you? I don't know about that. This Socrates was a wise man, I believe?"

"He was," assented Marlow. "And a true friend of youth. He lectured them in a peculiarly exasperating manner. It was a way he had."

“Then give me Powell every time,” declared our new acquaintance sturdily. “He didn’t lecture me in any way. Not he. He said: ‘How do you do?’ quite kindly to my mumble. Then says he looking very hard at me: ‘I don’t think I know you — do I?’

“No, sir,” I said and down went my heart sliding into my boots, just as the time had come to summon up all my cheek. There’s nothing meaner in the world than a piece of impudence that isn’t carried off well. For fear of appearing shamefaced I started about it so free and easy as almost to frighten myself. He listened for a while looking at my face with surprise and curiosity and then held up his hand. I was glad enough to shut up, I can tell you.

“Well, you are a cool hand,” says he. “And that friend of yours too. He pestered me coming here every day for a fortnight till a captain I’m acquainted with was good enough to give him a berth. And no sooner he’s provided for than he turns you on. You youngsters don’t seem to mind whom you get into trouble.”

“It was my turn now to stare with surprise and curiosity. He hadn’t been talking loud but he lowered his voice still more.

“Don’t you know it’s illegal?”

“I wondered what he was driving at till I remembered that procuring a berth for a sailor is a penal offence under the Act. That clause was directed of course against the swindling practices of the boarding-house crimps. It had never struck me it would apply to everybody alike no matter what the motive, because I believed then that people on shore did their work with care and foresight.

“I was confounded at the idea, but Mr. Powell made me soon see that an Act of Parliament hasn’t any sense of its own. It has only the sense that’s put into it; and that’s precious little sometimes. He didn’t mind helping a young man to a ship now and then, he said, but if we kept on coming constantly it would soon get about that he was doing it for money.

“A pretty thing that would be: the Senior Shipping-Master of the Port of London hauled up in a police court and fined fifty pounds,” says he. “I’ve another four years to serve to get my pension. It could be made to look very black against me and don’t you make any mistake about it,” he says.

“And all the time with one knee well up he went on swinging his other leg like a boy on a gate and looking at me very straight with his shining eyes. I was confounded I tell you. It made me sick to hear him imply that somebody would make a report against him.

“Oh!” I asked shocked, “who would think of such a scurvy trick, sir?” I was half disgusted with him for having the mere notion of it.

“Who?” says he, speaking very low. “Anybody. One of the office messengers maybe. I’ve risen to be the Senior of this office and we are all very good friends here, but don’t you think that my colleague that sits next to me wouldn’t like to go up to this desk by the window four years in advance of the regulation time? Or even one year for that matter. It’s human nature.”

"I could not help turning my head. The three fellows who had been skylarking when I came in were now talking together very soberly, and the long-necked chap was going on with his writing still. He seemed to me the most dangerous of the lot. I saw him sideface and his lips were set very tight. I had never looked at mankind in that light before. When one's young human nature shocks one. But what startled me most was to see the door I had come through open slowly and give passage to a head in a uniform cap with a Board of Trade badge. It was that blamed old doorkeeper from the hall. He had run me to earth and meant to dig me out too. He walked up the office smirking craftily, cap in hand.

"What is it, Symons?" asked Mr. Powell.

"I was only wondering where this 'ere gentleman 'ad gone to, sir. He slipped past me upstairs, sir."

I felt mighty uncomfortable.

"That's all right, Symons. I know the gentleman," says Mr. Powell as serious as a judge.

"Very well, sir. Of course, sir. I saw the gentleman running races all by 'isself down 'ere, so I . . ."

"It's all right I tell you," Mr. Powell cut him short with a wave of his hand; and, as the old fraud walked off at last, he raised his eyes to me. I did not know what to do: stay there, or clear out, or say that I was sorry.

"Let's see," says he, "what did you tell me your name was?"

"Now, observe, I hadn't given him my name at all and his question embarrassed me a bit. Somehow or other it didn't seem proper for me to fling his own name at him as it were. So I merely pulled out my new certificate from my pocket and put it into his hand unfolded, so that he could read Charles Powell written very plain on the parchment.

"He dropped his eyes on to it and after a while laid it quietly on the desk by his side. I didn't know whether he meant to make any remark on this coincidence. Before he had time to say anything the glass door came open with a bang and a tall, active man rushed in with great strides. His face looked very red below his high silk hat. You could see at once he was the skipper of a big ship.

"Mr. Powell after telling me in an undertone to wait a little addressed him in a friendly way.

"I've been expecting you in every moment to fetch away your Articles, Captain. Here they are all ready for you." And turning to a pile of agreements lying at his elbow he took up the topmost of them. From where I stood I could read the words: "Ship Ferndale" written in a large round hand on the first page.

"No, Mr. Powell, they aren't ready, worse luck," says that skipper. "I've got to ask you to strike out my second officer." He seemed excited and bothered. He explained that his second mate had been working on board all the morning. At one o'clock he went out to get a bit of dinner and didn't turn up at two as he ought to have done. Instead there came a messenger from the hospital with a note signed by a doctor.

Collar bone and one arm broken. Let himself be knocked down by a pair horse van while crossing the road outside the dock gate, as if he had neither eyes nor ears. And the ship ready to leave the dock at six o'clock to-morrow morning!

"Mr. Powell dipped his pen and began to turn the leaves of the agreement over. "We must then take his name off," he says in a kind of unconcerned sing-song.

"What am I to do?" burst out the skipper. "This office closes at four o'clock. I can't find a man in half an hour."

"This office closes at four," repeats Mr. Powell glancing up and down the pages and touching up a letter here and there with perfect indifference.

"Even if I managed to lay hold some time to-day of a man ready to go at such short notice I couldn't ship him regularly here — could I?"

"Mr. Powell was busy drawing his pen through the entries relating to that unlucky second mate and making a note in the margin.

"You could sign him on yourself on board," says he without looking up. "But I don't think you'll find easily an officer for such a pier-head jump."

"Upon this the fine-looking skipper gave signs of distress. The ship mustn't miss the next morning's tide. He had to take on board forty tons of dynamite and a hundred and twenty tons of gunpowder at a place down the river before proceeding to sea. It was all arranged for next day. There would be no end of fuss and complications if the ship didn't turn up in time . . . I couldn't help hearing all this, while wishing him to take himself off, because I wanted to know why Mr. Powell had told me to wait. After what he had been saying there didn't seem any object in my hanging about. If I had had my certificate in my pocket I should have tried to slip away quietly; but Mr. Powell had turned about into the same position I found him in at first and was again swinging his leg. My certificate open on the desk was under his left elbow and I couldn't very well go up and jerk it away.

"I don't know," says he carelessly, addressing the helpless captain but looking fixedly at me with an expression as if I hadn't been there. "I don't know whether I ought to tell you that I know of a disengaged second mate at hand."

"Do you mean you've got him here?" shouts the other looking all over the empty public part of the office as if he were ready to fling himself bodily upon anything resembling a second mate. He had been so full of his difficulty that I verify believe he had never noticed me. Or perhaps seeing me inside he may have thought I was some understrapper belonging to the place. But when Mr. Powell nodded in my direction he became very quiet and gave me a long stare. Then he stooped to Mr. Powell's ear — I suppose he imagined he was whispering, but I heard him well enough.

"Looks very respectable."

"Certainly," says the shipping-master quite calm and staring all the time at me. "His name's Powell."

"Oh, I see!" says the skipper as if struck all of a heap. "But is he ready to join at once?"

"I had a sort of vision of my lodgings — in the North of London, too, beyond Dalston, away to the devil — and all my gear scattered about, and my empty sea-chest somewhere in an outhouse the good people I was staying with had at the end of their sooty strip of garden. I heard the Shipping Master say in the coolest sort of way:

"He'll sleep on board to-night."

"He had better," says the Captain of the Ferndale very businesslike, as if the whole thing were settled. I can't say I was dumb for joy as you may suppose. It wasn't exactly that. I was more by way of being out of breath with the quickness of it. It didn't seem possible that this was happening to me. But the skipper, after he had talked for a while with Mr. Powell, too low for me to hear became visibly perplexed.

"I suppose he had heard I was freshly passed and without experience as an officer, because he turned about and looked me over as if I had been exposed for sale.

"He's young," he mutters. "Looks smart, though . . . You're smart and willing (this to me very sudden and loud) and all that, aren't you?"

"I just managed to open and shut my mouth, no more, being taken unawares. But it was enough for him. He made as if I had deafened him with protestations of my smartness and willingness.

"Of course, of course. All right." And then turning to the Shipping Master who sat there swinging his leg, he said that he certainly couldn't go to sea without a second officer. I stood by as if all these things were happening to some other chap whom I was seeing through with it. Mr. Powell stared at me with those shining eyes of his. But that bothered skipper turns upon me again as though he wanted to snap my head off.

"You aren't too big to be told how to do things — are you? You've a lot to learn yet though you mayn't think so."

"I had half a mind to save my dignity by telling him that if it was my seamanship he was alluding to I wanted him to understand that a fellow who had survived being turned inside out for an hour and a half by Captain R- was equal to any demand his old ship was likely to make on his competence. However he didn't give me a chance to make that sort of fool of myself because before I could open my mouth he had gone round on another tack and was addressing himself affably to Mr. Powell who swinging his leg never took his eyes off me.

"I'll take your young friend willingly, Mr. Powell. If you let him sign on as second-mate at once I'll take the Articles away with me now."

"It suddenly dawned upon me that the innocent skipper of the Ferndale had taken it for granted that I was a relative of the Shipping Master! I was quite astonished at this discovery, though indeed the mistake was natural enough under the circumstances. What I ought to have admired was the reticence with which this misunderstanding had been established and acted upon. But I was too stupid then to admire anything. All my anxiety was that this should be cleared up. I was ass enough to wonder exceedingly at Mr. Powell failing to notice the misapprehension. I saw a slight twitch come and go on his face; but instead of setting right that mistake the Shipping Master swung round on his stool and addressed me as 'Charles.' He did. And I detected him taking

a hasty squint at my certificate just before, because clearly till he did so he was not sure of my christian name. “Now then come round in front of the desk, Charles,” says he in a loud voice.

“Charles! At first, I declare to you, it didn’t seem possible that he was addressing himself to me. I even looked round for that Charles but there was nobody behind me except the thin-necked chap still hard at his writing, and the other three Shipping Masters who were changing their coats and reaching for their hats, making ready to go home. It was the industrious thin-necked man who without laying down his pen lifted with his left hand a flap near his desk and said kindly:

“Pass this way.”

I walked through in a trance, faced Mr. Powell, from whom I learned that we were bound to Port Elizabeth first, and signed my name on the Articles of the ship Ferndale as second mate — the voyage not to exceed two years.

“You won’t fail to join — eh?” says the captain anxiously. “It would cause no end of trouble and expense if you did. You’ve got a good six hours to get your gear together, and then you’ll have time to snatch a sleep on board before the crew joins in the morning.”

“It was easy enough for him to talk of getting ready in six hours for a voyage that was not to exceed two years. He hadn’t to do that trick himself, and with his sea-chest locked up in an outhouse the key of which had been mislaid for a week as I remembered. But neither was I much concerned. The idea that I was absolutely going to sea at six o’clock next morning hadn’t got quite into my head yet. It had been too sudden.

“Mr. Powell, slipping the Articles into a long envelope, spoke up with a sort of cold half-laugh without looking at either of us.

“Mind you don’t disgrace the name, Charles.”

“And the skipper chimes in very kindly:

“He’ll do well enough I dare say. I’ll look after him a bit.”

“Upon this he grabs the Articles, says something about trying to run in for a minute to see that poor devil in the hospital, and off he goes with his heavy swinging step after telling me sternly: “Don’t you go like that poor fellow and get yourself run over by a cart as if you hadn’t either eyes or ears.”

“Mr. Powell,” says I timidly (there was by then only the thin-necked man left in the office with us and he was already by the door, standing on one leg to turn the bottom of his trousers up before going away). “Mr. Powell,” says I, “I believe the Captain of the Ferndale was thinking all the time that I was a relation of yours.”

“I was rather concerned about the propriety of it, you know, but Mr. Powell didn’t seem to be in the least.

“Did he?” says he. “That’s funny, because it seems to me too that I’ve been a sort of good uncle to several of you young fellows lately. Don’t you think so yourself? However, if you don’t like it you may put him right — when you get out to sea.” At this I felt a bit queer. Mr. Powell had rendered me a very good service:- because it’s a fact that with us merchant sailors the first voyage as officer is the real start in life. He had given

me no less than that. I told him warmly that he had done for me more that day than all my relations put together ever did.

“Oh, no, no,” says he. “I guess it’s that shipment of explosives waiting down the river which has done most for you. Forty tons of dynamite have been your best friend to-day, young man.”

“That was true too, perhaps. Anyway I saw clearly enough that I had nothing to thank myself for. But as I tried to thank him, he checked my stammering.

“Don’t be in a hurry to thank me,” says he. “The voyage isn’t finished yet.”

Our new acquaintance paused, then added meditatively: “Queer man. As if it made any difference. Queer man.”

“It’s certainly unwise to admit any sort of responsibility for our actions, whose consequences we are never able to foresee,” remarked Marlow by way of assent.

“The consequence of his action was that I got a ship,” said the other. “That could not do much harm,” he added with a laugh which argued a probably unconscious contempt of general ideas.

But Marlow was not put off. He was patient and reflective. He had been at sea many years and I verily believe he liked sea-life because upon the whole it is favourable to reflection. I am speaking of the now nearly vanished sea-life under sail. To those who may be surprised at the statement I will point out that this life secured for the mind of him who embraced it the inestimable advantages of solitude and silence. Marlow had the habit of pursuing general ideas in a peculiar manner, between jest and earnest.

“Oh, I wouldn’t suggest,” he said, “that your namesake Mr. Powell, the Shipping Master, had done you much harm. Such was hardly his intention. And even if it had been he would not have had the power. He was but a man, and the incapacity to achieve anything distinctly good or evil is inherent in our earthly condition. Mediocrity is our mark. And perhaps it’s just as well, since, for the most part, we cannot be certain of the effect of our actions.”

“I don’t know about the effect,” the other stood up to Marlow manfully. “What effect did you expect anyhow? I tell you he did something uncommonly kind.”

“He did what he could,” Marlow retorted gently, “and on his own showing that was not a very great deal. I cannot help thinking that there was some malice in the way he seized the opportunity to serve you. He managed to make you uncomfortable. You wanted to go to sea, but he jumped at the chance of accommodating your desire with a vengeance. I am inclined to think your cheek alarmed him. And this was an excellent occasion to suppress you altogether. For if you accepted he was relieved of you with every appearance of humanity, and if you made objections (after requesting his assistance, mind you) it was open to him to drop you as a sort of impostor. You might have had to decline that berth for some very valid reason. From sheer necessity perhaps. The notice was too uncommonly short. But under the circumstances you’d have covered yourself with ignominy.”

Our new friend knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

“Quite a mistake,” he said. “I am not of the declining sort, though I’ll admit it was something like telling a man that you would like a bath and in consequence being instantly knocked overboard to sink or swim with your clothes on. However, I didn’t feel as if I were in deep water at first. I left the shipping office quietly and for a time strolled along the street as easy as if I had a week before me to fit myself out. But by and by I reflected that the notice was even shorter than it looked. The afternoon was well advanced; I had some things to get, a lot of small matters to attend to, one or two persons to see. One of them was an aunt of mine, my only relation, who quarrelled with poor father as long as he lived about some silly matter that had neither right nor wrong to it. She left her money to me when she died. I used always to go and see her for decency’s sake. I had so much to do before night that I didn’t know where to begin. I felt inclined to sit down on the kerb and hold my head in my hands. It was as if an engine had been started going under my skull. Finally I sat down in the first cab that came along and it was a hard matter to keep on sitting there I can tell you, while we rolled up and down the streets, pulling up here and there, the parcels accumulating round me and the engine in my head gathering more way every minute. The composure of the people on the pavements was provoking to a degree, and as to the people in shops, they were benumbed, more than half frozen — imbecile. Funny how it affects you to be in a peculiar state of mind: everybody that does not act up to your excitement seems so confoundedly unfriendly. And my state of mind what with the hurry, the worry and a growing exultation was peculiar enough. That engine in my head went round at its top speed hour after hour till eleven at about at night it let up on me suddenly at the entrance to the Dock before large iron gates in a dead wall.”

* * * * *

These gates were closed and locked. The cabby, after shooting his things off the roof of his machine into young Powell’s arms, drove away leaving him alone with his sea-chest, a sail cloth bag and a few parcels on the pavement about his feet. It was a dark, narrow thoroughfare he told us. A mean row of houses on the other side looked empty: there wasn’t the smallest gleam of light in them. The white-hot glare of a gin palace a good way off made the intervening piece of the street pitch black. Some human shapes appearing mysteriously, as if they had sprung up from the dark ground, shunned the edge of the faint light thrown down by the gateway lamps. These figures were wary in their movements and perfectly silent of foot, like beasts of prey slinking about a camp fire. Powell gathered up his belongings and hovered over them like a hen over her brood. A gruffly insinuating voice said:

“Let’s carry your things in, Capt’in! I’ve got my pal ‘ere.”

He was a tall, bony, grey-haired ruffian with a bulldog jaw, in a torn cotton shirt and moleskin trousers. The shadow of his hobnailed boots was enormous and coffinlike. His pal, who didn’t come up much higher than his elbow, stepping forward exhibited a pale face with a long drooping nose and no chin to speak of. He seemed to have just scrambled out of a dust-bin in a tam-o’shanter cap and a tattered soldier’s coat much too long for him. Being so deadly white he looked like a horrible dirty invalid

in a ragged dressing gown. The coat flapped open in front and the rest of his apparel consisted of one brace which crossed his naked, bony chest, and a pair of trousers. He blinked rapidly as if dazed by the faint light, while his patron, the old bandit, glowered at young Powell from under his beetling brow.

“Say the word, Capt’in. The bobby’ll let us in all right. ‘E knows both of us.”

“I didn’t answer him,” continued Mr. Powell. “I was listening to footsteps on the other side of the gate, echoing between the walls of the warehouses as if in an uninhabited town of very high buildings dark from basement to roof. You could never have guessed that within a stone’s throw there was an open sheet of water and big ships lying afloat. The few gas lamps showing up a bit of brick work here and there, appeared in the blackness like penny dips in a range of cellars — and the solitary footsteps came on, tramp, tramp. A dock policeman strode into the light on the other side of the gate, very broad-chested and stern.

“Hallo! What’s up here?”

“He was really surprised, but after some palaver he let me in together with the two loafers carrying my luggage. He grumbled at them however and slammed the gate violently with a loud clang. I was startled to discover how many night prowlers had collected in the darkness of the street in such a short time and without my being aware of it. Directly we were through they came surging against the bars, silent, like a mob of ugly spectres. But suddenly, up the street somewhere, perhaps near that public-house, a row started as if Bedlam had broken loose: shouts, yells, an awful shrill shriek — and at that noise all these heads vanished from behind the bars.

“Look at this,” marvelled the constable. “It’s a wonder to me they didn’t make off with your things while you were waiting.”

“I would have taken good care of that,” I said defiantly. But the constable wasn’t impressed.

“Much you would have done. The bag going off round one dark corner; the chest round another. Would you have run two ways at once? And anyhow you’d have been tripped up and jumped upon before you had run three yards. I tell you you’ve had a most extraordinary chance that there wasn’t one of them regular boys about to-night, in the High Street, to twig your loaded cab go by. Ted here is honest . . . You are on the honest lay, Ted, ain’t you?”

“Always was, orficer,” said the big ruffian with feeling. The other frail creature seemed dumb and only hopped about with the edge of its soldier coat touching the ground.

“Oh yes, I dare say,” said the constable. “Now then, forward, march . . . He’s that because he ain’t game for the other thing,” he confided to me. “He hasn’t got the nerve for it. However, I ain’t going to lose sight of them two till they go out through the gate. That little chap’s a devil. He’s got the nerve for anything, only he hasn’t got the muscle. Well! Well! You’ve had a chance to get in with a whole skin and with all your things.”

"I was incredulous a little. It seemed impossible that after getting ready with so much hurry and inconvenience I should have lost my chance of a start in life from such a cause. I asked:

"Does that sort of thing happen often so near the dock gates?"

"Often! No! Of course not often. But it ain't often either that a man comes along with a cabload of things to join a ship at this time of night. I've been in the dock police thirteen years and haven't seen it done once."

"Meantime we followed my sea-chest which was being carried down a sort of deep narrow lane, separating two high warehouses, between honest Ted and his little devil of a pal who had to keep up a trot to the other's stride. The skirt of his soldier's coat floating behind him nearly swept the ground so that he seemed to be running on castors. At the corner of the gloomy passage a rigged jib boom with a dolphin-striker ending in an arrow-head stuck out of the night close to a cast iron lamp-post. It was the quay side. They set down their load in the light and honest Ted asked hoarsely:

"Where's your ship, gov'nor?"

"I didn't know. The constable was interested at my ignorance.

"Don't know where your ship is?" he asked with curiosity. "And you the second officer! Haven't you been working on board of her?"

"I couldn't explain that the only work connected with my appointment was the work of chance. I told him briefly that I didn't know her at all. At this he remarked:

"So I see. Here she is, right before you. That's her."

"At once the head-gear in the gas light inspired me with interest and respect; the spars were big, the chains and ropes stout and the whole thing looked powerful and trustworthy. Barely touched by the light her bows rose faintly alongside the narrow strip of the quay; the rest of her was a black smudge in the darkness. Here I was face to face with my start in life. We walked in a body a few steps on a greasy pavement between her side and the towering wall of a warehouse and I hit my shins cruelly against the end of the gangway. The constable hailed her quietly in a bass undertone 'Ferndale there!' A feeble and dismal sound, something in the nature of a buzzing groan, answered from behind the bulwarks.

"I distinguished vaguely an irregular round knob, of wood, perhaps, resting on the rail. It did not move in the least; but as another broken-down buzz like a still fainter echo of the first dismal sound proceeded from it I concluded it must be the head of the ship-keeper. The stalwart constable jeered in a mock-official manner.

"Second officer coming to join. Move yourself a bit."

"The truth of the statement touched me in the pit of the stomach (you know that's the spot where emotion gets home on a man) for it was borne upon me that really and truly I was nothing but a second officer of a ship just like any other second officer, to that constable. I was moved by this solid evidence of my new dignity. Only his tone offended me. Nevertheless I gave him the tip he was looking for. Thereupon he lost all interest in me, humorous or otherwise, and walked away driving sternly before him the honest Ted, who went off grumbling to himself like a hungry ogre, and his horrible

dumb little pal in the soldier's coat, who, from first to last, never emitted the slightest sound.

"It was very dark on the quarter deck of the Ferndale between the deep bulwarks overshadowed by the break of the poop and frowned upon by the front of the warehouse. I plumped down on to my chest near the after hatch as if my legs had been jerked from under me. I felt suddenly very tired and languid. The ship-keeper, whom I could hardly make out hung over the capstan in a fit of weak pitiful coughing. He gasped out very low 'Oh! dear! Oh! dear!' and struggled for breath so long that I got up alarmed and irresolute.

"I've been took like this since last Christmas twelvemonth. It ain't nothing."

"He seemed a hundred years old at least. I never saw him properly because he was gone ashore and out of sight when I came on deck in the morning; but he gave me the notion of the feeblest creature that ever breathed. His voice was thin like the buzzing of a mosquito. As it would have been cruel to demand assistance from such a shadowy wreck I went to work myself, dragging my chest along a pitch-black passage under the poop deck, while he sighed and moaned around me as if my exertions were more than his weakness could stand. At last as I banged pretty heavily against the bulkheads he warned me in his faint breathless wheeze to be more careful.

"What's the matter?" I asked rather roughly, not relishing to be admonished by this forlorn broken-down ghost.

"Nothing! Nothing, sir," he protested so hastily that he lost his poor breath again and I felt sorry for him. "Only the captain and his missus are sleeping on board. She's a lady that mustn't be disturbed. They came about half-past eight, and we had a permit to have lights in the cabin till ten to-night."

"This struck me as a considerable piece of news. I had never been in a ship where the captain had his wife with him. I'd heard fellows say that captains' wives could work a lot of mischief on board ship if they happened to take a dislike to anyone; especially the new wives if young and pretty. The old and experienced wives on the other hand fancied they knew more about the ship than the skipper himself and had an eye like a hawk's for what went on. They were like an extra chief mate of a particularly sharp and unfeeling sort who made his report in the evening. The best of them were a nuisance. In the general opinion a skipper with his wife on board was more difficult to please; but whether to show off his authority before an admiring female or from loving anxiety for her safety or simply from irritation at her presence — nobody I ever heard on the subject could tell for certain.

"After I had bundled in my things somehow I struck a match and had a dazzling glimpse of my berth; then I pitched the roll of my bedding into the bunk but took no trouble to spread it out. I wasn't sleepy now, neither was I tired. And the thought that I was done with the earth for many many months to come made me feel very quiet and self-contained as it were. Sailors will understand what I mean."

Marlow nodded. "It is a strictly professional feeling," he commented. "But other professions or trades know nothing of it. It is only this calling whose primary appeal

lies in the suggestion of restless adventure which holds out that deep sensation to those who embrace it. It is difficult to define, I admit.”

“I should call it the peace of the sea,” said Mr. Charles Powell in an earnest tone but looking at us as though he expected to be met by a laugh of derision and were half prepared to salve his reputation for common sense by joining in it. But neither of us laughed at Mr. Charles Powell in whose start in life we had been called to take a part. He was lucky in his audience.

“A very good name,” said Marlow looking at him approvingly. “A sailor finds a deep feeling of security in the exercise of his calling. The exacting life of the sea has this advantage over the life of the earth that its claims are simple and cannot be evaded.”

“Gospel truth,” assented Mr. Powell. “No! they cannot be evaded.”

That an excellent understanding should have established itself between my old friend and our new acquaintance was remarkable enough. For they were exactly dissimilar — one individuality projecting itself in length and the other in breadth, which is already a sufficient ground for irreconcilable difference. Marlow who was lanky, loose, quietly composed in varied shades of brown robbed of every vestige of gloss, had a narrow, veiled glance, the neutral bearing and the secret irritability which go together with a predisposition to congestion of the liver. The other, compact, broad and sturdy of limb, seemed extremely full of sound organs functioning vigorously all the time in order to keep up the brilliance of his colouring, the light curl of his coal-black hair and the lustre of his eyes, which asserted themselves roundly in an open, manly face. Between two such organisms one would not have expected to find the slightest temperamental accord. But I have observed that profane men living in ships like the holy men gathered together in monasteries develop traits of profound resemblance. This must be because the service of the sea and the service of a temple are both detached from the vanities and errors of a world which follows no severe rule. The men of the sea understand each other very well in their view of earthly things, for simplicity is a good counsellor and isolation not a bad educator. A turn of mind composed of innocence and scepticism is common to them all, with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game. Mr. Powell took me aside to say,

“I like the things he says.”

“You understand each other pretty well,” I observed.

“I know his sort,” said Powell, going to the window to look at his cutter still riding to the flood. “He’s the sort that’s always chasing some notion or other round and round his head just for the fun of the thing.”

“Keeps them in good condition,” I said.

“Lively enough I dare say,” he admitted.

“Would you like better a man who let his notions lie curled up?”

“That I wouldn’t,” answered our new acquaintance. Clearly he was not difficult to get on with. “I like him, very well,” he continued, “though it isn’t easy to make him out. He seems to be up to a thing or two. What’s he doing?”

I informed him that our friend Marlow had retired from the sea in a sort of half-hearted fashion some years ago.

Mr. Powell's comment was: "Fancied had enough of it?"

"Fancied's the very word to use in this connection," I observed, remembering the subtly provisional character of Marlow's long sojourn amongst us. From year to year he dwelt on land as a bird rests on the branch of a tree, so tense with the power of brusque flight into its true element that it is incomprehensible why it should sit still minute after minute. The sea is the sailor's true element, and Marlow, lingering on shore, was to me an object of incredulous commiseration like a bird, which, secretly, should have lost its faith in the high virtue of flying.

Chapter 2 — The Fynes and the Girl-friend

We were on our feet in the room by then, and Marlow, brown and deliberate, approached the window where Mr. Powell and I had retired. "What was the name of your chance again?" he asked. Mr. Powell stared for a moment.

"Oh! The Ferndale. A Liverpool ship. Composite built."

"Ferndale," repeated Marlow thoughtfully. "Ferndale."

"Know her?"

"Our friend," I said, "knows something of every ship. He seems to have gone about the seas prying into things considerably."

Marlow smiled.

"I've seen her, at least once."

"The finest sea-boat ever launched," declared Mr. Powell sturdily. "Without exception."

"She looked a stout, comfortable ship," assented Marlow. "Uncommonly comfortable. Not very fast tho'."

"She was fast enough for any reasonable man — when I was in her," growled Mr. Powell with his back to us.

"Any ship is that — for a reasonable man," generalized Marlow in a conciliatory tone. "A sailor isn't a globe-trotter."

"No," muttered Mr. Powell.

"Time's nothing to him," advanced Marlow.

"I don't suppose it's much," said Mr. Powell. "All the same a quick passage is a feather in a man's cap."

"True. But that ornament is for the use of the master only. And by the by what was his name?"

"The master of the Ferndale? Anthony. Captain Anthony."

"Just so. Quite right," approved Marlow thoughtfully. Our new acquaintance looked over his shoulder.

"What do you mean? Why is it more right than if it had been Brown?"

“He has known him probably,” I explained. “Marlow here appears to know something of every soul that ever went afloat in a sailor’s body.”

Mr. Powell seemed wonderfully amenable to verbal suggestions for looking again out of the window, he muttered:

“He was a good soul.”

This clearly referred to Captain Anthony of the *Ferndale*. Marlow addressed his protest to me.

“I did not know him. I really didn’t. He was a good soul. That’s nothing very much out of the way — is it? And I didn’t even know that much of him. All I knew of him was an accident called *Fyne*.”

At this Mr. Powell who evidently could be rebellious too turned his back squarely on the window.

“What on earth do you mean?” he asked. “An — accident — called *Fyne*,” he repeated separating the words with emphasis.

Marlow was not disconcerted.

“I don’t mean accident in the sense of a mishap. Not in the least. *Fyne* was a good little man in the Civil Service. By accident I mean that which happens blindly and without intelligent design. That’s generally the way a brother-in-law happens into a man’s life.”

Marlow’s tone being apologetic and our new acquaintance having again turned to the window I took it upon myself to say:

“You are justified. There is very little intelligent design in the majority of marriages; but they are none the worse for that. Intelligence leads people astray as far as passion sometimes. I know you are not a cynic.”

Marlow smiled his retrospective smile which was kind as though he bore no grudge against people he used to know.

“Little *Fyne*’s marriage was quite successful. There was no design at all in it. *Fyne*, you must know, was an enthusiastic pedestrian. He spent his holidays tramping all over our native land. His tastes were simple. He put infinite conviction and perseverance into his holidays. At the proper season you would meet in the fields, *Fyne*, a serious-faced, broad-chested, little man, with a shabby knap-sack on his back, making for some church steeple. He had a horror of roads. He wrote once a little book called the ‘*Tramp’s Itinerary*,’ and was recognised as an authority on the footpaths of England. So one year, in his favourite over-the-fields, back-way fashion he entered a pretty Surrey village where he met Miss Anthony. Pure accident, you see. They came to an understanding, across some stile, most likely. Little *Fyne* held very solemn views as to the destiny of women on this earth, the nature of our sublunary love, the obligations of this transient life and so on. He probably disclosed them to his future wife. Miss Anthony’s views of life were very decided too but in a different way. I don’t know the story of their wooing. I imagine it was carried on clandestinely and, I am certain, with portentous gravity, at the back of copses, behind hedges . . .

“Why was it carried on clandestinely?” I inquired.

“Because of the lady’s father. He was a savage sentimentalist who had his own decided views of his paternal prerogatives. He was a terror; but the only evidence of imaginative faculty about Fyne was his pride in his wife’s parentage. It stimulated his ingenuity too. Difficult — is it not? — to introduce one’s wife’s maiden name into general conversation. But my simple Fyne made use of Captain Anthony for that purpose, or else I would never even have heard of the man. “My wife’s sailor-brother” was the phrase. He trotted out the sailor-brother in a pretty wide range of subjects: Indian and colonial affairs, matters of trade, talk of travels, of seaside holidays and so on. Once I remember “My wife’s sailor-brother Captain Anthony” being produced in connection with nothing less recondite than a sunset. And little Fyne never failed to add “The son of Carleon Anthony, the poet — you know.” He used to lower his voice for that statement, and people were impressed or pretended to be.”

The late Carleon Anthony, the poet, sang in his time of the domestic and social amenities of our age with a most felicitous versification, his object being, in his own words, “to glorify the result of six thousand years’ evolution towards the refinement of thought, manners and feelings.” Why he fixed the term at six thousand years I don’t know. His poems read like sentimental novels told in verse of a really superior quality. You felt as if you were being taken out for a delightful country drive by a charming lady in a pony carriage. But in his domestic life that same Carleon Anthony showed traces of the primitive cave-dweller’s temperament. He was a massive, implacable man with a handsome face, arbitrary and exacting with his dependants, but marvellously suave in his manner to admiring strangers. These contrasted displays must have been particularly exasperating to his long-suffering family. After his second wife’s death his boy, whom he persisted by a mere whim in educating at home, ran away in conventional style and, as if disgusted with the amenities of civilization, threw himself, figuratively speaking, into the sea. The daughter (the elder of the two children) either from compassion or because women are naturally more enduring, remained in bondage to the poet for several years, till she too seized a chance of escape by throwing herself into the arms, the muscular arms, of the pedestrian Fyne. This was either great luck or great sagacity. A civil servant is, I should imagine, the last human being in the world to preserve those traits of the cave-dweller from which she was fleeing. Her father would never consent to see her after the marriage. Such unforgiving selfishness is difficult to understand unless as a perverse sort of refinement. There were also doubts as to Carleon Anthony’s complete sanity for some considerable time before he died.

Most of the above I elicited from Marlow, for all I knew of Carleon Anthony was his unexciting but fascinating verse. Marlow assured me that the Fyne marriage was perfectly successful and even happy, in an earnest, unplayful fashion, being blessed besides by three healthy, active, self-reliant children, all girls. They were all pedestrians too. Even the youngest would wander away for miles if not restrained. Mrs. Fyne had a ruddy out-of-doors complexion and wore blouses with a starched front like a man’s shirt, a stand-up collar and a long necktie. Marlow had made their acquaintance one

summer in the country, where they were accustomed to take a cottage for the holidays
...

At this point we were interrupted by Mr. Powell who declared that he must leave us. The tide was on the turn, he announced coming away from the window abruptly. He wanted to be on board his cutter before she swung and of course he would sleep on board. Never slept away from the cutter while on a cruise. He was gone in a moment, unceremoniously, but giving us no offence and leaving behind an impression as though we had known him for a long time. The ingenuous way he had told us of his start in life had something to do with putting him on that footing with us. I gave no thought to seeing him again.

Marlow expressed a confident hope of coming across him before long.

“He cruises about the mouth of the river all the summer. He will be easy to find any week-end,” he remarked ringing the bell so that we might settle up with the waiter.

* * * * *

Later on I asked Marlow why he wished to cultivate this chance acquaintance. He confessed apologetically that it was the commonest sort of curiosity. I flatter myself that I understand all sorts of curiosity. Curiosity about daily facts, about daily things, about daily men. It is the most respectable faculty of the human mind — in fact I cannot conceive the uses of an incurious mind. It would be like a chamber perpetually locked up. But in this particular case Mr. Powell seemed to have given us already a complete insight into his personality such as it was; a personality capable of perception and with a feeling for the vagaries of fate, but essentially simple in itself.

Marlow agreed with me so far. He explained however that his curiosity was not excited by Mr. Powell exclusively. It originated a good way further back in the fact of his accidental acquaintance with the Fynes, in the country. This chance meeting with a man who had sailed with Captain Anthony had revived it. It had revived it to some purpose, to such purpose that to me too was given the knowledge of its origin and of its nature. It was given to me in several stages, at intervals which are not indicated here. On this first occasion I remarked to Marlow with some surprise:

“But, if I remember rightly you said you didn’t know Captain Anthony.”

“No. I never saw the man. It’s years ago now, but I seem to hear solemn little Fyne’s deep voice announcing the approaching visit of his wife’s brother “the son of the poet, you know.” He had just arrived in London from a long voyage, and, directly his occupations permitted, was coming down to stay with his relatives for a few weeks. No doubt we two should find many things to talk about by ourselves in reference to our common calling, added little Fyne portentously in his grave undertones, as if the Mercantile Marine were a secret society.

You must understand that I cultivated the Fynes only in the country, in their holiday time. This was the third year. Of their existence in town I knew no more than may be inferred from analogy. I played chess with Fyne in the late afternoon, and sometimes came over to the cottage early enough to have tea with the whole family at a big round table. They sat about it, an unsmiling, sunburnt company of very few words

indeed. Even the children were silent and as if contemptuous of each other and of their elders. Fyne muttered sometimes deep down in his chest some insignificant remark. Mrs. Fyne smiled mechanically (she had splendid teeth) while distributing tea and bread and butter. A something which was not coldness, nor yet indifference, but a sort of peculiar self-possession gave her the appearance of a very trustworthy, very capable and excellent governess; as if Fyne were a widower and the children not her own but only entrusted to her calm, efficient, unemotional care. One expected her to address Fyne as Mr. When she called him John it surprised one like a shocking familiarity. The atmosphere of that holiday was — if I may put it so — brightly dull. Healthy faces, fair complexions, clear eyes, and never a frank smile in the whole lot, unless perhaps from a girl-friend.

The girl-friend problem exercised me greatly. How and where the Fynes got all these pretty creatures to come and stay with them I can't imagine. I had at first the wild suspicion that they were obtained to amuse Fyne. But I soon discovered that he could hardly tell one from the other, though obviously their presence met with his solemn approval. These girls in fact came for Mrs. Fyne. They treated her with admiring deference. She answered to some need of theirs. They sat at her feet. They were like disciples. It was very curious. Of Fyne they took but scanty notice. As to myself I was made to feel that I did not exist.

After tea we would sit down to chess and then Fyne's everlasting gravity became faintly tinged by an attenuated gleam of something inward which resembled sly satisfaction. Of the divine frivolity of laughter he was only capable over a chess-board. Certain positions of the game struck him as humorous, which nothing else on earth could do . . .

"He used to beat you," I asserted with confidence.

"Yes. He used to beat me," Marlow owned up hastily.

So he and Fyne played two games after tea. The children romped together outside, gravely, unplayfully, as one would expect from Fyne's children, and Mrs. Fyne would be gone to the bottom of the garden with the girl-friend of the week. She always walked off directly after tea with her arm round the girl-friend's waist. Marlow said that there was only one girl-friend with whom he had conversed at all. It had happened quite unexpectedly, long after he had given up all hope of getting into touch with these reserved girl-friends.

One day he saw a woman walking about on the edge of a high quarry, which rose a sheer hundred feet, at least, from the road winding up the hill out of which it had been excavated. He shouted warningly to her from below where he happened to be passing. She was really in considerable danger. At the sound of his voice she started back and retreated out of his sight amongst some young Scotch firs growing near the very brink of the precipice.

"I sat down on a bank of grass," Marlow went on. "She had given me a turn. The hem of her skirt seemed to float over that awful sheer drop, she was so close to the edge. An absurd thing to do. A perfectly mad trick — for no conceivable object! I

was reflecting on the foolhardiness of the average girl and remembering some other instances of the kind, when she came into view walking down the steep curve of the road. She had Mrs. Fyne's walking-stick and was escorted by the Fyne dog. Her dead white face struck me with astonishment, so that I forgot to raise my hat. I just sat and stared. The dog, a vivacious and amiable animal which for some inscrutable reason had bestowed his friendship on my unworthy self, rushed up the bank demonstratively and insinuated himself under my arm.

The girl-friend (it was one of them) went past some way as though she had not seen me, then stopped and called the dog to her several times; but he only nestled closer to my side, and when I tried to push him away developed that remarkable power of internal resistance by which a dog makes himself practically immovable by anything short of a kick. She looked over her shoulder and her arched eyebrows frowned above her blanched face. It was almost a scowl. Then the expression changed. She looked unhappy. "Come here!" she cried once more in an angry and distressed tone. I took off my hat at last, but the dog hanging out his tongue with that cheerfully imbecile expression some dogs know so well how to put on when it suits their purpose, pretended to be deaf.

She cried from the distance desperately.

"Perhaps you will take him to the cottage then. I can't wait."

"I won't be responsible for that dog," I protested getting down the bank and advancing towards her. She looked very hurt, apparently by the desertion of the dog. "But if you let me walk with you he will follow us all right," I suggested.

She moved on without answering me. The dog launched himself suddenly full speed down the road receding from us in a small cloud of dust. It vanished in the distance, and presently we came up with him lying on the grass. He panted in the shade of the hedge with shining eyes but pretended not to see us. We had not exchanged a word so far. The girl by my side gave him a scornful glance in passing.

"He offered to come with me," she remarked bitterly.

"And then abandoned you!" I sympathized. "It looks very unchivalrous. But that's merely his want of tact. I believe he meant to protest against your reckless proceedings. What made you come so near the edge of that quarry? The earth might have given way. Haven't you noticed a smashed fir tree at the bottom? Tumbled over only the other morning after a night's rain."

"I don't see why I shouldn't be as reckless as I please."

I was nettled by her brusque manner of asserting her folly, and I told her that neither did I as far as that went, in a tone which almost suggested that she was welcome to break her neck for all I cared. This was considerably more than I meant, but I don't like rude girls. I had been introduced to her only the day before — at the round tea-table — and she had barely acknowledged the introduction. I had not caught her name but I had noticed her fine, arched eyebrows which, so the physiognomists say, are a sign of courage.

I examined her appearance quietly. Her hair was nearly black, her eyes blue, deeply shaded by long dark eyelashes. She had a little colour now. She looked straight before her; the corner of her lip on my side drooped a little; her chin was fine, somewhat pointed. I went on to say that some regard for others should stand in the way of one's playing with danger. I urged playfully the distress of the poor Fynes in case of accident, if nothing else. I told her that she did not know the bucolic mind. Had she given occasion for a coroner's inquest the verdict would have been suicide, with the implication of unhappy love. They would never be able to understand that she had taken the trouble to climb over two post-and-rail fences only for the fun of being reckless. Indeed even as I talked chaffingly I was greatly struck myself by the fact.

She retorted that once one was dead what horrid people thought of one did not matter. It was said with infinite contempt; but something like a suppressed quaver in the voice made me look at her again. I perceived then that her thick eyelashes were wet. This surprising discovery silenced me as you may guess. She looked unhappy. And — I don't know how to say it — well — it suited her. The clouded brow, the pained mouth, the vague fixed glance! A victim. And this characteristic aspect made her attractive; an individual touch — you know.

The dog had run on ahead and now gazed at us by the side of the Fyne's garden-gate in a tense attitude and wagging his stumpy tail very, very slowly, with an air of concentrated attention. The girl-friend of the Fynes bolted violently through the aforesaid gate and into the cottage leaving me on the road — astounded.

A couple of hours afterwards I returned to the cottage for chess as usual. I saw neither the girl nor Mrs. Fyne then. We had our two games and on parting I warned Fyne that I was called to town on business and might be away for some time. He regretted it very much. His brother-in-law was expected next day but he didn't know whether he was a chess-player. Captain Anthony ("the son of the poet — you know") was of a retiring disposition, shy with strangers, unused to society and very much devoted to his calling, Fyne explained. All the time they had been married he could be induced only once before to come and stay with them for a few days. He had had a rather unhappy boyhood; and it made him a silent man. But no doubt, concluded Fyne, as if dealing portentously with a mystery, we two sailors should find much to say to one another.

This point was never settled. I was detained in town from week to week till it seemed hardly worth while to go back. But as I had kept on my rooms in the farmhouse I concluded to go down again for a few days.

It was late, deep dusk, when I got out at our little country station. My eyes fell on the unmistakable broad back and the muscular legs in cycling stockings of little Fyne. He passed along the carriages rapidly towards the rear of the train, which presently pulled out and left him solitary at the end of the rustic platform. When he came back to where I waited I perceived that he was much perturbed, so perturbed as to forget the convention of the usual greetings. He only exclaimed Oh! on recognizing me, and stopped irresolute. When I asked him if he had been expecting somebody by that

train he didn't seem to know. He stammered disconnectedly. I looked hard at him. To all appearances he was perfectly sober; moreover to suspect Fyne of a lapse from the proprieties high or low, great or small, was absurd. He was also a too serious and deliberate person to go mad suddenly. But as he seemed to have forgotten that he had a tongue in his head I concluded I would leave him to his mystery. To my surprise he followed me out of the station and kept by my side, though I did not encourage him. I did not however repulse his attempts at conversation. He was no longer expecting me, he said. He had given me up. The weather had been uniformly fine — and so on. I gathered also that the son of the poet had curtailed his stay somewhat and gone back to his ship the day before.

That information touched me but little. Believing in heredity in moderation I knew well how sea-life fashions a man outwardly and stamps his soul with the mark of a certain prosaic fitness — because a sailor is not an adventurer. I expressed no regret at missing Captain Anthony and we proceeded in silence till, on approaching the holiday cottage, Fyne suddenly and unexpectedly broke it by the hurried declaration that he would go on with me a little farther.

“Go with you to your door,” he mumbled and started forward to the little gate where the shadowy figure of Mrs. Fyne hovered, clearly on the lookout for him. She was alone. The children must have been already in bed and I saw no attending girl-friend shadow near her vague but unmistakable form, half-lost in the obscurity of the little garden.

I heard Fyne exclaim “Nothing” and then Mrs. Fyne's well-trained, responsible voice uttered the words, “It's what I have said,” with incisive equanimity. By that time I had passed on, raising my hat. Almost at once Fyne caught me up and slowed down to my strolling gait which must have been infinitely irksome to his high pedestrian faculties. I am sure that all his muscular person must have suffered from awful physical boredom; but he did not attempt to charm it away by conversation. He preserved a portentous and dreary silence. And I was bored too. Suddenly I perceived the menace of even worse boredom. Yes! He was so silent because he had something to tell me.

I became extremely frightened. But man, reckless animal, is so made that in him curiosity, the paltriest curiosity, will overcome all terrors, every disgust, and even despair itself. To my laconic invitation to come in for a drink he answered by a deep, gravely accented: “Thanks, I will” as though it were a response in church. His face as seen in the lamplight gave me no clue to the character of the impending communication; as indeed from the nature of things it couldn't do, its normal expression being already that of the utmost possible seriousness. It was perfect and immovable; and for a certainty if he had something excruciatingly funny to tell me it would be all the same.

He gazed at me earnestly and delivered himself of some weighty remarks on Mrs. Fyne's desire to befriend, counsel, and guide young girls of all sorts on the path of life. It was a voluntary mission. He approved his wife's action and also her views and principles in general.

All this with a solemn countenance and in deep measured tones. Yet somehow I got an irresistible conviction that he was exasperated by something in particular. In the unworthy hope of being amused by the misfortunes of a fellow-creature I asked him point-blank what was wrong now.

What was wrong was that a girl-friend was missing. She had been missing precisely since six o'clock that morning. The woman who did the work of the cottage saw her going out at that hour, for a walk. The pedestrian Fyne's ideas of a walk were extensive, but the girl did not turn up for lunch, nor yet for tea, nor yet for dinner. She had not turned up by footpath, road or rail. He had been reluctant to make inquiries. It would have set all the village talking. The Fynes had expected her to reappear every moment, till the shades of the night and the silence of slumber had stolen gradually over the wide and peaceful rural landscape commanded by the cottage.

After telling me that much Fyne sat helpless in unconclusive agony. Going to bed was out of the question — neither could any steps be taken just then. What to do with himself he did not know!

I asked him if this was the same young lady I saw a day or two before I went to town? He really could not remember. Was she a girl with dark hair and blue eyes? I asked further. He really couldn't tell what colour her eyes were. He was very unobservant except as to the peculiarities of footpaths, on which he was an authority.

I thought with amazement and some admiration that Mrs. Fyne's young disciples were to her husband's gravity no more than evanescent shadows. However, with but little hesitation Fyne ventured to affirm that — yes, her hair was of some dark shade.

"We had a good deal to do with that girl first and last," he explained solemnly; then getting up as if moved by a spring he snatched his cap off the table. "She may be back in the cottage," he cried in his bass voice. I followed him out on the road.

It was one of those dewy, clear, starry nights, oppressing our spirit, crushing our pride, by the brilliant evidence of the awful loneliness, of the hopeless obscure insignificance of our globe lost in the splendid revelation of a glittering, soulless universe. I hate such skies. Daylight is friendly to man toiling under a sun which warms his heart; and cloudy soft nights are more kindly to our littleness. I nearly ran back again to my lighted parlour; Fyne fussing in a knicker-bocker suit before the hosts of heaven, on a shadowy earth, about a transient, phantom-like girl, seemed too ridiculous to associate with. On the other hand there was something fascinating in the very absurdity. He cut along in his best pedestrian style and I found myself let in for a spell of severe exercise at eleven o'clock at night.

In the distance over the fields and trees smudging and blotching the vast obscurity, one lighted window of the cottage with the blind up was like a bright beacon kept alight to guide the lost wanderer. Inside, at the table bearing the lamp, we saw Mrs. Fyne sitting with folded arms and not a hair of her head out of place. She looked exactly like a governess who had put the children to bed; and her manner to me was just the neutral manner of a governess. To her husband, too, for that matter.

Fyne told her that I was fully informed. Not a muscle of her ruddy smooth handsome face moved. She had schooled herself into that sort of thing. Having seen two successive wives of the delicate poet chivied and worried into their graves, she had adopted that cool, detached manner to meet her gifted father's outbreaks of selfish temper. It had now become a second nature. I suppose she was always like that; even in the very hour of elopement with Fyne. That transaction when one remembered it in her presence acquired a quaintly marvellous aspect to one's imagination. But somehow her self-possession matched very well little Fyne's invariable solemnity.

I was rather sorry for him. Wasn't he worried! The agony of solemnity. At the same time I was amused. I didn't take a gloomy view of that "vanishing girl" trick. Somehow I couldn't. But I said nothing. None of us said anything. We sat about that big round table as if assembled for a conference and looked at each other in a sort of fatuous consternation. I would have ended by laughing outright if I had not been saved from that impropriety by poor Fyne becoming preposterous.

He began with grave anguish to talk of going to the police in the morning, of printing descriptive bills, of setting people to drag the ponds for miles around. It was extremely gruesome. I murmured something about communicating with the young lady's relatives. It seemed to me a very natural suggestion; but Fyne and his wife exchanged such a significant glance that I felt as though I had made a tactless remark.

But I really wanted to help poor Fyne; and as I could see that, manlike, he suffered from the present inability to act, the passive waiting, I said: "Nothing of this can be done till to-morrow. But as you have given me an insight into the nature of your thoughts I can tell you what may be done at once. We may go and look at the bottom of the old quarry which is on the level of the road, about a mile from here."

The couple made big eyes at this, and then I told them of my meeting with the girl. You may be surprised but I assure you I had not perceived this aspect of it till that very moment. It was like a startling revelation; the past throwing a sinister light on the future. Fyne opened his mouth gravely and as gravely shut it. Nothing more. Mrs. Fyne said, "You had better go," with an air as if her self-possession had been pricked with a pin in some secret place.

And I — you know how stupid I can be at times — I perceived with dismay for the first time that by pandering to Fyne's morbid fancies I had let myself in for some more severe exercise. And wasn't I sorry I spoke! You know how I hate walking — at least on solid, rural earth; for I can walk a ship's deck a whole foggy night through, if necessary, and think little of it. There is some satisfaction too in playing the vagabond in the streets of a big town till the sky pales above the ridges of the roofs. I have done that repeatedly for pleasure — of a sort. But to tramp the slumbering country-side in the dark is for me a wearisome nightmare of exertion.

With perfect detachment Mrs. Fyne watched me go out after her husband. That woman was flint.

* * * * *

The fresh night had a smell of soil, of turned-up sods like a grave — an association particularly odious to a sailor by its idea of confinement and narrowness; yes, even when he has given up the hope of being buried at sea; about the last hope a sailor gives up consciously after he has been, as it does happen, decoyed by some chance into the toils of the land. A strong grave-like sniff. The ditch by the side of the road must have been freshly dug in front of the cottage.

Once clear of the garden Fyne gathered way like a racing cutter. What was a mile to him — or twenty miles? You think he might have gone shrinkingly on such an errand. But not a bit of it. The force of pedestrian genius I suppose. I raced by his side in a mood of profound self-derision, and infinitely vexed with that minx. Because dead or alive I thought of her as a minx . . .”

I smiled incredulously at Marlow’s ferocity; but Marlow pausing with a whimsically retrospective air, never flinched.

“Yes, yes. Even dead. And now you are shocked. You see, you are such a chivalrous masculine beggar. But there is enough of the woman in my nature to free my judgment of women from glamorous reticency. And then, why should I upset myself? A woman is not necessarily either a doll or an angel to me. She is a human being, very much like myself. And I have come across too many dead souls lying so to speak at the foot of high unscaleable places for a merely possible dead body at the bottom of a quarry to strike my sincerity dumb.

The cliff-like face of the quarry looked forbiddingly impressive. I will admit that Fyne and I hung back for a moment before we made a plunge off the road into the bushes growing in a broad space at the foot of the towering limestone wall. These bushes were heavy with dew. There were also concealed mudholes in there. We crept and tumbled and felt about with our hands along the ground. We got wet, scratched, and plastered with mire all over our nether garments. Fyne fell suddenly into a strange cavity — probably a disused lime-kiln. His voice uplifted in grave distress sounded more than usually rich, solemn and profound. This was the comic relief of an absurdly dramatic situation. While hauling him out I permitted myself to laugh aloud at last. Fyne, of course, didn’t.

I need not tell you that we found nothing after a most conscientious search. Fyne even pushed his way into a decaying shed half-buried in dew-soaked vegetation. He struck matches, several of them too, as if to make absolutely sure that the vanished girl-friend of his wife was not hiding there. The short flares illuminated his grave, immovable countenance while I let myself go completely and laughed in peals.

I asked him if he really and truly supposed that any sane girl would go and hide in that shed; and if so why?

Disdainful of my mirth he merely muttered his basso-profundo thankfulness that we had not found her anywhere about there. Having grown extremely sensitive (an effect of irritation) to the tonalities, I may say, of this affair, I felt that it was only an imperfect, reserved, thankfulness, with one eye still on the possibilities of the several

ponds in the neighbourhood. And I remember I snorted, I positively snorted, at that poor Fyne.

What really jarred upon me was the rate of his walking. Differences in politics, in ethics and even in aesthetics need not arouse angry antagonism. One's opinion may change; one's tastes may alter — in fact they do. One's very conception of virtue is at the mercy of some felicitous temptation which may be sprung on one any day. All these things are perpetually on the swing. But a temperamental difference, temperament being immutable, is the parent of hate. That's why religious quarrels are the fiercest of all. My temperament, in matters pertaining to solid land, is the temperament of leisurely movement, of deliberate gait. And there was that little Fyne pounding along the road in a most offensive manner; a man wedded to thick-soled, laced boots; whereas my temperament demands thin shoes of the lightest kind. Of course there could never have been question of friendship between us; but under the provocation of having to keep up with his pace I began to dislike him actively. I begged sarcastically to know whether he could tell me if we were engaged in a farce or in a tragedy. I wanted to regulate my feelings which, I told him, were in an unbecoming state of confusion.

But Fyne was as impervious to sarcasm as a turtle. He tramped on, and all he did was to ejaculate twice out of his deep chest, vaguely, doubtfully.

"I am afraid . . . I am afraid! . . ."

This was tragic. The thump of his boots was the only sound in a shadowy world. I kept by his side with a comparatively ghostly, silent tread. By a strange illusion the road appeared to run up against a lot of low stars at no very great distance, but as we advanced new stretches of whitey-brown ribbon seemed to come up from under the black ground. I observed, as we went by, the lamp in my parlour in the farmhouse still burning. But I did not leave Fyne to run in and put it out. The impetus of his pedestrian excellence carried me past in his wake before I could make up my mind.

"Tell me, Fyne," I cried, "you don't think the girl was mad — do you?"

He answered nothing. Soon the lighted beacon-like window of the cottage came into view. Then Fyne uttered a solemn: "Certainly not," with profound assurance. But immediately after he added a "Very highly strung young person indeed," which unsettled me again. Was it a tragedy?

"Nobody ever got up at six o'clock in the morning to commit suicide," I declared crustily. "It's unheard of! This is a farce."

As a matter of fact it was neither farce nor tragedy.

Coming up to the cottage we had a view of Mrs. Fyne inside still sitting in the strong light at the round table with folded arms. It looked as though she had not moved her very head by as much as an inch since we went away. She was amazing in a sort of unsubtle way; crudely amazing — I thought. Why crudely? I don't know. Perhaps because I saw her then in a crude light. I mean this materially — in the light of an unshaded lamp. Our mental conclusions depend so much on momentary physical sensations — don't they? If the lamp had been shaded I should perhaps have gone home after expressing politely my concern at the Fynes' unpleasant predicament.

Losing a girl-friend in that manner is unpleasant. It is also mysterious. So mysterious that a certain mystery attaches to the people to whom such a thing does happen. Moreover I had never really understood the Fynes; he with his solemnity which extended to the very eating of bread and butter; she with that air of detachment and resolution in breasting the common-place current of their unexciting life, in which the cutting of bread and butter appeared to me, by a long way, the most dangerous episode. Sometimes I amused myself by supposing that to their minds this world of ours must be wearing a perfectly overwhelming aspect, and that their heads contained respectively awfully serious and extremely desperate thoughts — and trying to imagine what an exciting time they must be having of it in the inscrutable depths of their being. This last was difficult to a volatile person (I am sure that to the Fynes I was a volatile person) and the amusement in itself was not very great; but still — in the country — away from all mental stimulants! . . . My efforts had invested them with a sort of amusing profundity.

But when Fyne and I got back into the room, then in the searching, domestic, glare of the lamp, inimical to the play of fancy, I saw these two stripped of every vesture it had amused me to put on them for fun. Queer enough they were. Is there a human being that isn't that — more or less secretly? But whatever their secret, it was manifest to me that it was neither subtle nor profound. They were a good, stupid, earnest couple and very much bothered. They were that — with the usual unshaded crudity of average people. There was nothing in them that the lamplight might not touch without the slightest risk of indiscretion.

Directly we had entered the room Fyne announced the result by saying "Nothing" in the same tone as at the gate on his return from the railway station. And as then Mrs. Fyne uttered an incisive "It's what I've said," which might have been the veriest echo of her words in the garden. We three looked at each other as if on the brink of a disclosure. I don't know whether she was vexed at my presence. It could hardly be called intrusion — could it? Little Fyne began it. It had to go on. We stood before her, plastered with the same mud (Fyne was a sight!), scratched by the same brambles, conscious of the same experience. Yes. Before her. And she looked at us with folded arms, with an extraordinary fulness of assumed responsibility. I addressed her.

"You don't believe in an accident, Mrs. Fyne, do you?"

She shook her head in curt negation while, caked in mud and inexpressibly serious-faced, Fyne seemed to be backing her up with all the weight of his solemn presence. Nothing more absurd could be conceived. It was delicious. And I went on in deferential accents: "Am I to understand then that you entertain the theory of suicide?"

I don't know that I am liable to fits of delirium but by a sudden and alarming aberration while waiting for her answer I became mentally aware of three trained dogs dancing on their hind legs. I don't know why. Perhaps because of the pervading solemnity. There's nothing more solemn on earth than a dance of trained dogs.

"She has chosen to disappear. That's all."

In these words Mrs. Fyne answered me. The aggressive tone was too much for my endurance. In an instant I found myself out of the dance and down on all-fours so to speak, with liberty to bark and bite.

“The devil she has,” I cried. “Has chosen to . . . Like this, all at once, anyhow, regardless . . . I’ve had the privilege of meeting that reckless and brusque young lady and I must say that with her air of an angry victim . . . “

“Precisely,” Mrs. Fyne said very unexpectedly like a steel trap going off. I stared at her. How provoking she was! So I went on to finish my tirade. “She struck me at first sight as the most inconsiderate wrong-headed girl that I ever . . . “

“Why should a girl be more considerate than anyone else? More than any man, for instance?” inquired Mrs. Fyne with a still greater assertion of responsibility in her bearing.

Of course I exclaimed at this, not very loudly it is true, but forcibly. Were then the feelings of friends, relations and even of strangers to be disregarded? I asked Mrs. Fyne if she did not think it was a sort of duty to show elementary consideration not only for the natural feelings but even for the prejudices of one’s fellow-creatures.

Her answer knocked me over.

“Not for a woman.”

Just like that. I confess that I went down flat. And while in that collapsed state I learned the true nature of Mrs. Fyne’s feminist doctrine. It was not political, it was not social. It was a knock-me-down doctrine — a practical individualistic doctrine. You would not thank me for expounding it to you at large. Indeed I think that she herself did not enlighten me fully. There must have been things not fit for a man to hear. But shortly, and as far as my bewilderment allowed me to grasp its naïve atrociousness, it was something like this: that no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman (who by the mere fact of her sex was the predestined victim of conditions created by men’s selfish passions, their vices and their abominable tyranny) from taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence. She had even the right to go out of existence without considering anyone’s feelings or convenience since some women’s existences were made impossible by the shortsighted baseness of men.

I looked at her, sitting before the lamp at one o’clock in the morning, with her mature, smooth-cheeked face of masculine shape robbed of its freshness by fatigue; at her eyes dimmed by this senseless vigil. I looked also at Fyne; the mud was drying on him; he was obviously tired. The weariness of solemnity. But he preserved an unflinching, endorsing, gravity of expression. Endorsing it all as became a good, convinced husband.

“Oh! I see,” I said. “No consideration . . . Well I hope you like it.”

They amused me beyond the wildest imaginings of which I was capable. After the first shock, you understand, I recovered very quickly. The order of the world was safe enough. He was a civil servant and she his good and faithful wife. But when it comes to dealing with human beings anything, anything may be expected. So even

my astonishment did not last very long. How far she developed and illustrated that conscienceless and austere doctrine to the girl-friends, who were mere transient shadows to her husband, I could not tell. Any length I supposed. And he looked on, acquiesced, approved, just for that very reason — because these pretty girls were but shadows to him. O! Most virtuous Fyne! He cast his eyes down. He didn't like it. But I eyed him with hidden animosity for he had got me to run after him under somewhat false pretences.

Mrs. Fyne had only smiled at me very expressively, very self-confidently. "Oh I quite understand that you accept the fullest responsibility," I said. "I am the only ridiculous person in this — this — I don't know how to call it — performance. However, I've nothing more to do here, so I'll say good-night — or good morning, for it must be past one."

But before departing, in common decency, I offered to take any wires they might write. My lodgings were nearer the post-office than the cottage and I would send them off the first thing in the morning. I supposed they would wish to communicate, if only as to the disposal of the luggage, with the young lady's relatives . . .

Fyne, he looked rather downcast by then, thanked me and declined.

"There is really no one," he said, very grave.

"No one," I exclaimed.

"Practically," said curt Mrs. Fyne.

And my curiosity was aroused again.

"Ah! I see. An orphan."

Mrs. Fyne looked away weary and sombre, and Fyne said "Yes" impulsively, and then qualified the affirmative by the quaint statement: "To a certain extent."

I became conscious of a languid, exhausted embarrassment, bowed to Mrs. Fyne, and went out of the cottage to be confronted outside its door by the bespangled, cruel revelation of the Immensity of the Universe. The night was not sufficiently advanced for the stars to have paled; and the earth seemed to me more profoundly asleep — perhaps because I was alone now. Not having Fyne with me to set the pace I let myself drift, rather than walk, in the direction of the farmhouse. To drift is the only reposeful sort of motion (ask any ship if it isn't) and therefore consistent with thoughtfulness. And I pondered: How is one an orphan "to a certain extent"?

No amount of solemnity could make such a statement other than bizarre. What a strange condition to be in. Very likely one of the parents only was dead? But no; it couldn't be, since Fyne had said just before that "there was really no one" to communicate with. No one! And then remembering Mrs. Fyne's snappy "Practically" my thoughts fastened upon that lady as a more tangible object of speculation.

I wondered — and wondering I doubted — whether she really understood herself the theory she had propounded to me. Everything may be said — indeed ought to be said — providing we know how to say it. She probably did not. She was not intelligent enough for that. She had no knowledge of the world. She had got hold of words as a child might get hold of some poisonous pills and play with them for "dear, tiny little

marbles.” No! The domestic-slave daughter of Carleon Anthony and the little Fyne of the Civil Service (that flower of civilization) were not intelligent people. They were commonplace, earnest, without smiles and without guile. But he had his solemnities and she had her reveries, her lurid, violent, crude reveries. And I thought with some sadness that all these revolts and indignations, all these protests, revulsions of feeling, pangs of suffering and of rage, expressed but the uneasiness of sensual beings trying for their share in the joys of form, colour, sensations — the only riches of our world of senses. A poet may be a simple being but he is bound to be various and full of wiles, ingenious and irritable. I reflected on the variety of ways the ingenuity of the late bard of civilization would be able to invent for the tormenting of his dependants. Poets not being generally foresighted in practical affairs, no vision of consequences would restrain him. Yes. The Fynes were excellent people, but Mrs. Fyne wasn’t the daughter of a domestic tyrant for nothing. There were no limits to her revolt. But they were excellent people. It was clear that they must have been extremely good to that girl whose position in the world seemed somewhat difficult, with her face of a victim, her obvious lack of resignation and the bizarre status of orphan “to a certain extent.”

Such were my thoughts, but in truth I soon ceased to trouble about all these people. I found that my lamp had gone out leaving behind an awful smell. I fled from it up the stairs and went to bed in the dark. My slumbers — I suppose the one good in pedestrian exercise, confound it, is that it helps our natural callousness — my slumbers were deep, dreamless and refreshing.

My appetite at breakfast was not affected by my ignorance of the facts, motives, events and conclusions. I think that to understand everything is not good for the intellect. A well-stocked intelligence weakens the impulse to action; an overstocked one leads gently to idiocy. But Mrs. Fyne’s individualist woman-doctrine, naïvely unscrupulous, flitted through my mind. The salad of unprincipled notions she put into these girl-friends’ heads! Good innocent creature, worthy wife, excellent mother (of the strict governess type), she was as guileless of consequences as any determinist philosopher ever was.

As to honour — you know — it’s a very fine medieval inheritance which women never got hold of. It wasn’t theirs. Since it may be laid as a general principle that women always get what they want we must suppose they didn’t want it. In addition they are devoid of decency. I mean masculine decency. Cautiousness too is foreign to them — the heavy reasonable cautiousness which is our glory. And if they had it they would make of it a thing of passion, so that its own mother — I mean the mother of cautiousness — wouldn’t recognize it. Prudence with them is a matter of thrill like the rest of sublunary contrivances. “Sensation at any cost,” is their secret device. All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? Because in such completeness there is power — the kind of thrill they love most . . . “

“Do you expect me to agree to all this?” I interrupted.

“No, it isn’t necessary,” said Marlow, feeling the check to his eloquence but with a great effort at amiability. “You need not even understand it. I continue: with such

disposition what prevents women — to use the phrase an old boatswain of my acquaintance applied descriptively to his captain — what prevents them from “coming on deck and playing hell with the ship” generally, is that something in them precise and mysterious, acting both as restraint and as inspiration; their femininity in short which they think they can get rid of by trying hard, but can’t, and never will. Therefore we may conclude that, for all their enterprises, the world is and remains safe enough. Feeling, in my character of a lover of peace, soothed by that conclusion I prepared myself to enjoy a fine day.

And it was a fine day; a delicious day, with the horror of the Infinite veiled by the splendid tent of blue; a day innocently bright like a child with a washed face, fresh like an innocent young girl, suave in welcoming one’s respects like — like a Roman prelate. I love such days. They are perfection for remaining indoors. And I enjoyed it temperamentally in a chair, my feet up on the sill of the open window, a book in my hands and the murmured harmonies of wind and sun in my heart making an accompaniment to the rhythms of my author. Then looking up from the page I saw outside a pair of grey eyes thatched by ragged yellowy-white eyebrows gazing at me solemnly over the toes of my slippers. There was a grave, furrowed brow surmounting that portentous gaze, a brown tweed cap set far back on the perspiring head.

“Come inside,” I cried as heartily as my sinking heart would permit.

After a short but severe scuffle with his dog at the outer door, Fyne entered. I treated him without ceremony and only waved my hand towards a chair. Even before he sat down he gasped out:

“We’ve heard — midday post.”

Gasped out! The grave, immovable Fyne of the Civil Service, gasped! This was enough, you’ll admit, to cause me to put my feet to the ground swiftly. That fellow was always making me do things in subtle discord with my meditative temperament. No wonder that I had but a qualified liking for him. I said with just a suspicion of jeering tone:

“Of course. I told you last night on the road that it was a farce we were engaged in.”

He made the little parlour resound to its foundations with a note of anger positively sepulchral in its depth of tone. “Farce be hanged! She has bolted with my wife’s brother, Captain Anthony.” This outburst was followed by complete subsidence. He faltered miserably as he added from force of habit: “The son of the poet, you know.”

A silence fell. Fyne’s several expressions were so many examples of varied consistency. This was the discomfiture of solemnity. My interest of course was revived.

“But hold on,” I said. “They didn’t go together. Is it a suspicion or does she actually say that . . . “

“She has gone after him,” stated Fyne in comminatory tones. “By previous arrangement. She confesses that much.”

He added that it was very shocking. I asked him whether he should have preferred them going off together; and on what ground he based that preference. This was sheer

fun for me in regard of the fact that Fyne's too was a runaway match, which even got into the papers in its time, because the late indignant poet had no discretion and sought to avenge this outrage publicly in some absurd way before a bewigged judge. The dejected gesture of little Fyne's hand disarmed my mocking mood. But I could not help expressing my surprise that Mrs. Fyne had not detected at once what was brewing. Women were supposed to have an unerring eye.

He told me that his wife had been very much engaged in a certain work. I had always wondered how she occupied her time. It was in writing. Like her husband she too published a little book. Much later on I came upon it. It had nothing to do with pedestrianism. It was a sort of hand-book for women with grievances (and all women had them), a sort of compendious theory and practice of feminine free morality. It made you laugh at its transparent simplicity. But that authorship was revealed to me much later. I didn't of course ask Fyne what work his wife was engaged on; but I marvelled to myself at her complete ignorance of the world, of her own sex and of the other kind of sinners. Yet, where could she have got any experience? Her father had kept her strictly cloistered. Marriage with Fyne was certainly a change but only to another kind of clausturation. You may tell me that the ordinary powers of observation ought to have been enough. Why, yes! But, then, as she had set up for a guide and teacher, there was nothing surprising for me in the discovery that she was blind. That's quite in order. She was a profoundly innocent person; only it would not have been proper to tell her husband so.

Chapter 3 — Thrift — and the Child

But there was nothing improper in my observing to Fyne that, last night, Mrs. Fyne seemed to have some idea where that enterprising young lady had gone to. Fyne shook his head. No; his wife had been by no means so certain as she had pretended to be. She merely had her reasons to think, to hope, that the girl might have taken a room somewhere in London, had buried herself in town — in readiness or perhaps in horror of the approaching day —

He ceased and sat solemnly dejected, in a brown study. "What day?" I asked at last; but he did not hear me apparently. He diffused such portentous gloom into the atmosphere that I lost patience with him.

"What on earth are you so dismal about?" I cried, being genuinely surprised and puzzled. "One would think the girl was a state prisoner under your care."

And suddenly I became still more surprised at myself, at the way I had somehow taken for granted things which did appear queer when one thought them out.

"But why this secrecy? Why did they elope — if it is an elopement? Was the girl afraid of your wife? And your brother-in-law? What on earth possesses him to make a clandestine match of it? Was he afraid of your wife too?"

Fyne made an effort to rouse himself.

"Of course my brother-in-law, Captain Anthony, the son of . . ." He checked himself as if trying to break a bad habit. "He would be persuaded by her. We have been most friendly to the girl!"

"She struck me as a foolish and inconsiderate little person. But why should you and your wife take to heart so strongly mere folly — or even a want of consideration?"

"It's the most unscrupulous action," declared Fyne weightily — and sighed.

"I suppose she is poor," I observed after a short silence. "But after all . . ."

"You don't know who she is." Fyne had regained his average solemnity.

I confessed that I had not caught her name when his wife had introduced us to each other. "It was something beginning with an S- wasn't it?" And then with the utmost coolness Fyne remarked that it did not matter. The name was not her name.

"Do you mean to say that you made a young lady known to me under a false name?" I asked, with the amused feeling that the days of wonders and portents had not passed away yet. That the eminently serious Fynes should do such an exceptional thing was simply staggering. With a more hasty enunciation than usual little Fyne was sure that I would not demand an apology for this irregularity if I knew what her real name was. A sort of warmth crept into his deep tone.

"We have tried to befriend that girl in every way. She is the daughter and only child of de Barral."

Evidently he expected to produce a sensation; he kept his eyes fixed upon me prepared for some sign of it. But I merely returned his intense, awaiting gaze. For a time we stared at each other. Conscious of being reprehensibly dense I groped in the darkness of my mind: De Barral, De Barral — and all at once noise and light burst on me as if a window of my memory had been suddenly flung open on a street in the City. De Barral! But could it be the same? Surely not!

"The financier?" I suggested half incredulous.

"Yes," said Fyne; and in this instance his native solemnity of tone seemed to be strangely appropriate. "The convict."

Marlow looked at me, significantly, and remarked in an explanatory tone:

"One somehow never thought of de Barral as having any children, or any other home than the offices of the "Orb"; or any other existence, associations or interests than financial. I see you remember the crash . . ."

"I was away in the Indian Seas at the time," I said. "But of course —"

"Of course," Marlow struck in. "All the world . . . You may wonder at my slowness in recognizing the name. But you know that my memory is merely a mausoleum of proper names. There they lie inanimate, awaiting the magic touch — and not very prompt in arising when called, either. The name is the first thing I forget of a man. It is but just to add that frequently it is also the last, and this accounts for my possession of a good many anonymous memories. In de Barral's case, he got put away in my mausoleum in company with so many names of his own creation that really he had to throw off a monstrous heap of grisly bones before he stood before me at the call of the wizard Fyne. The fellow had a pretty fancy in names: the "Orb" Deposit Bank, the "Sceptre" Mutual

Aid Society, the “Thrift and Independence” Association. Yes, a very pretty taste in names; and nothing else besides — absolutely nothing — no other merit. Well yes. He had another name, but that’s pure luck — his own name of de Barral which he did not invent. I don’t think that a mere Jones or Brown could have fished out from the depths of the Incredible such a colossal manifestation of human folly as that man did. But it may be that I am underestimating the alacrity of human folly in rising to the bait. No doubt I am. The greed of that absurd monster is incalculable, unfathomable, inconceivable. The career of de Barral demonstrates that it will rise to a naked hook. He didn’t lure it with a fairy tale. He hadn’t enough imagination for it . . . “

“Was he a foreigner?” I asked. “It’s clearly a French name. I suppose it was his name?”

“Oh, he didn’t invent it. He was born to it, in Bethnal Green, as it came out during the proceedings. He was in the habit of alluding to his Scotch connections. But every great man has done that. The mother, I believe, was Scotch, right enough. The father de Barral whatever his origins retired from the Customs Service (tide-waiter I think), and started lending money in a very, very small way in the East End to people connected with the docks, stevedores, minor barge-owners, ship-chandlers, tally clerks, all sorts of very small fry. He made his living at it. He was a very decent man I believe. He had enough influence to place his only son as junior clerk in the account department of one of the Dock Companies. “Now, my boy,” he said to him, “I’ve given you a fine start.” But de Barral didn’t start. He stuck. He gave perfect satisfaction. At the end of three years he got a small rise of salary and went out courting in the evenings. He went courting the daughter of an old sea-captain who was a churchwarden of his parish and lived in an old badly preserved Georgian house with a garden: one of these houses standing in a reduced bit of “grounds” that you discover in a labyrinth of the most sordid streets, exactly alike and composed of six-roomed hutches.

Some of them were the vicarages of slum parishes. The old sailor had got hold of one cheap, and de Barral got hold of his daughter — which was a good bargain for him. The old sailor was very good to the young couple and very fond of their little girl. Mrs. de Barral was an equable, unassuming woman, at that time with a fund of simple gaiety, and with no ambitions; but, woman-like, she longed for change and for something interesting to happen now and then. It was she who encouraged de Barral to accept the offer of a post in the west-end branch of a great bank. It appears he shrank from such a great adventure for a long time. At last his wife’s arguments prevailed. Later on she used to say: ‘It’s the only time he ever listened to me; and I wonder now if it hadn’t been better for me to die before I ever made him go into that bank.’

You may be surprised at my knowledge of these details. Well, I had them ultimately from Mrs. Fyne. Mrs. Fyne while yet Miss Anthony, in her days of bondage, knew Mrs. de Barral in her days of exile. Mrs. de Barral was living then in a big stone mansion with mullioned windows in a large damp park, called the Priory, adjoining the village where the refined poet had built himself a house.

These were the days of de Barral's success. He had bought the place without ever seeing it and had packed off his wife and child at once there to take possession. He did not know what to do with them in London. He himself had a suite of rooms in an hotel. He gave there dinner parties followed by cards in the evening. He had developed the gambling passion — or else a mere card mania — but at any rate he played heavily, for relaxation, with a lot of dubious hangers on.

Meantime Mrs. de Barral, expecting him every day, lived at the Priory, with a carriage and pair, a governess for the child and many servants. The village people would see her through the railings wandering under the trees with her little girl lost in her strange surroundings. Nobody ever came near her. And there she died as some faithful and delicate animals die — from neglect, absolutely from neglect, rather unexpectedly and without any fuss. The village was sorry for her because, though obviously worried about something, she was good to the poor and was always ready for a chat with any of the humble folks. Of course they knew that she wasn't a lady — not what you would call a real lady. And even her acquaintance with Miss Anthony was only a cottage-door, a village-street acquaintance. Carleon Anthony was a tremendous aristocrat (his father had been a "restoring" architect) and his daughter was not allowed to associate with anyone but the county young ladies. Nevertheless in defiance of the poet's wrathful concern for undefiled refinement there were some quiet, melancholy strolls to and fro in the great avenue of chestnuts leading to the park-gate, during which Mrs. de Barral came to call Miss Anthony 'my dear' — and even 'my poor dear.' The lonely soul had no one to talk to but that not very happy girl. The governess despised her. The housekeeper was distant in her manner. Moreover Mrs. de Barral was no foolish gossiping woman. But she made some confidences to Miss Anthony. Such wealth was a terrific thing to have thrust upon one she affirmed. Once she went so far as to confess that she was dying with anxiety. Mr. de Barral (so she referred to him) had been an excellent husband and an exemplary father but "you see my dear I have had a great experience of him. I am sure he won't know what to do with all that money people are giving to him to take care of for them. He's as likely as not to do something rash. When he comes here I must have a good long serious talk with him, like the talks we often used to have together in the good old times of our life." And then one day a cry of anguish was wrung from her: 'My dear, he will never come here, he will never, never come!'

She was wrong. He came to the funeral, was extremely cut up, and holding the child tightly by the hand wept bitterly at the side of the grave. Miss Anthony, at the cost of a whole week of sneers and abuse from the poet, saw it all with her own eyes. De Barral clung to the child like a drowning man. He managed, though, to catch the half-past five fast train, travelling to town alone in a reserved compartment, with all the blinds down . . . "

"Leaving the child?" I said interrogatively.

"Yes. Leaving . . . He shirked the problem. He was born that way. He had no idea what to do with her or for that matter with anything or anybody including himself.

He bolted back to his suite of rooms in the hotel. He was the most helpless . . . She might have been left in the Priory to the end of time had not the high-toned governess threatened to send in her resignation. She didn't care for the child a bit, and the lonely, gloomy Priory had got on her nerves. She wasn't going to put up with such a life and, having just come out of some ducal family, she bullied de Barral in a very lofty fashion. To pacify her he took a splendidly furnished house in the most expensive part of Brighton for them, and now and then ran down for a week-end, with a trunk full of exquisite sweets and with his hat full of money. The governess spent it for him in extra ducal style. She was nearly forty and harboured a secret taste for patronizing young men of sorts — of a certain sort. But of that Mrs. Fyne of course had no personal knowledge then; she told me however that even in the Priory days she had suspected her of being an artificial, heartless, vulgar-minded woman with the lowest possible ideals. But de Barral did not know it. He literally did not know anything . . . “

“But tell me, Marlow,” I interrupted, “how do you account for this opinion? He must have been a personality in a sense — in some one sense surely. You don't work the greatest material havoc of a decade at least, in a commercial community, without having something in you.”

Marlow shook his head.

“He was a mere sign, a portent. There was nothing in him. Just about that time the word Thrift was to the fore. You know the power of words. We pass through periods dominated by this or that word — it may be development, or it may be competition, or education, or purity or efficiency or even sanctity. It is the word of the time. Well just then it was the word Thrift which was out in the streets walking arm in arm with righteousness, the inseparable companion and backer up of all such national catch-words, looking everybody in the eye as it were. The very drabs of the pavement, poor things, didn't escape the fascination . . . However! . . . Well the greatest portion of the press were screeching in all possible tones, like a confounded company of parrots instructed by some devil with a taste for practical jokes, that the financier de Barral was helping the great moral evolution of our character towards the newly-discovered virtue of Thrift. He was helping it by all these great establishments of his, which made the moral merits of Thrift manifest to the most callous hearts, simply by promising to pay ten per cent. interest on all deposits. And you didn't want necessarily to belong to the well-to-do classes in order to participate in the advantages of virtue. If you had but a spare sixpence in the world and went and gave it to de Barral it was Thrift! It's quite likely that he himself believed it. He must have. It's inconceivable that he alone should stand out against the infatuation of the whole world. He hadn't enough intelligence for that. But to look at him one couldn't tell . . . “

“You did see him then?” I said with some curiosity.

“I did. Strange, isn't it? It was only once, but as I sat with the distressed Fyne who had suddenly resuscitated his name buried in my memory with other dead labels of the past, I may say I saw him again, I saw him with great vividness of recollection, as he appeared in the days of his glory or splendour. No! Neither of these words will fit

his success. There was never any glory or splendour about that figure. Well, let us say in the days when he was, according to the majority of the daily press, a financial force working for the improvement of the character of the people. I'll tell you how it came about.

At that time I used to know a podgy, wealthy, bald little man having chambers in the Albany; a financier too, in his way, carrying out transactions of an intimate nature and of no moral character; mostly with young men of birth and expectations — though I dare say he didn't withhold his ministrations from elderly plebeians either. He was a true democrat; he would have done business (a sharp kind of business) with the devil himself. Everything was fly that came into his web. He received the applicants in an alert, jovial fashion which was quite surprising. It gave relief without giving too much confidence, which was just as well perhaps. His business was transacted in an apartment furnished like a drawing-room, the walls hung with several brown, heavily-framed, oil paintings. I don't know if they were good, but they were big, and with their elaborate, tarnished gilt-frames had a melancholy dignity. The man himself sat at a shining, inlaid writing table which looked like a rare piece from a museum of art; his chair had a high, oval, carved back, upholstered in faded tapestry; and these objects made of the costly black Havana cigar, which he rolled incessantly from the middle to the left corner of his mouth and back again, an inexpressibly cheap and nasty object. I had to see him several times in the interest of a poor devil so unlucky that he didn't even have a more competent friend than myself to speak for him at a very difficult time in his life.

I don't know at what hour my private financier began his day, but he used to give one appointments at unheard of times: such as a quarter to eight in the morning, for instance. On arriving one found him busy at that marvellous writing table, looking very fresh and alert, exhaling a faint fragrance of scented soap and with the cigar already well alight. You may believe that I entered on my mission with many unpleasant forebodings; but there was in that fat, admirably washed, little man such a profound contempt for mankind that it amounted to a species of good nature; which, unlike the milk of genuine kindness, was never in danger of turning sour. Then, once, during a pause in business, while we were waiting for the production of a document for which he had sent (perhaps to the cellar?) I happened to remark, glancing round the room, that I had never seen so many fine things assembled together out of a collection. Whether this was unconscious diplomacy on my part, or not, I shouldn't like to say — but the remark was true enough, and it pleased him extremely. "It is a collection," he said emphatically. "Only I live right in it, which most collectors don't. But I see that you know what you are looking at. Not many people who come here on business do. Stable fittings are more in their way."

I don't know whether my appreciation helped to advance my friend's business but at any rate it helped our intercourse. He treated me with a shade of familiarity as one of the initiated.

The last time I called on him to conclude the transaction we were interrupted by a person, something like a cross between a bookmaker and a private secretary, who, entering through a door which was not the anteroom door, walked up and stooped to whisper into his ear.

“Eh? What? Who, did you say?”

The nondescript person stooped and whispered again, adding a little louder: “Says he won’t detain you a moment.”

My little man glanced at me, said “Ah! Well,” irresolutely. I got up from my chair and offered to come again later. He looked whimsically alarmed. “No, no. It’s bad enough to lose my money but I don’t want to waste any more of my time over your friend. We must be done with this to-day. Just go and have a look at that garniture de cheminée yonder. There’s another, something like it, in the castle of Laeken, but mine’s much superior in design.”

I moved accordingly to the other side of that big room. The garniture was very fine. But while pretending to examine it I watched my man going forward to meet a tall visitor, who said, “I thought you would be disengaged so early. It’s only a word or two” — and after a whispered confabulation of no more than a minute, reconduct him to the door and shake hands ceremoniously. “Not at all, not at all. Very pleased to be of use. You can depend absolutely on my information” — “Oh thank you, thank you. I just looked in.” “Certainly, quite right. Any time . . . Good morning.”

I had a good look at the visitor while they were exchanging these civilities. He was clad in black. I remember perfectly that he wore a flat, broad, black satin tie in which was stuck a large cameo pin; and a small turn down collar. His hair, discoloured and silky, curled slightly over his ears. His cheeks were hairless and round, and apparently soft. He held himself very upright, walked with small steps and spoke gently in an inward voice. Perhaps from contrast with the magnificent polish of the room and the neatness of its owner, he struck me as dingy, indigent, and, if not exactly humble, then much subdued by evil fortune.

I wondered greatly at my fat little financier’s civility to that dubious personage when he asked me, as we resumed our respective seats, whether I knew who it was that had just gone out. On my shaking my head negatively he smiled queerly, said “De Barral,” and enjoyed my surprise. Then becoming grave: “That’s a deep fellow, if you like. We all know where he started from and where he got to; but nobody knows what he means to do.” He became thoughtful for a moment and added as if speaking to himself, “I wonder what his game is.”

And, you know, there was no game, no game of any sort, or shape or kind. It came out plainly at the trial. As I’ve told you before, he was a clerk in a bank, like thousands of others. He got that berth as a second start in life and there he stuck again, giving perfect satisfaction. Then one day as though a supernatural voice had whispered into his ear or some invisible fly had stung him, he put on his hat, went out into the street and began advertising. That’s absolutely all that there was to it. He caught in the street the word of the time and harnessed it to his preposterous chariot.

One remembers his first modest advertisements headed with the magic word Thrift, Thrift, Thrift, thrice repeated; promising ten per cent. on all deposits and giving the address of the Thrift and Independence Aid Association in Vauxhall Bridge Road. Apparently nothing more was necessary. He didn't even explain what he meant to do with the money he asked the public to pour into his lap. Of course he meant to lend it out at high rates of interest. He did so — but he did it without system, plan, foresight or judgment. And as he frittered away the sums that flowed in, he advertised for more — and got it. During a period of general business prosperity he set up The Orb Bank and The Sceptre Trust, simply, it seems for advertising purposes. They were mere names. He was totally unable to organize anything, to promote any sort of enterprise if it were only for the purpose of juggling with the shares. At that time he could have had for the asking any number of Dukes, retired Generals, active M.P.'s, ex-ambassadors and so on as Directors to sit at the wildest boards of his invention. But he never tried. He had no real imagination. All he could do was to publish more advertisements and open more branch offices of the Thrift and Independence, of The Orb, of The Sceptre, for the receipt of deposits; first in this town, then in that town, north and south — everywhere where he could find suitable premises at a moderate rent. For this was the great characteristic of the management. Modesty, moderation, simplicity. Neither The Orb nor The Sceptre nor yet their parent the Thrift and Independence had built for themselves the usual palaces. For this abstention they were praised in silly public prints as illustrating in their management the principle of Thrift for which they were founded. The fact is that de Barral simply didn't think of it. Of course he had soon moved from Vauxhall Bridge Road. He knew enough for that. What he got hold of next was an old, enormous, rat-infested brick house in a small street off the Strand. Strangers were taken in front of the meanest possible, begrimed, yellowy, flat brick wall, with two rows of unadorned window-holes one above the other, and were exhorted with bated breath to behold and admire the simplicity of the head-quarters of the great financial force of the day. The word THRIFT perched right up on the roof in giant gilt letters, and two enormous shield-like brass-plates curved round the corners on each side of the doorway were the only shining spots in de Barral's business outfit. Nobody knew what operations were carried on inside except this — that if you walked in and tendered your money over the counter it would be calmly taken from you by somebody who would give you a printed receipt. That and no more. It appears that such knowledge is irresistible. People went in and tendered; and once it was taken from their hands their money was more irretrievably gone from them than if they had thrown it into the sea. This then, and nothing else was being carried on in there . . . “

“Come, Marlow,” I said, “you exaggerate surely — if only by your way of putting things. It's too startling.”

“I exaggerate!” he defended himself. “My way of putting things! My dear fellow I have merely stripped the rags of business verbiage and financial jargon off my statements. And you are startled! I am giving you the naked truth. It's true too that nothing lays itself open to the charge of exaggeration more than the language of naked truth. What

comes with a shock is admitted with difficulty. But what will you say to the end of his career?

It was of course sensational and tolerably sudden. It began with the Orb Deposit Bank. Under the name of that institution de Barral with the frantic obstinacy of an unimaginative man had been financing an Indian prince who was prosecuting a claim for immense sums of money against the government. It was an enormous number of scores of lakhs — a miserable remnant of his ancestors' treasures — that sort of thing. And it was all authentic enough. There was a real prince; and the claim too was sufficiently real — only unfortunately it was not a valid claim. So the prince lost his case on the last appeal and the beginning of de Barral's end became manifest to the public in the shape of a half-sheet of note paper wafered by the four corners on the closed door of The Orb offices notifying that payment was stopped at that establishment.

Its consort The Sceptre collapsed within the week. I won't say in American parlance that suddenly the bottom fell out of the whole of de Barral concerns. There never had been any bottom to it. It was like the cask of Danaides into which the public had been pleased to pour its deposits. That they were gone was clear; and the bankruptcy proceedings which followed were like a sinister farce, bursts of laughter in a setting of mute anguish — that of the depositors; hundreds of thousands of them. The laughter was irresistible; the accompaniment of the bankrupt's public examination.

I don't know if it was from utter lack of all imagination or from the possession in undue proportion of a particular kind of it, or from both — and the three alternatives are possible — but it was discovered that this man who had been raised to such a height by the credulity of the public was himself more gullible than any of his depositors. He had been the prey of all sorts of swindlers, adventurers, visionaries and even lunatics. Wrapping himself up in deep and imbecile secrecy he had gone in for the most fantastic schemes: a harbour and docks on the coast of Patagonia, quarries in Labrador — such like speculations. Fisheries to feed a canning Factory on the banks of the Amazon was one of them. A principality to be bought in Madagascar was another. As the grotesque details of these incredible transactions came out one by one ripples of laughter ran over the closely packed court — each one a little louder than the other. The audience ended by fairly roaring under the cumulative effect of absurdity. The Registrar laughed, the barristers laughed, the reporters laughed, the serried ranks of the miserable depositors watching anxiously every word, laughed like one man. They laughed hysterically — the poor wretches — on the verge of tears.

There was only one person who remained unmoved. It was de Barral himself. He preserved his serene, gentle expression, I am told (for I have not witnessed those scenes myself), and looked around at the people with an air of placid sufficiency which was the first hint to the world of the man's overweening, unmeasurable conceit, hidden hitherto under a diffident manner. It could be seen too in his dogged assertion that if he had been given enough time and a lot more money everything would have come right. And there were some people (yes, amongst his very victims) who more than half

believed him, even after the criminal prosecution which soon followed. When placed in the dock he lost his steadiness as if some sustaining illusion had gone to pieces within him suddenly. He ceased to be himself in manner completely, and even in disposition, in so far that his faded neutral eyes matching his discoloured hair so well, were discovered then to be capable of expressing a sort of underhand hate. He was at first defiant, then insolent, then broke down and burst into tears; but it might have been from rage. Then he calmed down, returned to his soft manner of speech and to that unassuming quiet bearing which had been usual with him even in his greatest days. But it seemed as though in this moment of change he had at last perceived what a power he had been; for he remarked to one of the prosecuting counsel who had assumed a lofty moral tone in questioning him, that — yes, he had gambled — he liked cards. But that only a year ago a host of smart people would have been only too pleased to take a hand at cards with him. Yes — he went on — some of the very people who were there accommodated with seats on the bench; and turning upon the counsel “You yourself as well,” he cried. He could have had half the town at his rooms to fawn upon him if he had cared for that sort of thing. “Why, now I think of it, it took me most of my time to keep people, just of your sort, off me,” he ended with a good humoured — quite unobtrusive, contempt, as though the fact had dawned upon him for the first time.

This was the moment, the only moment, when he had perhaps all the audience in Court with him, in a hush of dreary silence. And then the dreary proceedings were resumed. For all the outside excitement it was the most dreary of all celebrated trials. The bankruptcy proceedings had exhausted all the laughter there was in it. Only the fact of wide-spread ruin remained, and the resentment of a mass of people for having been fooled by means too simple to save their self-respect from a deep wound which the cleverness of a consummate scoundrel would not have inflicted. A shamefaced amazement attended these proceedings in which de Barral was not being exposed alone. For himself his only cry was: Time! Time! Time would have set everything right. In time some of these speculations of his were certain to have succeeded. He repeated this defence, this excuse, this confession of faith, with wearisome iteration. Everything he had done or left undone had been to gain time. He had hypnotized himself with the word. Sometimes, I am told, his appearance was ecstatic, his motionless pale eyes seemed to be gazing down the vista of future ages. Time — and of course, more money. “Ah! If only you had left me alone for a couple of years more,” he cried once in accents of passionate belief. “The money was coming in all right.” The deposits you understand — the savings of Thrift. Oh yes they had been coming in to the very last moment. And he regretted them. He had arrived to regard them as his own by a sort of mystical persuasion. And yet it was a perfectly true cry, when he turned once more on the counsel who was beginning a question with the words “You have had all these immense sums . . .” with the indignant retort “What have I had out of them?”

“It was perfectly true. He had had nothing out of them — nothing of the prestigious or the desirable things of the earth, craved for by predatory natures. He had gratified no tastes, had known no luxury; he had built no gorgeous palaces, had formed no

splendid galleries out of these “immense sums.” He had not even a home. He had gone into these rooms in an hotel and had stuck there for years, giving no doubt perfect satisfaction to the management. They had twice raised his rent to show I suppose their high sense of his distinguished patronage. He had bought for himself out of all the wealth streaming through his fingers neither adulation nor love, neither splendour nor comfort. There was something perfect in his consistent mediocrity. His very vanity seemed to miss the gratification of even the mere show of power. In the days when he was most fully in the public eye the invincible obscurity of his origins clung to him like a shadowy garment. He had handled millions without ever enjoying anything of what is counted as precious in the community of men, because he had neither the brutality of temperament nor the fineness of mind to make him desire them with the will power of a masterful adventurer . . . “

“You seem to have studied the man,” I observed.

“Studied,” repeated Marlow thoughtfully. “No! Not studied. I had no opportunities. You know that I saw him only on that one occasion I told you of. But it may be that a glimpse and no more is the proper way of seeing an individuality; and de Barral was that, in virtue of his very deficiencies for they made of him something quite unlike one’s preconceived ideas. There were also very few materials accessible to a man like me to form a judgment from. But in such a case I verify believe that a little is as good as a feast — perhaps better. If one has a taste for that kind of thing the merest starting-point becomes a coign of vantage, and then by a series of logically deduced verisimilitudes one arrives at truth — or very near the truth — as near as any circumstantial evidence can do. I have not studied de Barral but that is how I understand him so far as he could be understood through the din of the crash; the wailing and gnashing of teeth, the newspaper contents bills, “The Thrift Frauds. Cross-examination of the accused. Extra special” — blazing fiercely; the charitable appeals for the victims, the grave tones of the dailies rumbling with compassion as if they were the national bowels. All this lasted a whole week of industrious sittings. A pressman whom I knew told me “He’s an idiot.” Which was possible. Before that I overheard once somebody declaring that he had a criminal type of face; which I knew was untrue. The sentence was pronounced by artificial light in a stifling poisonous atmosphere. Something edifying was said by the judge weightily, about the retribution overtaking the perpetrator of “the most heartless frauds on an unprecedented scale.” I don’t understand these things much, but it appears that he had juggled with accounts, cooked balance sheets, had gathered in deposits months after he ought to have known himself to be hopelessly insolvent, and done enough of other things, highly reprehensible in the eyes of the law, to earn for himself seven years’ penal servitude. The sentence making its way outside met with a good reception. A small mob composed mainly of people who themselves did not look particularly clever and scrupulous, leavened by a slight sprinkling of genuine pickpockets amused itself by cheering in the most penetrating, abominable cold drizzle that I remember. I happened to be passing there on my way from the East End where I had spent my day about the Docks with an old chum who was looking after the

fitting out of a new ship. I am always eager, when allowed, to call on a new ship. They interest me like charming young persons.

I got mixed up in that crowd seething with an animosity as senseless as things of the street always are, and it was while I was laboriously making my way out of it that the pressman of whom I spoke was jostled against me. He did me the justice to be surprised. "What? You here! The last person in the world . . . If I had known I could have got you inside. Plenty of room. Interest been over for the last three days. Got seven years. Well, I am glad."

"Why are you glad? Because he's got seven years?" I asked, greatly incommoded by the pressure of a hulking fellow who was remarking to some of his equally oppressive friends that the "beggar ought to have been poleaxed." I don't know whether he had ever confided his savings to de Barral but if so, judging from his appearance, they must have been the proceeds of some successful burglary. The pressman by my side said 'No,' to my question. He was glad because it was all over. He had suffered greatly from the heat and the bad air of the court. The clammy, raw, chill of the streets seemed to affect his liver instantly. He became contemptuous and irritable and plied his elbows viciously making way for himself and me.

A dull affair this. All such cases were dull. No really dramatic moments. The book-keeping of The Orb and all the rest of them was certainly a burlesque revelation but the public did not care for revelations of that kind. Dull dog that de Barral — he grumbled. He could not or would not take the trouble to characterize for me the appearance of that man now officially a criminal (we had gone across the road for a drink) but told me with a sourly, derisive snigger that, after the sentence had been pronounced the fellow clung to the dock long enough to make a sort of protest. 'You haven't given me time. If I had been given time I would have ended by being made a peer like some of them.' And he had permitted himself his very first and last gesture in all these days, raising a hard-clenched fist above his head.

The pressman disapproved of that manifestation. It was not his business to understand it. Is it ever the business of any pressman to understand anything? I guess not. It would lead him too far away from the actualities which are the daily bread of the public mind. He probably thought the display worth very little from a picturesque point of view; the weak voice; the colourless personality as incapable of an attitude as a bed-post, the very fatuity of the clenched hand so ineffectual at that time and place — no, it wasn't worth much. And then, for him, an accomplished craftsman in his trade, thinking was distinctly "bad business." His business was to write a readable account. But I who had nothing to write, I permitted myself to use my mind as we sat before our still untouched glasses. And the disclosure which so often rewards a moment of detachment from mere visual impressions gave me a thrill very much approaching a shudder. I seemed to understand that, with the shock of the agonies and perplexities of his trial, the imagination of that man, whose moods, notions and motives wore frequently an air of grotesque mystery — that his imagination had been at last roused

into activity. And this was awful. Just try to enter into the feelings of a man whose imagination wakes up at the very moment he is about to enter the tomb . . . “

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“You must not think,” went on Marlow after a pause, “that on that morning with Fyne I went consciously in my mind over all this, let us call it information; no, better say, this fund of knowledge which I had, or rather which existed, in me in regard to de Barral. Information is something one goes out to seek and puts away when found as you might do a piece of lead: ponderous, useful, unvibrating, dull. Whereas knowledge comes to one, this sort of knowledge, a chance acquisition preserving in its repose a fine resonant quality . . . But as such distinctions touch upon the transcendental I shall spare you the pain of listening to them. There are limits to my cruelty. No! I didn’t reckon up carefully in my mind all this I have been telling you. How could I have done so, with Fyne right there in the room? He sat perfectly still, statuesque in homely fashion, after having delivered himself of his effective assent: “Yes. The convict,” and I, far from indulging in a reminiscent excursion into the past, remained sufficiently in the present to muse in a vague, absent-minded way on the respectable proportions and on the (upon the whole) comely shape of his great pedestrian’s calves, for he had thrown one leg over his knee, carelessly, to conceal the trouble of his mind by an air of ease. But all the same the knowledge was in me, the awakened resonance of which I spoke just now; I was aware of it on that beautiful day, so fresh, so warm and friendly, so accomplished — an exquisite courtesy of the much abused English climate when it makes up its meteorological mind to behave like a perfect gentleman. Of course the English climate is never a rough. It suffers from spleen somewhat frequently — but that is gentlemanly too, and I don’t mind going to meet him in that mood. He has his days of grey, veiled, polite melancholy, in which he is very fascinating. How seldom he lapses into a blustering manner, after all! And then it is mostly in a season when, appropriately enough, one may go out and kill something. But his fine days are the best for stopping at home, to read, to think, to muse — even to dream; in fact to live fully, intensely and quietly, in the brightness of comprehension, in that receptive glow of the mind, the gift of the clear, luminous and serene weather.

That day I had intended to live intensely and quietly, basking in the weather’s glory which would have lent enchantment to the most unpromising of intellectual prospects. For a companion I had found a book, not bemused with the cleverness of the day — a fine-weather book, simple and sincere like the talk of an unselfish friend. But looking at little Fyne seated in the room I understood that nothing would come of my contemplative aspirations; that in one way or another I should be let in for some form of severe exercise. Walking, it would be, I feared, since, for me, that idea was inseparably associated with the visual impression of Fyne. Where, why, how, a rapid striding rush could be brought in helpful relation to the good Fyne’s present trouble and perplexity I could not imagine; except on the principle that senseless pedestrianism was Fyne’s panacea for all the ills and evils bodily and spiritual of the universe. It could be of no use for me to say or do anything. It was bound to come. Contemplating his muscular

limb encased in a golf-stocking, and under the strong impression of the information he had just imparted I said wondering, rather irrationally:

“And so de Barral had a wife and child! That girl’s his daughter. And how . . . “

Fyne interrupted me by stating again earnestly, as though it were something not easy to believe, that his wife and himself had tried to befriend the girl in every way — indeed they had! I did not doubt him for a moment, of course, but my wonder at this was more rational. At that hour of the morning, you mustn’t forget, I knew nothing as yet of Mrs. Fyne’s contact (it was hardly more) with de Barral’s wife and child during their exile at the Priory, in the culminating days of that man’s fame.

Fyne who had come over, it was clear, solely to talk to me on that subject, gave me the first hint of this initial, merely out of doors, connection. “The girl was quite a child then,” he continued. “Later on she was removed out of Mrs. Fyne’s reach in charge of a governess — a very unsatisfactory person,” he explained. His wife had then — h’m — met him; and on her marriage she lost sight of the child completely. But after the birth of Polly (Polly was the third Fyne girl) she did not get on very well, and went to Brighton for some months to recover her strength — and there, one day in the street, the child (she wore her hair down her back still) recognized her outside a shop and rushed, actually rushed, into Mrs. Fyne’s arms. Rather touching this. And so, disregarding the cold impertinence of that . . . h’m . . . governess, his wife naturally responded.

He was solemnly fragmentary. I broke in with the observation that it must have been before the crash.

Fyne nodded with deepened gravity, stating in his bass tone —

“Just before,” and indulged himself with a weighty period of solemn silence.

De Barral, he resumed suddenly, was not coming to Brighton for week-ends regularly, then. Must have been conscious already of the approaching disaster. Mrs. Fyne avoided being drawn into making his acquaintance, and this suited the views of the governess person, very jealous of any outside influence. But in any case it would not have been an easy matter. Extraordinary, stiff-backed, thin figure all in black, the observed of all, while walking hand-in-hand with the girl; apparently shy, but — and here Fyne came very near showing something like insight — probably nursing under a diffident manner a considerable amount of secret arrogance. Mrs. Fyne pitied Flora de Barral’s fate long before the catastrophe. Most unfortunate guidance. Very unsatisfactory surroundings. The girl was known in the streets, was stared at in public places as if she had been a sort of princess, but she was kept with a very ominous consistency, from making any acquaintances — though of course there were many people no doubt who would have been more than willing to — h’m — make themselves agreeable to Miss de Barral. But this did not enter into the plans of the governess, an intriguing person hatching a most sinister plot under her severe air of distant, fashionable exclusiveness. Good little Fyne’s eyes bulged with solemn horror as he revealed to me, in agitated speech, his wife’s more than suspicions, at the time, of that, Mrs., Mrs. What’s her name’s perfidious conduct. She actually seemed to have — Mrs. Fyne asserted — formed a

plot already to marry eventually her charge to an impecunious relation of her own — a young man with furtive eyes and something impudent in his manner, whom that woman called her nephew, and whom she was always having down to stay with her.

“And perhaps not her nephew. No relation at all” — Fyne emitted with a convulsive effort this, the most awful part of the suspicions Mrs. Fyne used to impart to him piecemeal when he came down to spend his week-ends gravely with her and the children. The Fynes, in their good-natured concern for the unlucky child of the man busied in stirring casually so many millions, spent the moments of their weekly reunion in wondering earnestly what could be done to defeat the most wicked of conspiracies, trying to invent some tactful line of conduct in such extraordinary circumstances. I could see them, simple, and scrupulous, worrying honestly about that unprotected big girl while looking at their own little girls playing on the sea-shore. Fyne assured me that his wife’s rest was disturbed by the great problem of interference.

“It was very acute of Mrs. Fyne to spot such a deep game,” I said, wondering to myself where her acuteness had gone to now, to let her be taken unawares by a game so much simpler and played to the end under her very nose. But then, at that time, when her nightly rest was disturbed by the dread of the fate preparing for de Barral’s unprotected child, she was not engaged in writing a compendious and ruthless hand-book on the theory and practice of life, for the use of women with a grievance. She could as yet, before the task of evolving the philosophy of rebellious action had affected her intuitive sharpness, perceive things which were, I suspect, moderately plain. For I am inclined to believe that the woman whom chance had put in command of Flora de Barral’s destiny took no very subtle pains to conceal her game. She was conscious of being a complete master of the situation, having once for all established her ascendancy over de Barral. She had taken all her measures against outside observation of her conduct; and I could not help smiling at the thought what a ghastly nuisance the serious, innocent Fynes must have been to her. How exasperated she must have been by that couple falling into Brighton as completely unforeseen as a bolt from the blue — if not so prompt. How she must have hated them!

But I conclude she would have carried out whatever plan she might have formed. I can imagine de Barral accustomed for years to defer to her wishes and, either through arrogance, or shyness, or simply because of his unimaginative stupidity, remaining outside the social pale, knowing no one but some card-playing cronies; I can picture him to myself terrified at the prospect of having the care of a marriageable girl thrust on his hands, forcing on him a complete change of habits and the necessity of another kind of existence which he would not even have known how to begin. It is evident to me that Mrs. What’s her name would have had her atrocious way with very little trouble even if the excellent Fynes had been able to do something. She would simply have bullied de Barral in a lofty style. There’s nothing more subservient than an arrogant man when his arrogance has once been broken in some particular instance.

However there was no time and no necessity for any one to do anything. The situation itself vanished in the financial crash as a building vanishes in an earthquake —

here one moment and gone the next with only an ill-omened, slight, preliminary rumble. Well, to say 'in a moment' is an exaggeration perhaps; but that everything was over in just twenty-four hours is an exact statement. Fyne was able to tell me all about it; and the phrase that would depict the nature of the change best is: an instant and complete destitution. I don't understand these matters very well, but from Fyne's narrative it seemed as if the creditors or the depositors, or the competent authorities, had got hold in the twinkling of an eye of everything de Barral possessed in the world, down to his watch and chain, the money in his trousers' pocket, his spare suits of clothes, and I suppose the cameo pin out of his black satin cravat. Everything! I believe he gave up the very wedding ring of his late wife. The gloomy Priory with its damp park and a couple of farms had been made over to Mrs. de Barral; but when she died (without making a will) it reverted to him, I imagine. They got that of course; but it was a mere crumb in a Sahara of starvation, a drop in the thirsty ocean. I dare say that not a single soul in the world got the comfort of as much as a recovered threepenny bit out of the estate. Then, less than crumbs, less than drops, there were to be grabbed, the lease of the big Brighton house, the furniture therein, the carriage and pair, the girl's riding horse, her costly trinkets; down to the heavily gold-mounted collar of her pedigree St. Bernard. The dog too went: the most noble-looking item in the beggarly assets.

What however went first of all or rather vanished was nothing in the nature of an asset. It was that plotting governess with the trick of a "perfect lady" manner (severely conventional) and the soul of a remorseless brigand. When a woman takes to any sort of unlawful man-trade, there's nothing to beat her in the way of thoroughness. It's true that you will find people who'll tell you that this terrific virulence in breaking through all established things, is altogether the fault of men. Such people will ask you with a clever air why the servile wars were always the most fierce, desperate and atrocious of all wars. And you may make such answer as you can — even the eminently feminine one, if you choose, so typical of the women's literal mind "I don't see what this has to do with it!" How many arguments have been knocked over (I won't say knocked down) by these few words! For if we men try to put the spaciousness of all experiences into our reasoning and would fain put the Infinite itself into our love, it isn't, as some writer has remarked, "It isn't women's doing." Oh no. They don't care for these things. That sort of aspiration is not much in their way; and it shall be a funny world, the world of their arranging, where the Irrelevant would fantastically step in to take the place of the sober humdrum Imaginative . . . "

I raised my hand to stop my friend Marlow.

"Do you really believe what you have said?" I asked, meaning no offence, because with Marlow one never could be sure.

"Only on certain days of the year," said Marlow readily with a malicious smile. "To-day I have been simply trying to be spacious and I perceive I've managed to hurt your susceptibilities which are consecrated to women. When you sit alone and silent you are defending in your mind the poor women from attacks which cannot possibly

touch them. I wonder what can touch them? But to soothe your uneasiness I will point out again that an Irrelevant world would be very amusing, if the women take care to make it as charming as they alone can, by preserving for us certain well-known, well-established, I'll almost say hackneyed, illusions, without which the average male creature cannot get on. And that condition is very important. For there is nothing more provoking than the Irrelevant when it has ceased to amuse and charm; and then the danger would be of the subjugated masculinity in its exasperation, making some brusque, unguarded movement and accidentally putting its elbow through the fine tissue of the world of which I speak. And that would be fatal to it. For nothing looks more irretrievably deplorable than fine tissue which has been damaged. The women themselves would be the first to become disgusted with their own creation.

There was something of women's highly practical sanity and also of their irrelevancy in the conduct of Miss de Barral's amazing governess. It appeared from Fyne's narrative that the day before the first rumble of the cataclysm the questionable young man arrived unexpectedly in Brighton to stay with his "Aunt." To all outward appearance everything was going on normally; the fellow went out riding with the girl in the afternoon as he often used to do — a sight which never failed to fill Mrs. Fyne with indignation. Fyne himself was down there with his family for a whole week and was called to the window to behold the iniquity in its progress and to share in his wife's feelings. There was not even a groom with them. And Mrs. Fyne's distress was so strong at this glimpse of the unlucky girl all unconscious of her danger riding smilingly by, that Fyne began to consider seriously whether it wasn't their plain duty to interfere at all risks — simply by writing a letter to de Barral. He said to his wife with a solemnity I can easily imagine "You ought to undertake that task, my dear. You have known his wife after all. That's something at any rate." On the other hand the fear of exposing Mrs. Fyne to some nasty rebuff worried him exceedingly. Mrs. Fyne on her side gave way to despondency. Success seemed impossible. Here was a woman for more than five years in charge of the girl and apparently enjoying the complete confidence of the father. What, that would be effective, could one say, without proofs, without . . . This Mr. de Barral must be, Mrs. Fyne pronounced, either a very stupid or a downright bad man, to neglect his child so.

You will notice that perhaps because of Fyne's solemn view of our transient life and Mrs. Fyne's natural capacity for responsibility, it had never occurred to them that the simplest way out of the difficulty was to do nothing and dismiss the matter as no concern of theirs. Which in a strict worldly sense it certainly was not. But they spent, Fyne told me, a most disturbed afternoon, considering the ways and means of dealing with the danger hanging over the head of the girl out for a ride (and no doubt enjoying herself) with an abominable scamp.

Chapter 4 — the Governess

And the best of it was that the danger was all over already. There was no danger any more. The supposed nephew's appearance had a purpose. He had come, full, full to trembling — with the bigness of his news. There must have been rumours already as to the shaky position of the de Barral's concerns; but only amongst those in the very inmost know. No rumour or echo of rumour had reached the profane in the West-End — let alone in the guileless marine suburb of Hove. The Fynes had no suspicion; the governess, playing with cold, distinguished exclusiveness the part of mother to the fabulously wealthy Miss de Barral, had no suspicion; the masters of music, of drawing, of dancing to Miss de Barral, had no idea; the minds of her medical man, of her dentist, of the servants in the house, of the tradesmen proud of having the name of de Barral on their books, were in a state of absolute serenity. Thus, that fellow, who had unexpectedly received a most alarming straight tip from somebody in the City arrived in Brighton, at about lunch-time, with something very much in the nature of a deadly bomb in his possession. But he knew better than to throw it on the public pavement. He ate his lunch impenetrably, sitting opposite Flora de Barral, and then, on some excuse, closeted himself with the woman whom little Fyne's charity described (with a slight hesitation of speech however) as his "Aunt."

What they said to each other in private we can imagine. She came out of her own sitting-room with red spots on her cheek-bones, which having provoked a question from her "beloved" charge, were accounted for by a curt "I have a headache coming on." But we may be certain that the talk being over she must have said to that young blackguard: "You had better take her out for a ride as usual." We have proof positive of this in Fyne and Mrs. Fyne observing them mount at the door and pass under the windows of their sitting-room, talking together, and the poor girl all smiles; because she enjoyed in all innocence the company of Charley. She made no secret of it whatever to Mrs. Fyne; in fact, she had confided to her, long before, that she liked him very much: a confidence which had filled Mrs. Fyne with desolation and that sense of powerless anguish which is experienced in certain kinds of nightmare. For how could she warn the girl? She did venture to tell her once that she didn't like Mr. Charley. Miss de Barral heard her with astonishment. How was it possible not to like Charley? Afterwards with naïve loyalty she told Mrs. Fyne that, immensely as she was fond of her she could not hear a word against Charley — the wonderful Charley.

The daughter of de Barral probably enjoyed her jolly ride with the jolly Charley (infinitely more jolly than going out with a stupid old riding-master), very much indeed, because the Fynes saw them coming back at a later hour than usual. In fact it was getting nearly dark. On dismounting, helped off by the delightful Charley, she patted the neck of her horse and went up the steps. Her last ride. She was then within a few days of her sixteenth birthday, a slight figure in a riding habit, rather shorter than the average height for her age, in a black bowler hat from under which her fine rippling dark hair cut square at the ends was hanging well down her back. The delightful Charley

mounted again to take the two horses round to the mews. Mrs. Fyne remaining at the window saw the house door close on Miss de Barral returning from her last ride.

And meantime what had the governess (out of a nobleman's family) so judiciously selected (a lady, and connected with well-known county people as she said) to direct the studies, guard the health, form the mind, polish the manners, and generally play the perfect mother to that luckless child — what had she been doing? Well, having got rid of her charge by the most natural device possible, which proved her practical sense, she started packing her belongings, an act which showed her clear view of the situation. She had worked methodically, rapidly, and well, emptying the drawers, clearing the tables in her special apartment of that big house, with something silently passionate in her thoroughness; taking everything belonging to her and some things of less unquestionable ownership, a jewelled penholder, an ivory and gold paper knife (the house was full of common, costly objects), some chased silver boxes presented by de Barral and other trifles; but the photograph of Flora de Barral, with the loving inscription, which stood on her writing desk, of the most modern and expensive style, in a silver-gilt frame, she neglected to take. Having accidentally, in the course of the operations, knocked it off on the floor she let it lie there after a downward glance. Thus it, or the frame at least, became, I suppose, part of the assets in the de Barral bankruptcy.

At dinner that evening the child found her company dull and brusque. It was uncommonly slow. She could get nothing from her governess but monosyllables, and the jolly Charley actually snubbed the various cheery openings of his "little chum" — as he used to call her at times, — but not at that time. No doubt the couple were nervous and preoccupied. For all this we have evidence, and for the fact that Flora being offended with the delightful nephew of her profoundly respected governess sulked through the rest of the evening and was glad to retire early. Mrs., Mrs. — I've really forgotten her name — the governess, invited her nephew to her sitting-room, mentioning aloud that it was to talk over some family matters. This was meant for Flora to hear, and she heard it — without the slightest interest. In fact there was nothing sufficiently unusual in such an invitation to arouse in her mind even a passing wonder. She went bored to bed and being tired with her long ride slept soundly all night. Her last sleep, I won't say of innocence — that word would not render my exact meaning, because it has a special meaning of its own — but I will say: of that ignorance, or better still, of that unconsciousness of the world's ways, the unconsciousness of danger, of pain, of humiliation, of bitterness, of falsehood. An unconsciousness which in the case of other beings like herself is removed by a gradual process of experience and information, often only partial at that, with saving reserves, softening doubts, veiling theories. Her unconsciousness of the evil which lives in the secret thoughts and therefore in the open acts of mankind, whenever it happens that evil thought meets evil courage; her unconsciousness was to be broken into with profane violence with desecrating circumstances, like a temple violated by a mad, vengeful impiety. Yes, that very young girl, almost no more than a child — this was what was going to happen to her. And if you

ask me, how, wherefore, for what reason? I will answer you: Why, by chance! By the merest chance, as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important or unimportant; and even things which are neither, things so completely neutral in character that you would wonder why they do happen at all if you didn't know that they, too, carry in their insignificance the seeds of further incalculable chances.

Of course, all the chances were that de Barral should have fallen upon a perfectly harmless, naïve, usual, inefficient specimen of respectable governess for his daughter; or on a commonplace silly adventuress who would have tried, say, to marry him or work some other sort of common mischief in a small way. Or again he might have chanced on a model of all the virtues, or the repository of all knowledge, or anything equally harmless, conventional, and middle class. All calculations were in his favour; but, chance being incalculable, he fell upon an individuality whom it is much easier to define by opprobrious names than to classify in a calm and scientific spirit — but an individuality certainly, and a temperament as well. Rare? No. There is a certain amount of what I would politely call unscrupulousness in all of us. Think for instance of the excellent Mrs. Fyne, who herself, and in the bosom of her family, resembled a governess of a conventional type. Only, her mental excesses were theoretical, hedged in by so much humane feeling and conventional reserves, that they amounted to no more than mere libertinage of thought; whereas the other woman, the governess of Flora de Barral, was, as you may have noticed, severely practical — terribly practical. No! Hers was not a rare temperament, except in its fierce resentment of repression; a feeling which like genius or lunacy is apt to drive people into sudden irrelevancy. Hers was feminine irrelevancy. A male genius, a male ruffian, or even a male lunatic, would not have behaved exactly as she did behave. There is a softness in masculine nature, even the most brutal, which acts as a check.

While the girl slept those two, the woman of forty, an age in itself terrible, and that hopeless young “wrong ‘un” of twenty-three (also well connected I believe) had some sort of subdued row in the cleared rooms: wardrobes open, drawers half pulled out and empty, trunks locked and strapped, furniture in idle disarray, and not so much as a single scrap of paper left behind on the tables. The maid, whom the governess and the pupil shared between them, after finishing with Flora, came to the door as usual, but was not admitted. She heard the two voices in dispute before she knocked, and then being sent away retreated at once — the only person in the house convinced at that time that there was “something up.”

Dark and, so to speak, inscrutable spaces being met with in life there must be such places in any statement dealing with life. In what I am telling you of now — an episode of one of my humdrum holidays in the green country, recalled quite naturally after all the years by our meeting a man who has been a blue-water sailor — this evening confabulation is a dark, inscrutable spot. And we may conjecture what we like. I have no difficulty in imagining that the woman — of forty, and the chief of the enterprise — must have raged at large. And perhaps the other did not rage enough. Youth feels deeply it is true, but it has not the same vivid sense of lost opportunities. It believes

in the absolute reality of time. And then, in that abominable scamp with his youth already soiled, withered like a plucked flower ready to be flung on some rotting heap of rubbish, no very genuine feeling about anything could exist — not even about the hazards of his own unclean existence. A sneering half-laugh with some such remark as: “We are properly sold and no mistake” would have been enough to make trouble in that way. And then another sneer, “Waste time enough over it too,” followed perhaps by the bitter retort from the other party “You seemed to like it well enough though, playing the fool with that chit of a girl.” Something of that sort. Don’t you see it — eh . . . “

Marlow looked at me with his dark penetrating glance. I was struck by the absolute verisimilitude of this suggestion. But we were always tilting at each other. I saw an opening and pushed my uncandid thrust.

“You have a ghastly imagination,” I said with a cheerfully sceptical smile.

“Well, and if I have,” he returned unabashed. “But let me remind you that this situation came to me unasked. I am like a puzzle-headed chief-mate we had once in the dear old Samarcand when I was a youngster. The fellow went gravely about trying to “account to himself” — his favourite expression — for a lot of things no one would care to bother one’s head about. He was an old idiot but he was also an accomplished practical seaman. I was quite a boy and he impressed me. I must have caught the disposition from him.”

“Well — go on with your accounting then,” I said, assuming an air of resignation.

“That’s just it.” Marlow fell into his stride at once. “That’s just it. Mere disappointed cupidity cannot account for the proceedings of the next morning; proceedings which I shall not describe to you — but which I shall tell you of presently, not as a matter of conjecture but of actual fact. Meantime returning to that evening altercation in deadened tones within the private apartment of Miss de Barral’s governess, what if I were to tell you that disappointment had most likely made them touchy with each other, but that perhaps the secret of his careless, railing behaviour, was in the thought, springing up within him with an emphatic oath of relief “Now there’s nothing to prevent me from breaking away from that old woman.” And that the secret of her envenomed rage, not against this miserable and attractive wretch, but against fate, accident and the whole course of human life, concentrating its venom on de Barral and including the innocent girl herself, was in the thought, in the fear crying within her “Now I have nothing to hold him with . . . “

I couldn’t refuse Marlow the tribute of a prolonged whistle “Phew! So you suppose that . . . “

He waved his hand impatiently.

“I don’t suppose. It was so. And anyhow why shouldn’t you accept the supposition. Do you look upon governesses as creatures above suspicion or necessarily of moral perfection? I suppose their hearts would not stand looking into much better than other people’s. Why shouldn’t a governess have passions, all the passions, even that of libertinage, and even ungovernable passions; yet suppressed by the very same means

which keep the rest of us in order: early training — necessity — circumstances — fear of consequences; till there comes an age, a time when the restraint of years becomes intolerable — and infatuation irresistible . . . “

“But if infatuation — quite possible I admit,” I argued, “how do you account for the nature of the conspiracy.”

“You expect a cogency of conduct not usual in women,” said Marlow. “The subtrefuges of a menaced passion are not to be fathomed. You think it is going on the way it looks, whereas it is capable, for its own ends, of walking backwards into a precipice.

When one once acknowledges that she was not a common woman, then all this is easily understood. She was abominable but she was not common. She had suffered in her life not from its constant inferiority but from constant self-repression. A common woman finding herself placed in a commanding position might have formed the design to become the second Mrs. de Barral. Which would have been impracticable. De Barral would not have known what to do with a wife. But even if by some impossible chance he had made advances, this governess would have repulsed him with scorn. She had treated him always as an inferior being with an assured, distant politeness. In her composed, schooled manner she despised and disliked both father and daughter exceedingly. I have a notion that she had always disliked intensely all her charges including the two ducal (if they were ducal) little girls with whom she had dazzled de Barral. What an odious, ungratified existence it must have been for a woman as avid of all the sensuous emotions which life can give as most of her betters.

She had seen her youth vanish, her freshness disappear, her hopes die, and now she felt her flaming middle-age slipping away from her. No wonder that with her admirably dressed, abundant hair, thickly sprinkled with white threads and adding to her elegant aspect the piquant distinction of a powdered coiffure — no wonder, I say, that she clung desperately to her last infatuation for that graceless young scamp, even to the extent of hatching for him that amazing plot. He was not so far gone in degradation as to make him utterly hopeless for such an attempt. She hoped to keep him straight with that enormous bribe. She was clearly a woman uncommon enough to live without illusions — which, of course, does not mean that she was reasonable. She had said to herself, perhaps with a fury of self-contempt “In a few years I shall be too old for anybody. Meantime I shall have him — and I shall hold him by throwing to him the money of that ordinary, silly, little girl of no account.” Well, it was a desperate expedient — but she thought it worth while. And besides there is hardly a woman in the world, no matter how hard, depraved or frantic, in whom something of the maternal instinct does not survive, unconsumed like a salamander, in the fires of the most abandoned passion. Yes there might have been that sentiment for him too. There was no doubt. So I say again: No wonder! No wonder that she raged at everything — and perhaps even at him, with contradictory reproaches: for regretting the girl, a little fool who would never in her life be worth anybody’s attention, and for taking the disaster itself with a cynical levity in which she perceived a flavour of revolt.

And so the altercation in the night went on, over the irremediable. He arguing "What's the hurry? Why clear out like this?" perhaps a little sorry for the girl and as usual without a penny in his pocket, appreciating the comfortable quarters, wishing to linger on as long as possible in the shameless enjoyment of this already doomed luxury. There was really no hurry for a few days. Always time enough to vanish. And, with that, a touch of masculine softness, a sort of regard for appearances surviving his degradation: "You might behave decently at the last, Eliza." But there was no softness in the sallow face under the gala effect of powdered hair, its formal calmness gone, the dark-ringed eyes glaring at him with a sort of hunger. "No! No! If it is as you say then not a day, not an hour, not a moment." She stuck to it, very determined that there should be no more of that boy and girl philandering since the object of it was gone; angry with herself for having suffered from it so much in the past, furious at its having been all in vain.

But she was reasonable enough not to quarrel with him finally. What was the good? She found means to placate him. The only means. As long as there was some money to be got she had hold of him. "Now go away. We shall do no good by any more of this sort of talk. I want to be alone for a bit." He went away, sulkily acquiescent. There was a room always kept ready for him on the same floor, at the further end of a short thickly carpeted passage.

How she passed the night, this woman with no illusions to help her through the hours which must have been sleepless I shouldn't like to say. It ended at last; and this strange victim of the de Barral failure, whose name would never be known to the Official Receiver, came down to breakfast, impenetrable in her everyday perfection. From the very first, somehow, she had accepted the fatal news for true. All her life she had never believed in her luck, with that pessimism of the passionate who at bottom feel themselves to be the outcasts of a morally restrained universe. But this did not make it any easier, on opening the morning paper feverishly, to see the thing confirmed. Oh yes! It was there. The Orb had suspended payment — the first growl of the storm faint as yet, but to the initiated the forerunner of a deluge. As an item of news it was not indecently displayed. It was not displayed at all in a sense. The serious paper, the only one of the great dailies which had always maintained an attitude of reserve towards the de Barral group of banks, had its "manner." Yes! a modest item of news! But there was also, on another page, a special financial article in a hostile tone beginning with the words "We have always feared" and a guarded, half-column leader, opening with the phrase: "It is a deplorable sign of the times" what was, in effect, an austere, general rebuke to the absurd infatuations of the investing public. She glanced through these articles, a line here and a line there — no more was necessary to catch beyond doubt the murmur of the oncoming flood. Several slighting references by name to de Barral revived her animosity against the man, suddenly, as by the effect of unforeseen moral support. The miserable wretch! . . . "

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“ — You understand,” Marlow interrupted the current of his narrative, “that in order to be consecutive in my relation of this affair I am telling you at once the details which I heard from Mrs. Fyne later in the day, as well as what little Fyne imparted to me with his usual solemnity during that morning call. As you may easily guess the Fynes, in their apartments, had read the news at the same time, and, as a matter of fact, in the same august and highly moral newspaper, as the governess in the luxurious mansion a few doors down on the opposite side of the street. But they read them with different feelings. They were thunderstruck. Fyne had to explain the full purport of the intelligence to Mrs. Fyne whose first cry was that of relief. Then that poor child would be safe from these designing, horrid people. Mrs. Fyne did not know what it might mean to be suddenly reduced from riches to absolute penury. Fyne with his masculine imagination was less inclined to rejoice extravagantly at the girl’s escape from the moral dangers which had been menacing her defenceless existence. It was a confoundedly big price to pay. What an unfortunate little thing she was! “We might be able to do something to comfort that poor child at any rate for the time she is here,” said Mrs. Fyne. She felt under a sort of moral obligation not to be indifferent. But no comfort for anyone could be got by rushing out into the street at this early hour; and so, following the advice of Fyne not to act hastily, they both sat down at the window and stared feelingly at the great house, awful to their eyes in its stolid, prosperous, expensive respectability with ruin absolutely standing at the door.

By that time, or very soon after, all Brighton had the information and formed a more or less just appreciation of its gravity. The butler in Miss de Barral’s big house had seen the news, perhaps earlier than anybody within a mile of the Parade, in the course of his morning duties of which one was to dry the freshly delivered paper before the fire — an occasion to glance at it which no intelligent man could have neglected. He communicated to the rest of the household his vaguely forcible impression that something had gone d — -bly wrong with the affairs of “her father in London.”

This brought an atmosphere of constraint through the house, which Flora de Barral coming down somewhat later than usual could not help noticing in her own way. Everybody seemed to stare so stupidly somehow; she feared a dull day.

In the dining-room the governess in her place, a newspaper half-concealed under the cloth on her lap, after a few words exchanged with lips that seemed hardly to move, remaining motionless, her eyes fixed before her in an enduring silence; and presently Charley coming in to whom she did not even give a glance. He hardly said good morning, though he had a half-hearted try to smile at the girl, and sitting opposite her with his eyes on his plate and slight quivers passing along the line of his clean-shaven jaw, he too had nothing to say. It was dull, horribly dull to begin one’s day like this; but she knew what it was. These never-ending family affairs! It was not for the first time that she had suffered from their depressing after-effects on these two. It was a shame that the delightful Charley should be made dull by these stupid talks, and it was perfectly stupid of him to let himself be upset like this by his aunt.

When after a period of still, as if calculating, immobility, her governess got up abruptly and went out with the paper in her hand, almost immediately afterwards followed by Charley who left his breakfast half eaten, the girl was positively relieved. They would have it out that morning whatever it was, and be themselves again in the afternoon. At least Charley would be. To the moods of her governess she did not attach so much importance.

For the first time that morning the Fynes saw the front door of the awful house open and the objectionable young man issue forth, his rascality visible to their prejudiced eyes in his very bowler hat and in the smart cut of his short fawn overcoat. He walked away rapidly like a man hurrying to catch a train, glancing from side to side as though he were carrying something off. Could he be departing for good? Undoubtedly, undoubtedly! But Mrs. Fyne's fervent "thank goodness" turned out to be a bit, as the Americans — some Americans — say "previous." In a very short time the odious fellow appeared again, strolling, absolutely strolling back, his hat now tilted a little on one side, with an air of leisure and satisfaction. Mrs. Fyne groaned not only in the spirit, at this sight, but in the flesh, audibly; and asked her husband what it might mean. Fyne naturally couldn't say. Mrs. Fyne believed that there was something horrid in progress and meantime the object of her detestation had gone up the steps and had knocked at the door which at once opened to admit him.

He had been only as far as the bank.

His reason for leaving his breakfast unfinished to run after Miss de Barral's governess, was to speak to her in reference to that very errand possessing the utmost possible importance in his eyes. He shrugged his shoulders at the nervousness of her eyes and hands, at the half-strangled whisper "I had to go out. I could hardly contain myself." That was her affair. He was, with a young man's squeamishness, rather sick of her ferocity. He did not understand it. Men do not accumulate hate against each other in tiny amounts, treasuring every pinch carefully till it grows at last into a monstrous and explosive hoard. He had run out after her to remind her of the balance at the bank. What about lifting that money without wasting any more time? She had promised him to leave nothing behind.

An account opened in her name for the expenses of the establishment in Brighton, had been fed by de Barral with deferential lavishness. The governess crossed the wide hall into a little room at the side where she sat down to write the cheque, which he hastened out to go and cash as if it were stolen or a forgery. As observed by the Fynes, his uneasy appearance on leaving the house arose from the fact that his first trouble having been caused by a cheque of doubtful authenticity, the possession of a document of the sort made him unreasonably uncomfortable till this one was safely cashed. And after all, you know it was stealing of an indirect sort; for the money was de Barral's money if the account was in the name of the accomplished lady. At any rate the cheque was cashed. On getting hold of the notes and gold he recovered his jaunty bearing, it being well known that with certain natures the presence of money (even stolen) in the pocket, acts as a tonic, or at least as a stimulant. He cocked his hat a little on one side

as though he had had a drink or two — which indeed he might have had in reality, to celebrate the occasion.

The governess had been waiting for his return in the hall, disregarding the sidelong glances of the butler as he went in and out of the dining-room clearing away the breakfast things. It was she, herself, who had opened the door so promptly. "It's all right," he said touching his breast-pocket; and she did not dare, the miserable wretch without illusions, she did not dare ask him to hand it over. They looked at each other in silence. He nodded significantly: "Where is she now?" and she whispered "Gone into the drawing-room. Want to see her again?" with an archly black look which he acknowledged by a muttered, surly: "I am damned if I do. Well, as you want to bolt like this, why don't we go now?"

She set her lips with cruel obstinacy and shook her head. She had her idea, her completed plan. At that moment the Fynes, still at the window and watching like a pair of private detectives, saw a man with a long grey beard and a jovial face go up the steps helping himself with a thick stick, and knock at the door. Who could he be?

He was one of Miss de Barral's masters. She had lately taken up painting in water-colours, having read in a high-class woman's weekly paper that a great many princesses of the European royal houses were cultivating that art. This was the water-colour morning; and the teacher, a veteran of many exhibitions, of a venerable and jovial aspect, had turned up with his usual punctuality. He was no great reader of morning papers, and even had he seen the news it is very likely he would not have understood its real purport. At any rate he turned up, as the governess expected him to do, and the Fynes saw him pass through the fateful door.

He bowed cordially to the lady in charge of Miss de Barral's education, whom he saw in the hall engaged in conversation with a very good-looking but somewhat raffish young gentleman. She turned to him graciously: "Flora is already waiting for you in the drawing-room."

The cultivation of the art said to be patronized by princesses was pursued in the drawing-room from considerations of the right kind of light. The governess preceded the master up the stairs and into the room where Miss de Barral was found arrayed in a holland pinafore (also of the right kind for the pursuit of the art) and smilingly expectant. The water-colour lesson enlivened by the jocular conversation of the kindly, humorous, old man was always great fun; and she felt she would be compensated for the tiresome beginning of the day.

Her governess generally was present at the lesson; but on this occasion she only sat down till the master and pupil had gone to work in earnest, and then as though she had suddenly remembered some order to give, rose quietly and went out of the room.

Once outside, the servants summoned by the passing maid without a bell being rung, and quick, quick, let all this luggage be taken down into the hall, and let one of you call a cab. She stood outside the drawing-room door on the landing, looking at each piece, trunk, leather cases, portmanteaus, being carried past her, her brows knitted and her aspect so sombre and absorbed that it took some little time for the butler to muster

courage enough to speak to her. But he reflected that he was a free-born Briton and had his rights. He spoke straight to the point but in the usual respectful manner.

“Beg you pardon, ma’am — but are you going away for good?”

He was startled by her tone. Its unexpected, unlady-like harshness fell on his trained ear with the disagreeable effect of a false note. “Yes. I am going away. And the best thing for all of you is to go away too, as soon as you like. You can go now, to-day, this moment. You had your wages paid you only last week. The longer you stay the greater your loss. But I have nothing to do with it now. You are the servants of Mr. de Barral — you know.”

The butler was astounded by the manner of this advice, and as his eyes wandered to the drawing-room door the governess extended her arm as if to bar the way. “Nobody goes in there.” And that was said still in another tone, such a tone that all trace of the trained respectfulness vanished from the butler’s bearing. He stared at her with a frank wondering gaze. “Not till I am gone,” she added, and there was such an expression on her face that the man was daunted by the mystery of it. He shrugged his shoulders slightly and without another word went down the stairs on his way to the basement, brushing in the hall past Mr. Charles who hat on head and both hands rammed deep into his overcoat pockets paced up and down as though on sentry duty there.

The ladies’ maid was the only servant upstairs, hovering in the passage on the first floor, curious and as if fascinated by the woman who stood there guarding the door. Being beckoned closer imperiously and asked by the governess to bring out of the now empty rooms the hat and veil, the only objects besides the furniture still to be found there, she did so in silence but inwardly fluttered. And while waiting uneasily, with the veil, before that woman who, without moving a step away from the drawing-room door was pinning with careless haste her hat on her head, she heard within a sudden burst of laughter from Miss de Barral enjoying the fun of the water-colour lesson given her for the last time by the cheery old man.

Mr. and Mrs. Fyne ambushed at their window — a most incredible occupation for people of their kind — saw with renewed anxiety a cab come to the door, and watched some luggage being carried out and put on its roof. The butler appeared for a moment, then went in again. What did it mean? Was Flora going to be taken to her father; or were these people, that woman and her horrible nephew, about to carry her off somewhere? Fyne couldn’t tell. He doubted the last, Flora having now, he judged, no value, either positive or speculative. Though no great reader of character he did not credit the governess with humane intentions. He confessed to me naïvely that he was excited as if watching some action on the stage. Then the thought struck him that the girl might have had some money settled on her, be possessed of some means, of some little fortune of her own and therefore —

He imparted this theory to his wife who shared fully his consternation. “I can’t believe the child will go away without running in to say good-bye to us,” she murmured. “We must find out! I shall ask her.” But at that very moment the cab rolled away, empty

inside, and the door of the house which had been standing slightly ajar till then was pushed to.

They remained silent staring at it till Mrs. Fyne whispered doubtfully "I really think I must go over." Fyne didn't answer for a while (his is a reflective mind, you know), and then as if Mrs. Fyne's whispers had an occult power over that door it opened wide again and the white-bearded man issued, astonishingly active in his movements, using his stick almost like a leaping-pole to get down the steps; and hobbled away briskly along the pavement. Naturally the Fynes were too far off to make out the expression of his face. But it would not have helped them very much to a guess at the conditions inside the house. The expression was humorously puzzled — nothing more.

For, at the end of his lesson, seizing his trusty stick and coming out with his habitual vivacity, he very nearly cannoned just outside the drawing-room door into the back of Miss de Barral's governess. He stopped himself in time and she turned round swiftly. It was embarrassing; he apologised; but her face was not startled; it was not aware of him; it wore a singular expression of resolution. A very singular expression which, as it were, detained him for a moment. In order to cover his embarrassment, he made some inane remark on the weather, upon which, instead of returning another inane remark according to the tacit rules of the game, she only gave him a smile of unfathomable meaning. Nothing could have been more singular. The good-looking young gentleman of questionable appearance took not the slightest notice of him in the hall. No servant was to be seen. He let himself out pulling the door to behind him with a crash as, in a manner, he was forced to do to get it shut at all.

When the echo of it had died away the woman on the landing leaned over the banister and called out bitterly to the man below "Don't you want to come up and say good-bye." He had an impatient movement of the shoulders and went on pacing to and fro as though he had not heard. But suddenly he checked himself, stood still for a moment, then with a gloomy face and without taking his hands out of his pockets ran smartly up the stairs. Already facing the door she turned her head for a whispered taunt: "Come! Confess you were dying to see her stupid little face once more," — to which he disdained to answer.

Flora de Barral, still seated before the table at which she had been wording on her sketch, raised her head at the noise of the opening door. The invading manner of their entrance gave her the sense of something she had never seen before. She knew them well. She knew the woman better than she knew her father. There had been between them an intimacy of relation as great as it can possibly be without the final closeness of affection. The delightful Charley walked in, with his eyes fixed on the back of her governess whose raised veil hid her forehead like a brown band above the black line of the eyebrows. The girl was astounded and alarmed by the altogether unknown expression in the woman's face. The stress of passion often discloses an aspect of the personality completely ignored till then by its closest intimates. There was something like an emanation of evil from her eyes and from the face of the other, who, exactly behind her and overtopping her by half a head, kept his eyelids lowered in a sinister

fashion — which in the poor girl, reached, stirred, set free that faculty of unreasoning explosive terror lying locked up at the bottom of all human hearts and of the hearts of animals as well. With suddenly enlarged pupils and a movement as instinctive almost as the bounding of a startled fawn, she jumped up and found herself in the middle of the big room, exclaiming at those amazing and familiar strangers.

“What do you want?”

You will note that she cried: What do you want? Not: What has happened? She told Mrs. Fyne that she had received suddenly the feeling of being personally attacked. And that must have been very terrifying. The woman before her had been the wisdom, the authority, the protection of life, security embodied and visible and undisputed.

You may imagine then the force of the shock in the intuitive perception not merely of danger, for she did not know what was alarming her, but in the sense of the security being gone. And not only security. I don't know how to explain it clearly. Look! Even a small child lives, plays and suffers in terms of its conception of its own existence. Imagine, if you can, a fact coming in suddenly with a force capable of shattering that very conception itself. It was only because of the girl being still so much of a child that she escaped mental destruction; that, in other words she got over it. Could one conceive of her more mature, while still as ignorant as she was, one must conclude that she would have become an idiot on the spot — long before the end of that experience. Luckily, people, whether mature or not mature (and who really is ever mature?) are for the most part quite incapable of understanding what is happening to them: a merciful provision of nature to preserve an average amount of sanity for working purposes in this world . . . “

“But we, my dear Marlow, have the inestimable advantage of understanding what is happening to others,” I struck in. “Or at least some of us seem to. Is that too a provision of nature? And what is it for? Is it that we may amuse ourselves gossiping about each other's affairs? You for instance seem — ”

“I don't know what I seem,” Marlow silenced me, “and surely life must be amused somehow. It would be still a very respectable provision if it were only for that end. But from that same provision of understanding, there springs in us compassion, charity, indignation, the sense of solidarity; and in minds of any largeness an inclination to that indulgence which is next door to affection. I don't mean to say that I am inclined to an indulgent view of the precious couple which broke in upon an unsuspecting girl. They came marching in (it's the very expression she used later on to Mrs. Fyne) but at her cry they stopped. It must have been startling enough to them. It was like having the mask torn off when you don't expect it. The man stopped for good; he didn't offer to move a step further. But, though the governess had come in there for the very purpose of taking the mask off for the first time in her life, she seemed to look upon the frightened cry as a fresh provocation. “What are you screaming for, you little fool?” she said advancing alone close to the girl who was affected exactly as if she had seen Medusa's head with serpentine locks set mysteriously on the shoulders of that familiar person, in that brown dress, under that hat she knew so well. It made her lose all her

hold on reality. She told Mrs. Fyne: "I didn't know where I was. I didn't even know that I was frightened. If she had told me it was a joke I would have laughed. If she had told me to put on my hat and go out with her I would have gone to put on my hat and gone out with her and never said a single word; I should have been convinced I had been mad for a minute or so, and I would have worried myself to death rather than breathe a hint of it to her or anyone. But the wretch put her face close to mine and I could not move. Directly I had looked into her eyes I felt grown on to the carpet."

It was years afterwards that she used to talk like this to Mrs. Fyne — and to Mrs. Fyne alone. Nobody else ever heard the story from her lips. But it was never forgotten. It was always felt; it remained like a mark on her soul, a sort of mystic wound, to be contemplated, to be meditated over. And she said further to Mrs. Fyne, in the course of many confidences provoked by that contemplation, that, as long as that woman called her names, it was almost soothing, it was in a manner reassuring. Her imagination had, like her body, gone off in a wild bound to meet the unknown; and then to hear after all something which more in its tone than in its substance was mere venomous abuse, had steadied the inward flutter of all her being.

"She called me a little fool more times than I can remember. I! A fool! Why, Mrs. Fyne! I do assure you I had never yet thought at all; never of anything in the world, till then. I just went on living. And one can't be a fool without one has at least tried to think. But what had I ever to think about?"

"And no doubt," commented Marlow, "her life had been a mere life of sensations — the response to which can neither be foolish nor wise. It can only be temperamental; and I believe that she was of a generally happy disposition, a child of the average kind. Even when she was asked violently whether she imagined that there was anything in her, apart from her money, to induce any intelligent person to take any sort of interest in her existence, she only caught her breath in one dry sob and said nothing, made no other sound, made no movement. When she was viciously assured that she was in heart, mind, manner and appearance, an utterly common and insipid creature, she remained still, without indignation, without anger. She stood, a frail and passive vessel into which the other went on pouring all the accumulated dislike for all her pupils, her scorn of all her employers (the ducal one included), the accumulated resentment, the infinite hatred of all these unrelieved years of — I won't say hypocrisy. The practice of perfect hypocrisy is a relief in itself, a secret triumph of the vilest sort, no doubt, but still a way of getting even with the common morality from which some of us appear to suffer so much. No! I will say the years, the passionate, bitter years, of restraint, the iron, admirably mannered restraint at every moment, in a never-failing perfect correctness of speech, glances, movements, smiles, gestures, establishing for her a high reputation, an impressive record of success in her sphere. It had been like living half strangled for years.

And all this torture for nothing, in the end! What looked at last like a possible prize (oh, without illusions! but still a prize) broken in her hands, fallen in the dust, the bitter dust, of disappointment, she revelled in the miserable revenge — pretty safe

too — only regretting the unworthiness of the girlish figure which stood for so much she had longed to be able to spit venom at, if only once, in perfect liberty. The presence of the young man at her back increased both her satisfaction and her rage. But the very violence of the attack seemed to defeat its end by rendering the representative victim as it were insensible. The cause of this outrage naturally escaping the girl's imagination her attitude was in effect that of dense, hopeless stupidity. And it is a fact that the worst shocks of life are often received without outcries, without gestures, without a flow of tears and the convulsions of sobbing. The insatiable governess missed these signs exceedingly. This pitiful stolidity was only a fresh provocation. Yet the poor girl was deadly pale.

“I was cold,” she used to explain to Mrs. Fyne. “I had had time to get terrified. She had pushed her face so near mine and her teeth looked as though she wanted to bite me. Her eyes seemed to have become quite dry, hard and small in a lot of horrible wrinkles. I was too afraid of her to shudder, too afraid of her to put my fingers to my ears. I didn't know what I expected her to call me next, but when she told me I was no better than a beggar — that there would be no more masters, no more servants, no more horses for me — I said to myself: Is that all? I should have laughed if I hadn't been too afraid of her to make the least little sound.”

It seemed that poor Flora had to know all the possible phases of that sort of anguish, beginning with instinctive panic, through the bewildered stage, the frozen stage and the stage of blanched apprehension, down to the instinctive prudence of extreme terror — the stillness of the mouse. But when she heard herself called the child of a cheat and a swindler, the very monstrous unexpectedness of this caused in her a revulsion towards letting herself go. She screamed out all at once “You mustn't speak like this of Papa!”

The effort of it uprooted her from that spot where her little feet seemed dug deep into the thick luxurious carpet, and she retreated backwards to a distant part of the room, hearing herself repeat “You mustn't, you mustn't” as if it were somebody else screaming. She came to a chair and flung herself into it. Thereupon the somebody else ceased screaming and she lolled, exhausted, sightless, in a silent room, as if indifferent to everything and without a single thought in her head.

The next few seconds seemed to last for ever so long; a black abyss of time separating what was past and gone from the reappearance of the governess and the reawakening of fear. And that woman was forcing the words through her set teeth: “You say I mustn't, I mustn't. All the world will be speaking of him like this to-morrow. They will say it, and they'll print it. You shall hear it and you shall read it — and then you shall know whose daughter you are.”

Her face lighted up with an atrocious satisfaction. “He's nothing but a thief,” she cried, “this father of yours. As to you I have never been deceived in you for a moment. I have been growing more and more sick of you for years. You are a vulgar, silly nonentity, and you shall go back to where you belong, whatever low place you have

sprung from, and beg your bread — that is if anybody's charity will have anything to do with you, which I doubt — ”

She would have gone on regardless of the enormous eyes, of the open mouth of the girl who sat up suddenly with the wild staring expression of being choked by invisible fingers on her throat, and yet horribly pale. The effect on her constitution was so profound, Mrs. Fyne told me, that she who as a child had a rather pretty delicate colouring, showed a white bloodless face for a couple of years afterwards, and remained always liable at the slightest emotion to an extraordinary ghost-like whiteness. The end came in the abomination of desolation of the poor child's miserable cry for help: “Charley! Charley!” coming from her throat in hidden gasping efforts. Her enlarged eyes had discovered him where he stood motionless and dumb.

He started from his immobility, a hand withdrawn brusquely from the pocket of his overcoat, strode up to the woman, seized her by the arm from behind, saying in a rough commanding tone: “Come away, Eliza.” In an instant the child saw them close together and remote, near the door, gone through the door, which she neither heard nor saw being opened or shut. But it was shut. Oh yes, it was shut. Her slow unseeing glance wandered all over the room. For some time longer she remained leaning forward, collecting her strength, doubting if she would be able to stand. She stood up at last. Everything about her spun round in an oppressive silence. She remembered perfectly — as she told Mrs. Fyne — that clinging to the arm of the chair she called out twice “Papa! Papa!” At the thought that he was far away in London everything about her became quite still. Then, frightened suddenly by the solitude of that empty room, she rushed out of it blindly.

* * * * *

With that fatal diffidence in well doing, inherent in the present condition of humanity, the Fynes continued to watch at their window. “It's always so difficult to know what to do for the best,” Fyne assured me. It is. Good intentions stand in their own way so much. Whereas if you want to do harm to anyone you needn't hesitate. You have only to go on. No one will reproach you with your mistakes or call you a confounded, clumsy meddler. The Fynes watched the door, the closed street door inimical somehow to their benevolent thoughts, the face of the house cruelly impenetrable. It was just as on any other day. The unchanged daily aspect of inanimate things is so impressive that Fyne went back into the room for a moment, picked up the paper again, and ran his eyes over the item of news. No doubt of it. It looked very bad. He came back to the window and Mrs. Fyne. Tired out as she was she sat there resolute and ready for responsibility. But she had no suggestion to offer. People do fear a rebuff wonderfully, and all her audacity was in her thoughts. She shrank from the incomparably insolent manner of the governess. Fyne stood by her side, as in those old-fashioned photographs of married couples where you see a husband with his hand on the back of his wife's chair. And they were about as efficient as an old photograph, and as still, till Mrs. Fyne started slightly. The street door had swung open, and, bursting out, appeared the young man, his hat (Mrs. Fyne observed) tilted forward over his eyes. After him

the governess slipped through, turning round at once to shut the door behind her with care. Meantime the man went down the white steps and strode along the pavement, his hands rammed deep into the pockets of his fawn overcoat. The woman, that woman of composed movements, of deliberate superior manner, took a little run to catch up with him, and directly she had caught up with him tried to introduce her hand under his arm. Mrs. Fyne saw the brusque half turn of the fellow's body as one avoids an importunate contact, defeating her attempt rudely. She did not try again but kept pace with his stride, and Mrs. Fyne watched them, walking independently, turn the corner of the street side by side, disappear for ever.

The Fynes looked at each other eloquently, doubtfully: What do you think of this? Then with common accord turned their eyes back to the street door, closed, massive, dark; the great, clear-brass knocker shining in a quiet slant of sunshine cut by a diagonal line of heavy shade filling the further end of the street. Could the girl be already gone? Sent away to her father? Had she any relations? Nobody but de Barral himself ever came to see her, Mrs. Fyne remembered; and she had the instantaneous, profound, maternal perception of the child's loneliness — and a girl too! It was irresistible. And, besides, the departure of the governess was not without its encouraging influence. "I am going over at once to find out," she declared resolutely but still staring across the street. Her intention was arrested by the sight of that awful, sombrely glistening door, swinging back suddenly on the yawning darkness of the hall, out of which literally flew out, right out on the pavement, almost without touching the white steps, a little figure swathed in a holland pinafore up to the chin, its hair streaming back from its head, darting past a lamp-post, past the red pillar-box . . . "Here," cried Mrs. Fyne; "she's coming here! Run, John! Run!"

Fyne bounded out of the room. This is his own word. Bounded! He assured me with intensified solemnity that he bounded; and the sight of the short and muscular Fyne bounding gravely about the circumscribed passages and staircases of a small, very high class, private hotel, would have been worth any amount of money to a man greedy of memorable impressions. But as I looked at him, the desire of laughter at my very lips, I asked myself: how many men could be found ready to compromise their cherished gravity for the sake of the unimportant child of a ruined financier with an ugly, black cloud already wreathing his head. I didn't laugh at little Fyne. I encouraged him: "You did! — very good . . . Well?"

His main thought was to save the child from some unpleasant interference. There was a porter downstairs, page boys; some people going away with their trunks in the passage; a railway omnibus at the door, white-breasted waiters dodging about the entrance.

He was in time. He was at the door before she reached it in her blind course. She did not recognize him; perhaps she did not see him. He caught her by the arm as she ran past and, very sensibly, without trying to check her, simply darted in with her and up the stairs, causing no end of consternation amongst the people in his way. They scattered. What might have been their thoughts at the spectacle of a shameless

middle-aged man abducting headlong into the upper regions of a respectable hotel a terrified young girl obviously under age, I don't know. And Fyne (he told me so) did not care for what people might think. All he wanted was to reach his wife before the girl collapsed. For a time she ran with him but at the last flight of stairs he had to seize and half drag, half carry her to his wife. Mrs. Fyne waited at the door with her quite unmoved physiognomy and her readiness to confront any sort of responsibility, which already characterized her, long before she became a ruthless theorist. Relieved, his mission accomplished, Fyne closed hastily the door of the sitting-room.

But before long both Fynes became frightened. After a period of immobility in the arms of Mrs. Fyne, the girl, who had not said a word, tore herself out from that slightly rigid embrace. She struggled dumbly between them, they did not know why, soundless and ghastly, till she sank exhausted on a couch. Luckily the children were out with the two nurses. The hotel housemaid helped Mrs. Fyne to put Flora de Barral to bed. She was as if gone speechless and insane. She lay on her back, her face white like a piece of paper, her dark eyes staring at the ceiling, her awful immobility broken by sudden shivering fits with a loud chattering of teeth in the shadowy silence of the room, the blinds pulled down, Mrs. Fyne sitting by patiently, her arms folded, yet inwardly moved by the riddle of that distress of which she could not guess the word, and saying to herself: "That child is too emotional — much too emotional to be ever really sound!" As if anyone not made of stone could be perfectly sound in this world. And then how sound? In what sense — to resist what? Force or corruption? And even in the best armour of steel there are joints a treacherous stroke can always find if chance gives the opportunity.

General considerations never had the power to trouble Mrs. Fyne much. The girl not being in a state to be questioned she waited by the bedside. Fyne had crossed over to the house, his scruples overcome by his anxiety to discover what really had happened. He did not have to lift the knocker; the door stood open on the inside gloom of the hall; he walked into it and saw no one about, the servants having assembled for a fatuous consultation in the basement. Fyne's uplifted bass voice startled them down there, the butler coming up, staring and in his shirt sleeves, very suspicious at first, and then, on Fyne's explanation that he was the husband of a lady who had called several times at the house — Miss de Barral's mother's friend — becoming humanely concerned and communicative, in a man to man tone, but preserving his trained high-class servant's voice: "Oh bless you, sir, no! She does not mean to come back. She told me so herself" — he assured Fyne with a faint shade of contempt creeping into his tone.

As regards their young lady nobody downstairs had any idea that she had run out of the house. He dared say they all would have been willing to do their very best for her, for the time being; but since she was now with her mother's friends . . .

He fidgeted. He murmured that all this was very unexpected. He wanted to know what he had better do with letters or telegrams which might arrive in the course of the day.

“Letters addressed to Miss de Barral, you had better bring over to my hotel over there,” said Fyne beginning to feel extremely worried about the future. The man said “Yes, sir,” adding, “and if a letter comes addressed to Mrs. . . . “

Fyne stopped him by a gesture. “I don’t know . . . Anything you like.”

“Very well, sir.”

The butler did not shut the street door after Fyne, but remained on the doorstep for a while, looking up and down the street in the spirit of independent expectation like a man who is again his own master. Mrs. Fyne hearing her husband return came out of the room where the girl was lying in bed. “No change,” she whispered; and Fyne could only make a hopeless sign of ignorance as to what all this meant and how it would end.

He feared future complications — naturally; a man of limited means, in a public position, his time not his own. Yes. He owned to me in the parlour of my farmhouse that he had been very much concerned then at the possible consequences. But as he was making this artless confession I said to myself that, whatever consequences and complications he might have imagined, the complication from which he was suffering now could never, never have presented itself to his mind. Slow but sure (for I conceive that the Book of Destiny has been written up from the beginning to the last page) it had been coming for something like six years — and now it had come. The complication was there! I looked at his unshaken solemnity with the amused pity we give the victim of a funny if somewhat ill-natured practical joke.

“Oh hang it,” he exclaimed — in no logical connection with what he had been relating to me. Nevertheless the exclamation was intelligible enough.

However at first there were, he admitted, no untoward complications, no embarrassing consequences. To a telegram in guarded terms dispatched to de Barral no answer was received for more than twenty-four hours. This certainly caused the Fynes some anxiety. When the answer arrived late on the evening of next day it was in the shape of an elderly man. An unexpected sort of man. Fyne explained to me with precision that he evidently belonged to what is most respectable in the lower middle classes. He was calm and slow in his speech. He was wearing a frock-coat, had grey whiskers meeting under his chin, and declared on entering that Mr. de Barral was his cousin. He hastened to add that he had not seen his cousin for many years, while he looked upon Fyne (who received him alone) with so much distrust that Fyne felt hurt (the person actually refusing at first the chair offered to him) and retorted tartly that he, for his part, had never seen Mr. de Barral, in his life, and that, since the visitor did not want to sit down, he, Fyne, begged him to state his business as shortly as possible. The man in black sat down then with a faint superior smile.

He had come for the girl. His cousin had asked him in a note delivered by a messenger to go to Brighton at once and take “his girl” over from a gentleman named Fyne and give her house-room for a time in his family. And there he was. His business had not allowed him to come sooner. His business was the manufacture on a large scale of cardboard boxes. He had two grown-up girls of his own. He had consulted his wife and

so that was all right. The girl would get a welcome in his home. His home most likely was not what she had been used to but, etc. etc.

All the time Fyne felt subtly in that man's manner a derisive disapproval of everything that was not lower middle class, a profound respect for money, a mean sort of contempt for speculators that fail, and a conceited satisfaction with his own respectable vulgarity.

With Mrs. Fyne the manner of the obscure cousin of de Barral was but little less offensive. He looked at her rather slyly but her cold, decided demeanour impressed him. Mrs. Fyne on her side was simply appalled by the personage, but did not show it outwardly. Not even when the man remarked with false simplicity that Florrie — her name was Florrie wasn't it? would probably miss at first all her grand friends. And when he was informed that the girl was in bed, not feeling well at all he showed an unsympathetic alarm. She wasn't an invalid was she? No. What was the matter with her then?

An extreme distaste for that respectable member of society was depicted in Fyne's face even as he was telling me of him after all these years. He was a specimen of precisely the class of which people like the Fynes have the least experience; and I imagine he jarred on them painfully. He possessed all the civic virtues in their very meanest form, and the finishing touch was given by a low sort of consciousness he manifested of possessing them. His industry was exemplary. He wished to catch the earliest possible train next morning. It seems that for seven and twenty years he had never missed being seated on his office-stool at the factory punctually at ten o'clock every day. He listened to Mrs. Fyne's objections with undisguised impatience. Why couldn't Florrie get up and have her breakfast at eight like other people? In his house the breakfast was at eight sharp. Mrs. Fyne's polite stoicism overcame him at last. He had come down at a very great personal inconvenience, he assured her with displeasure, but he gave up the early train.

The good Fynes didn't dare to look at each other before this unforeseen but perfectly authorized guardian, the same thought springing up in their minds: Poor girl! Poor girl! If the women of the family were like this too! . . . And of course they would be. Poor girl! But what could they have done even if they had been prepared to raise objections. The person in the frock-coat had the father's note; he had shown it to Fyne. Just a request to take care of the girl — as her nearest relative — without any explanation or a single allusion to the financial catastrophe, its tone strangely detached and in its very silence on the point giving occasion to think that the writer was not uneasy as to the child's future. Probably it was that very idea which had set the cousin so readily in motion. Men had come before out of commercial crashes with estates in the country and a comfortable income, if not for themselves then for their wives. And if a wife could be made comfortable by a little dexterous management then why not a daughter? Yes. This possibility might have been discussed in the person's household and judged worth acting upon.

The man actually hinted broadly that such was his belief and in face of Fyne's guarded replies gave him to understand that he was not the dupe of such reticences. Obviously he looked upon the Fynes as being disappointed because the girl was taken away from them. They, by a diplomatic sacrifice in the interests of poor Flora, had asked the man to dinner. He accepted ungraciously, remarking that he was not used to late hours. He had generally a bit of supper about half-past eight or nine. However . . .

He gazed contemptuously round the prettily decorated dining-room. He wrinkled his nose in a puzzled way at the dishes offered to him by the waiter but refused none, devouring the food with a great appetite and drinking ("swilling" Fyne called it) gallons of ginger beer, which was procured for him (in stone bottles) at his request. The difficulty of keeping up a conversation with that being exhausted Mrs. Fyne herself, who had come to the table armed with adamantine resolution. The only memorable thing he said was when, in a pause of gorging himself "with these French dishes" he deliberately let his eyes roam over the little tables occupied by parties of diners, and remarked that his wife did for a moment think of coming down with him, but that he was glad she didn't do so. "She wouldn't have been at all happy seeing all this alcohol about. Not at all happy," he declared weightily.

"You must have had a charming evening," I said to Fyne, "if I may judge from the way you have kept the memory green."

"Delightful," he growled with, positively, a flash of anger at the recollection, but lapsed back into his solemnity at once. After we had been silent for a while I asked whether the man took away the girl next day.

Fyne said that he did; in the afternoon, in a fly, with a few clothes the maid had got together and brought across from the big house. He only saw Flora again ten minutes before they left for the railway station, in the Fynes' sitting-room at the hotel. It was a most painful ten minutes for the Fynes. The respectable citizen addressed Miss de Barral as "Florrie" and "my dear," remarking to her that she was not very big "there's not much of you my dear" in a familiarly disparaging tone. Then turning to Mrs. Fyne, and quite loud "She's very white in the face. Why's that?" To this Mrs. Fyne made no reply. She had put the girl's hair up that morning with her own hands. It changed her very much, observed Fyne. He, naturally, played a subordinate, merely approving part. All he could do for Miss de Barral personally was to go downstairs and put her into the fly himself, while Miss de Barral's nearest relation, having been shouldered out of the way, stood by, with an umbrella and a little black bag, watching this proceeding with grim amusement, as it seemed. It was difficult to guess what the girl thought or what she felt. She no longer looked a child. She whispered to Fyne a faint "Thank you," from the fly, and he said to her in very distinct tones and while still holding her hand: "Pray don't forget to write fully to my wife in a day or two, Miss de Barral." Then Fyne stepped back and the cousin climbed into the fly muttering quite audibly: "I don't think you'll be troubled much with her in the future;" without however looking at Fyne on whom he did not even bestow a nod. The fly drove away.

Chapter 5 — the Tea-party

“Amiable personality,” I observed seeing Fyne on the point of falling into a brown study. But I could not help adding with meaning: “He hadn’t the gift of prophecy though.”

Fyne got up suddenly with a muttered “No, evidently not.” He was gloomy, hesitating. I supposed that he would not wish to play chess that afternoon. This would dispense me from leaving my rooms on a day much too fine to be wasted in walking exercise. And I was disappointed when picking up his cap he intimated to me his hope of seeing me at the cottage about four o’clock — as usual.

“It wouldn’t be as usual.” I put a particular stress on that remark. He admitted, after a short reflection, that it would not be. No. Not as usual. In fact it was his wife who hoped, rather, for my presence. She had formed a very favourable opinion of my practical sagacity.

This was the first I ever heard of it. I had never suspected that Mrs. Fyne had taken the trouble to distinguish in me the signs of sagacity or folly. The few words we had exchanged last night in the excitement — or the bother — of the girl’s disappearance, were the first moderately significant words which had ever passed between us. I had felt myself always to be in Mrs. Fyne’s view her husband’s chess-player and nothing else — a convenience — almost an implement.

“I am highly flattered,” I said. “I have always heard that there are no limits to feminine intuition; and now I am half inclined to believe it is so. But still I fail to see in what way my sagacity, practical or otherwise, can be of any service to Mrs. Fyne. One man’s sagacity is very much like any other man’s sagacity. And with you at hand — ”

Fyne, manifestly not attending to what I was saying, directed straight at me his worried solemn eyes and struck in:

“Yes, yes. Very likely. But you will come — won’t you?”

I had made up my mind that no Fyne of either sex would make me walk three miles (there and back to their cottage) on this fine day. If the Fynes had been an average sociable couple one knows only because leisure must be got through somehow, I would have made short work of that special invitation. But they were not that. Their undeniable humanity had to be acknowledged. At the same time I wanted to have my own way. So I proposed that I should be allowed the pleasure of offering them a cup of tea at my rooms.

A short reflective pause — and Fyne accepted eagerly in his own and his wife’s name. A moment after I heard the click of the gate-latch and then in an ecstasy of barking from his demonstrative dog his serious head went past my window on the other side of the hedge, its troubled gaze fixed forward, and the mind inside obviously employed in earnest speculation of an intricate nature. One at least of his wife’s girl-friends had become more than a mere shadow for him. I surmised however that it was not of the girl-friend but of his wife that Fyne was thinking. He was an excellent husband.

I prepared myself for the afternoon's hospitalities, calling in the farmer's wife and reviewing with her the resources of the house and the village. She was a helpful woman. But the resources of my sagacity I did not review. Except in the gross material sense of the afternoon tea I made no preparations for Mrs. Fyne.

It was impossible for me to make any such preparations. I could not tell what sort of sustenance she would look for from my sagacity. And as to taking stock of the wares of my mind no one I imagine is anxious to do that sort of thing if it can be avoided. A vaguely grandiose state of mental self-confidence is much too agreeable to be disturbed recklessly by such a delicate investigation. Perhaps if I had had a helpful woman at my elbow, a dear, flattering acute, devoted woman . . . There are in life moments when one positively regrets not being married. No! I don't exaggerate. I have said — moments, not years or even days. Moments. The farmer's wife obviously could not be asked to assist. She could not have been expected to possess the necessary insight and I doubt whether she would have known how to be flattering enough. She was being helpful in her own way, with an extraordinary black bonnet on her head, a good mile off by that time, trying to discover in the village shops a piece of eatable cake. The pluck of women! The optimism of the dear creatures!

And she managed to find something which looked eatable. That's all I know as I had no opportunity to observe the more intimate effects of that comestible. I myself never eat cake, and Mrs. Fyne, when she arrived punctually, brought with her no appetite for cake. She had no appetite for anything. But she had a thirst — the sign of deep, of tormenting emotion. Yes it was emotion, not the brilliant sunshine — more brilliant than warm as is the way of our discreet self-repressed, distinguished, insular sun, which would not turn a real lady scarlet — not on any account. Mrs. Fyne looked even cool. She wore a white skirt and coat; a white hat with a large brim reposed on her smoothly arranged hair. The coat was cut something like an army mess-jacket and the style suited her. I dare say there are many youthful subalterns, and not the worst-looking too, who resemble Mrs. Fyne in the type of face, in the sunburnt complexion, down to that something alert in bearing. But not many would have had that aspect breathing a readiness to assume any responsibility under Heaven. This is the sort of courage which ripens late in life and of course Mrs. Fyne was of mature years for all her unwrinkled face.

She looked round the room, told me positively that I was very comfortable there; to which I assented, humbly, acknowledging my undeserved good fortune.

"Why undeserved?" she wanted to know.

"I engaged these rooms by letter without asking any questions. It might have been an abominable hole," I explained to her. "I always do things like that. I don't like to be bothered. This is no great proof of sagacity — is it? Sagacious people I believe like to exercise that faculty. I have heard that they can't even help showing it in the veriest trifles. It must be very delightful. But I know nothing of it. I think that I have no sagacity — no practical sagacity."

Fyne made an inarticulate bass murmur of protest. I asked after the children whom I had not seen yet since my return from town. They had been very well. They were always well. Both Fyne and Mrs. Fyne spoke of the rude health of their children as if it were a result of moral excellence; in a peculiar tone which seemed to imply some contempt for people whose children were liable to be unwell at times. One almost felt inclined to apologize for the inquiry. And this annoyed me; unreasonably, I admit, because the assumption of superior merit is not a very exceptional weakness. Anxious to make myself disagreeable by way of retaliation I observed in accents of interested civility that the dear girls must have been wondering at the sudden disappearance of their mother's young friend. Had they been putting any awkward questions about Miss Smith. Wasn't it as Miss Smith that Miss de Barral had been introduced to me?

Mrs. Fyne, staring fixedly but also colouring deeper under her tan, told me that the children had never liked Flora very much. She hadn't the high spirits which endear grown-ups to healthy children, Mrs. Fyne explained unflinchingly. Flora had been staying at the cottage several times before. Mrs. Fyne assured me that she often found it very difficult to have her in the house.

"But what else could we do?" she exclaimed.

That little cry of distress quite genuine in its inexpressiveness, altered my feeling towards Mrs. Fyne. It would have been so easy to have done nothing and to have thought no more about it. My liking for her began while she was trying to tell me of the night she spent by the girl's bedside, the night before her departure with her unprepossessing relative. That Mrs. Fyne found means to comfort the child I doubt very much. She had not the genius for the task of undoing that which the hate of an infuriated woman had planned so well.

You will tell me perhaps that children's impressions are not durable. That's true enough. But here, child is only a manner of speaking. The girl was within a few days of her sixteenth birthday; she was old enough to be matured by the shock. The very effort she had to make in conveying the impression to Mrs. Fyne, in remembering the details, in finding adequate words — or any words at all — was in itself a terribly enlightening, an ageing process. She had talked a long time, uninterrupted by Mrs. Fyne, childlike enough in her wonder and pain, pausing now and then to interject the pitiful query: "It was cruel of her. Wasn't it cruel, Mrs. Fyne?"

For Charley she found excuses. He at any rate had not said anything, while he had looked very gloomy and miserable. He couldn't have taken part against his aunt — could he? But after all he did, when she called upon him, take "that cruel woman away." He had dragged her out by the arm. She had seen that plainly. She remembered it. That was it! The woman was mad. "Oh! Mrs. Fyne, don't tell me she wasn't mad. If you had only seen her face . . ."

But Mrs. Fyne was unflinching in her idea that as much truth as could be told was due in the way of kindness to the girl, whose fate she feared would be to live exposed to the hardest realities of unprivileged existences. She explained to her that there were in the world evil-minded, selfish people. Unscrupulous people . . . These two persons

had been after her father's money. The best thing she could do was to forget all about them.

"After papa's money? I don't understand," poor Flora de Barral had murmured, and lay still as if trying to think it out in the silence and shadows of the room where only a night-light was burning. Then she had a long shivering fit while holding tight the hand of Mrs. Fyne whose patient immobility by the bedside of that brutally murdered childhood did infinite honour to her humanity. That vigil must have been the more trying because I could see very well that at no time did she think the victim particularly charming or sympathetic. It was a manifestation of pure compassion, of compassion in itself, so to speak, not many women would have been capable of displaying with that unflinching steadiness. The shivering fit over, the girl's next words in an outburst of sobs were, "Oh! Mrs. Fyne, am I really such a horrid thing as she has made me out to be?"

"No, no!" protested Mrs. Fyne. "It is your former governess who is horrid and odious. She is a vile woman. I cannot tell you that she was mad but I think she must have been beside herself with rage and full of evil thoughts. You must try not to think of these abominations, my dear child."

They were not fit for anyone to think of much, Mrs. Fyne commented to me in a curt positive tone. All that had been very trying. The girl was like a creature struggling under a net.

"But how can I forget? she called my father a cheat and a swindler! Do tell me Mrs. Fyne that it isn't true. It can't be true. How can it be true?"

She sat up in bed with a sudden wild motion as if to jump out and flee away from the sound of the words which had just passed her own lips. Mrs. Fyne restrained her, soothed her, induced her at last to lay her head on her pillow again, assuring her all the time that nothing this woman had had the cruelty to say deserved to be taken to heart. The girl, exhausted, cried quietly for a time. It may be she had noticed something evasive in Mrs. Fyne's assurances. After a while, without stirring, she whispered brokenly:

"That awful woman told me that all the world would call papa these awful names. Is it possible? Is it possible?"

Mrs. Fyne kept silent.

"Do say something to me, Mrs. Fyne," the daughter of de Barral insisted in the same feeble whisper.

Again Mrs. Fyne assured me that it had been very trying. Terribly trying. "Yes, thanks, I will." She leaned back in the chair with folded arms while I poured another cup of tea for her, and Fyne went out to pacify the dog which, tied up under the porch, had become suddenly very indignant at somebody having the audacity to walk along the lane. Mrs. Fyne stirred her tea for a long time, drank a little, put the cup down and said with that air of accepting all the consequences:

“Silence would have been unfair. I don’t think it would have been kind either. I told her that she must be prepared for the world passing a very severe judgment on her father . . . “

* * * * *

“Wasn’t it admirable,” cried Marlow interrupting his narrative. “Admirable!” And as I looked dubiously at this unexpected enthusiasm he started justifying it after his own manner.

“I say admirable because it was so characteristic. It was perfect. Nothing short of genius could have found better. And this was nature! As they say of an artist’s work: this was a perfect Fyne. Compassion — judiciousness — something correctly measured. None of your dishevelled sentiment. And right! You must confess that nothing could have been more right. I had a mind to shout “Brava! Brava!” but I did not do that. I took a piece of cake and went out to bribe the Fyne dog into some sort of self-control. His sharp comical yapping was unbearable, like stabs through one’s brain, and Fyne’s deeply modulated remonstrances abashed the vivacious animal no more than the deep, patient murmur of the sea abashes a nigger minstrel on a popular beach. Fyne was beginning to swear at him in low, sepulchral tones when I appeared. The dog became at once wildly demonstrative, half strangling himself in his collar, his eyes and tongue hanging out in the excess of his incomprehensible affection for me. This was before he caught sight of the cake in my hand. A series of vertical springs high up in the air followed, and then, when he got the cake, he instantly lost his interest in everything else.

Fyne was slightly vexed with me. As kind a master as any dog could wish to have, he yet did not approve of cake being given to dogs. The Fyne dog was supposed to lead a Spartan existence on a diet of repulsive biscuits with an occasional dry, hygienic, bone thrown in. Fyne looked down gloomily at the appeased animal, I too looked at that fool-dog; and (you know how one’s memory gets suddenly stimulated) I was reminded visually, with an almost painful distinctness, of the ghostly white face of the girl I saw last accompanied by that dog — deserted by that dog. I almost heard her distressed voice as if on the verge of resentful tears calling to the dog, the unsympathetic dog. Perhaps she had not the power of evoking sympathy, that personal gift of direct appeal to the feelings. I said to Fyne, mistrusting the supine attitude of the dog:

“Why don’t you let him come inside?”

Oh dear no! He couldn’t think of it! I might indeed have saved my breath, I knew it was one of the Fynes’ rules of life, part of their solemnity and responsibility, one of those things that were part of their unassertive but ever present superiority, that their dog must not be allowed in. It was most improper to intrude the dog into the houses of the people they were calling on — if it were only a careless bachelor in farmhouse lodgings and a personal friend of the dog. It was out of the question. But they would let him bark one’s sanity away outside one’s window. They were strangely consistent in their lack of imaginative sympathy. I didn’t insist but simply led the way back to

the parlour, hoping that no wayfarer would happen along the lane for the next hour or so to disturb the dog's composure.

Mrs. Fyne seated immovable before the table charged with plates, cups, jugs, a cold teapot, crumbs, and the general litter of the entertainment turned her head towards us.

"You see, Mr. Marlow," she said in an unexpectedly confidential tone: "they are so utterly unsuited for each other."

At the moment I did not know how to apply this remark. I thought at first of Fyne and the dog. Then I adjusted it to the matter in hand which was neither more nor less than an elopement. Yes, by Jove! It was something very much like an elopement — with certain unusual characteristics of its own which made it in a sense equivocal. With amused wonder I remembered that my sagacity was requisitioned in such a connection. How unexpected! But we never know what tests our gifts may be put to. Sagacity dictated caution first of all. I believe caution to be the first duty of sagacity. Fyne sat down as if preparing himself to witness a joust, I thought.

"Do you think so, Mrs. Fyne?" I said sagaciously. "Of course you are in a position . . . " I was continuing with caution when she struck out vivaciously for immediate assent.

"Obviously! Clearly! You yourself must admit . . . "

"But, Mrs. Fyne," I remonstrated, "you forget that I don't know your brother."

This argument which was not only sagacious but true, overwhelmingly true, unanswerably true, seemed to surprise her.

I wondered why. I did not know enough of her brother for the remotest guess at what he might be like. I had never set eyes on the man. I didn't know him so completely that by contrast I seemed to have known Miss de Barral — whom I had seen twice (altogether about sixty minutes) and with whom I had exchanged about sixty words — from the cradle so to speak. And perhaps, I thought, looking down at Mrs. Fyne (I had remained standing) perhaps she thinks that this ought to be enough for a sagacious assent.

She kept silent; and I looking at her with polite expectation, went on addressing her mentally in a mood of familiar approval which would have astonished her had it been audible: You my dear at any rate are a sincere woman . . . "

"I call a woman sincere," Marlow began again after giving me a cigar and lighting one himself, "I call a woman sincere when she volunteers a statement resembling remotely in form what she really would like to say, what she really thinks ought to be said if it were not for the necessity to spare the stupid sensitiveness of men. The women's rougher, simpler, more upright judgment, embraces the whole truth, which their tact, their mistrust of masculine idealism, ever prevents them from speaking in its entirety. And their tact is unerring. We could not stand women speaking the truth. We could not bear it. It would cause infinite misery and bring about most awful disturbances in this rather mediocre, but still idealistic fool's paradise in which each of us lives his own little life — the unit in the great sum of existence. And they know it. They are merciful. This generalization does not apply exactly to Mrs. Fyne's outburst of sincerity in a

matter in which neither my affections nor my vanity were engaged. That's why, may be, she ventured so far. For a woman she chose to be as open as the day with me. There was not only the form but almost the whole substance of her thought in what she said. She believed she could risk it. She had reasoned somewhat in this way; there's a man, possessing a certain amount of sagacity . . . “

Marlow paused with a whimsical look at me. The last few words he had spoken with the cigar in his teeth. He took it out now by an ample movement of his arm and blew a thin cloud.

“You smile? It would have been more kind to spare my blushes. But as a matter of fact I need not blush. This is not vanity; it is analysis. We'll let sagacity stand. But we must also note what sagacity in this connection stands for. When you see this you shall see also that there was nothing in it to alarm my modesty. I don't think Mrs. Fyne credited me with the possession of wisdom tempered by common sense. And had I had the wisdom of the Seven Sages of Antiquity, she would not have been moved to confidence or admiration. The secret scorn of women for the capacity to consider judiciously and to express profoundly a meditated conclusion is unbounded. They have no use for these lofty exercises which they look upon as a sort of purely masculine game — game meaning a respectable occupation devised to kill time in this man-arranged life which must be got through somehow. What women's acuteness really respects are the inept “ideas” and the sheeplike impulses by which our actions and opinions are determined in matters of real importance. For if women are not rational they are indeed acute. Even Mrs. Fyne was acute. The good woman was making up to her husband's chess-player simply because she had scented in him that small portion of ‘femininity,’ that drop of superior essence of which I am myself aware; which, I gratefully acknowledge, has saved me from one or two misadventures in my life either ridiculous or lamentable, I am not very certain which. It matters very little. Anyhow misadventures. Observe that I say ‘femininity,’ a privilege — not ‘feminism,’ an attitude. I am not a feminist. It was Fyne who on certain solemn grounds had adopted that mental attitude; but it was enough to glance at him sitting on one side, to see that he was purely masculine to his finger-tips, masculine solidly, densely, amusingly, — hopelessly.

I did glance at him. You don't get your sagacity recognized by a man's wife without feeling the propriety and even the need to glance at the man now and again. So I glanced at him. Very masculine. So much so that “hopelessly” was not the last word of it. He was helpless. He was bound and delivered by it. And if by the obscure promptings of my composite temperament I beheld him with malicious amusement, yet being in fact, by definition and especially from profound conviction, a man, I could not help sympathizing with him largely. Seeing him thus disarmed, so completely captive by the very nature of things I was moved to speak to him kindly.

“Well. And what do you think of it?”

“I don't know. How's one to tell? But I say that the thing is done now and there's an end of it,” said the masculine creature as bluntly as his innate solemnity permitted.

Mrs. Fyne moved a little in her chair. I turned to her and remarked gently that this was a charge, a criticism, which was often made. Some people always ask: What could he see in her? Others wonder what she could have seen in him? Expressions of unsuitability.

She said with all the emphasis of her quietly folded arms:

“I know perfectly well what Flora has seen in my brother.”

I bowed my head to the gust but pursued my point.

“And then the marriage in most cases turns out no worse than the average, to say the least of it.”

Mrs. Fyne was disappointed by the optimistic turn of my sagacity. She rested her eyes on my face as though in doubt whether I had enough femininity in my composition to understand the case.

I waited for her to speak. She seemed to be asking herself; Is it after all, worth while to talk to that man? You understand how provoking this was. I looked in my mind for something appallingly stupid to say, with the object of distressing and teasing Mrs. Fyne. It is humiliating to confess a failure. One would think that a man of average intelligence could command stupidity at will. But it isn't so. I suppose it's a special gift or else the difficulty consists in being relevant. Discovering that I could find no really telling stupidity, I turned to the next best thing; a platitude. I advanced, in a common-sense tone, that, surely, in the matter of marriage a man had only himself to please.

Mrs. Fyne received this without the flutter of an eyelid. Fyne's masculine breast, as might have been expected, was pierced by that old, regulation shaft. He grunted most feelingly. I turned to him with false simplicity. “Don't you agree with me?”

“The very thing I've been telling my wife,” he exclaimed in his extra-manly bass. “We have been discussing — ”

A discussion in the Fyne ménage! How portentous! Perhaps the very first difference they had ever had: Mrs. Fyne unflinching and ready for any responsibility, Fyne solemn and shrinking — the children in bed upstairs; and outside the dark fields, the shadowy contours of the land on the starry background of the universe, with the crude light of the open window like a beacon for the truant who would never come back now; a truant no longer but a downright fugitive. Yet a fugitive carrying off spoils. It was the flight of a raider — or a traitor? This affair of the purloined brother, as I had named it to myself, had a very puzzling physiognomy. The girl must have been desperate, I thought, hearing the grave voice of Fyne well enough but catching the sense of his words not at all, except the very last words which were:

“Of course, it's extremely distressing.”

I looked at him inquisitively. What was distressing him? The purloining of the son of the poet-tyrant by the daughter of the financier-convict. Or only, if I may say so, the wind of their flight disturbing the solemn placidity of the Fynes' domestic atmosphere. My incertitude did not last long, for he added:

“Mrs. Fyne urges me to go to London at once.”

One could guess at, almost see, his profound distaste for the journey, his distress at a difference of feeling with his wife. With his serious view of the sublunary comedy Fyne suffered from not being able to agree solemnly with her sentiment as he was accustomed to do, in recognition of having had his way in one supreme instance; when he made her elope with him — the most momentous step imaginable in a young lady's life. He had been really trying to acknowledge it by taking the rightness of her feeling for granted on every other occasion. It had become a sort of habit at last. And it is never pleasant to break a habit. The man was deeply troubled. I said: "Really! To go to London!"

He looked dumbly into my eyes. It was pathetic and funny. "And you of course feel it would be useless," I pursued.

He evidently felt that, though he said nothing. He only went on blinking at me with a solemn and comical slowness. "Unless it be to carry there the family's blessing," I went on, indulging my chaffing humour steadily, in a rather sneaking fashion, for I dared not look at Mrs. Fyne, to my right. No sound or movement came from that direction. "You think very naturally that to match mere good, sound reasons, against the passionate conclusions of love is a waste of intellect bordering on the absurd."

He looked surprised as if I had discovered something very clever. He, dear man, had thought of nothing at all.

He simply knew that he did not want to go to London on that mission. Mere masculine delicacy. In a moment he became enthusiastic.

"Yes! Yes! Exactly. A man in love . . . You hear, my dear? Here you have an independent opinion — "

"Can anything be more hopeless," I insisted to the fascinated little Fyne, "than to pit reason against love. I must confess however that in this case when I think of that poor girl's sharp chin I wonder if . . . "

My levity was too much for Mrs. Fyne. Still leaning back in her chair she exclaimed: "Mr. Marlow!"

* * * * *

As if mysteriously affected by her indignation the absurd Fyne dog began to bark in the porch. It might have been at a trespassing bumble-bee however. That animal was capable of any eccentricity. Fyne got up quickly and went out to him. I think he was glad to leave us alone to discuss that matter of his journey to London. A sort of anti-sentimental journey. He, too, apparently, had confidence in my sagacity. It was touching, this confidence. It was at any rate more genuine than the confidence his wife pretended to have in her husband's chess-player, of three successive holidays. Confidence be hanged! Sagacity — indeed! She had simply marched in without a shadow of misgiving to make me back her up. But she had delivered herself into my hands . . . "

Interrupting his narrative Marlow addressed me in his tone between grim jest and grim earnest:

"Perhaps you didn't know that my character is upon the whole rather vindictive."

“No, I didn’t know,” I said with a grin. “That’s rather unusual for a sailor. They always seemed to me the least vindictive body of men in the world.”

“H’m! Simple souls,” Marlow muttered moodily. “Want of opportunity. The world leaves them alone for the most part. For myself it’s towards women that I feel vindictive mostly, in my small way. I admit that it is small. But then the occasions in themselves are not great. Mainly I resent that pretence of winding us round their dear little fingers, as of right. Not that the result ever amounts to much generally. There are so very few momentous opportunities. It is the assumption that each of us is a combination of a kid and an imbecile which I find provoking — in a small way; in a very small way. You needn’t stare as though I were breathing fire and smoke out of my nostrils. I am not a women-devouring monster. I am not even what is technically called “a brute.” I hope there’s enough of a kid and an imbecile in me to answer the requirements of some really good woman eventually — some day . . . Some day. Why do you gasp? You don’t suppose I should be afraid of getting married? That supposition would be offensive . . . “

“I wouldn’t dream of offending you,” I said.

“Very well. But meantime please remember that I was not married to Mrs. Fyne. That lady’s little finger was none of my legal property. I had not run off with it. It was Fyne who had done that thing. Let him be wound round as much as his backbone could stand — or even more, for all I cared. His rushing away from the discussion on the transparent pretence of quieting the dog confirmed my notion of there being a considerable strain on his elasticity. I confronted Mrs. Fyne resolved not to assist her in her eminently feminine occupation of thrusting a stick in the spokes of another woman’s wheel.

She tried to preserve her calm-eyed superiority. She was familiar and olympian, fenced in by the tea-table, that excellent symbol of domestic life in its lighter hour and its perfect security. In a few severely unadorned words she gave me to understand that she had ventured to hope for some really helpful suggestion from me. To this almost chiding declaration — because my vindictiveness seldom goes further than a bit of teasing — I said that I was really doing my best. And being a physiognomist . . . “

“Being what?” she interrupted me.

“A physiognomist,” I repeated raising my voice a little. “A physiognomist, Mrs. Fyne. And on the principles of that science a pointed little chin is a sufficient ground for interference. You want to interfere — do you not?”

Her eyes grew distinctly bigger. She had never been bantered before in her life. The late subtle poet’s method of making himself unpleasant was merely savage and abusive. Fyne had been always solemnly subservient. What other men she knew I cannot tell but I assume they must have been gentlemanly creatures. The girl-friends sat at her feet. How could she recognize my intention. She didn’t know what to make of my tone.

“Are you serious in what you say?” she asked slowly. And it was touching. It was as if a very young, confiding girl had spoken. I felt myself relenting.

"No. I am not, Mrs. Fyne," I said. "I didn't know I was expected to be serious as well as sagacious. No. That science is farcical and therefore I am not serious. It's true that most sciences are farcical except those which teach us how to put things together."

"The question is how to keep these two people apart," she struck in. She had recovered. I admired the quickness of women's wit. Mental agility is a rare perfection. And aren't they agile! Aren't they — just! And tenacious! When they once get hold you may uproot the tree but you won't shake them off the branch. In fact the more you shake . . . But only look at the charm of contradictory perfections! No wonder men give in — generally. I won't say I was actually charmed by Mrs. Fyne. I was not delighted with her. What affected me was not what she displayed but something which she could not conceal. And that was emotion — nothing less. The form of her declaration was dry, almost peremptory — but not its tone. Her voice faltered just the least bit, she smiled faintly; and as we were looking straight at each other I observed that her eyes were glistening in a peculiar manner. She was distressed. And indeed that Mrs. Fyne should have appealed to me at all was in itself the evidence of her profound distress. "By Jove she's desperate too," I thought. This discovery was followed by a movement of instinctive shrinking from this unreasonable and unmasculine affair. They were all alike, with their supreme interest aroused only by fighting with each other about some man: a lover, a son, a brother.

"But do you think there's time yet to do anything?" I asked.

She had an impatient movement of her shoulders without detaching herself from the back of the chair. Time! Of course? It was less than forty-eight hours since she had followed him to London . . . I am no great clerk at those matters but I murmured vaguely an allusion to special licences. We couldn't tell what might have happened to-day already. But she knew better, scornfully. Nothing had happened.

"Nothing's likely to happen before next Friday week, — if then."

This was wonderfully precise. Then after a pause she added that she should never forgive herself if some effort were not made, an appeal.

"To your brother?" I asked.

"Yes. John ought to go to-morrow. Nine o'clock train."

"So early as that!" I said. But I could not find it in my heart to pursue this discussion in a jocular tone. I submitted to her several obvious arguments, dictated apparently by common sense but in reality by my secret compassion. Mrs. Fyne brushed them aside, with the semi-conscious egoism of all safe, established, existences. They had known each other so little. Just three weeks. And of that time, too short for the birth of any serious sentiment, the first week had to be deducted. They would hardly look at each other to begin with. Flora barely consented to acknowledge Captain Anthony's presence. Good morning — good night — that was all — absolutely the whole extent of their intercourse. Captain Anthony was a silent man, completely unused to the society of girls of any sort and so shy in fact that he avoided raising his eyes to her face at the table. It was perfectly absurd. It was even inconvenient, embarrassing to her — Mrs. Fyne. After breakfast Flora would go off by herself for a long walk and Captain

Anthony (Mrs. Fyne referred to him at times also as Roderick) joined the children. But he was actually too shy to get on terms with his own nieces.

This would have sounded pathetic if I hadn't known the Fyne children who were at the same time solemn and malicious, and nursed a secret contempt for all the world. No one could get on terms with those fresh and comely young monsters! They just tolerated their parents and seemed to have a sort of mocking understanding among themselves against all outsiders, yet with no visible affection for each other. They had the habit of exchanging derisive glances which to a shy man must have been very trying. They thought their uncle no doubt a bore and perhaps an ass.

I was not surprised to hear that very soon Anthony formed the habit of crossing the two neighbouring fields to seek the shade of a clump of elms at a good distance from the cottage. He lay on the grass and smoked his pipe all the morning. Mrs. Fyne wondered at her brother's indolent habits. He had asked for books it is true but there were but few in the cottage. He read them through in three days and then continued to lie contentedly on his back with no other companion but his pipe. Amazing indolence! The live-long morning, Mrs. Fyne, busy writing upstairs in the cottage, could see him out of the window. She had a very long sight, and these elms were grouped on a rise of the ground. His indolence was plainly exposed to her criticism on a gentle green slope. Mrs. Fyne wondered at it; she was disgusted too. But having just then 'commenced author,' as you know, she could not tear herself away from the fascinating novelty. She let him wallow in his vice. I imagine Captain Anthony must have had a rather pleasant time in a quiet way. It was, I remember, a hot dry summer, favourable to contemplative life out of doors. And Mrs. Fyne was scandalized. Women don't understand the force of a contemplative temperament. It simply shocks them. They feel instinctively that it is the one which escapes best the domination of feminine influences. The dear girls were exchanging jeering remarks about "lazy uncle Roderick" openly, in her indulgent hearing. And it was so strange, she told me, because as a boy he was anything but indolent. On the contrary. Always active.

I remarked that a man of thirty-five was no longer a boy. It was an obvious remark but she received it without favour. She told me positively that the best, the nicest men remained boys all their lives. She was disappointed not to be able to detect anything boyish in her brother. Very, very sorry. She had not seen him for fifteen years or thereabouts, except on three or four occasions for a few hours at a time. No. Not a trace of the boy, he used to be, left in him.

She fell silent for a moment and I mused idly on the boyhood of little Fyne. I could not imagine what it might have been like. His dominant trait was clearly the remnant of still earlier days, because I've never seen such staring solemnity as Fyne's except in a very young baby. But where was he all that time? Didn't he suffer contamination from the indolence of Captain Anthony, I inquired. I was told that Mr. Fyne was very little at the cottage at the time. Some colleague of his was convalescing after a severe illness in a little seaside village in the neighbourhood and Fyne went off every morning by train to spend the day with the elderly invalid who had no one to look after him. It was

a very praiseworthy excuse for neglecting his brother-in-law “the son of the poet, you know,” with whom he had nothing in common even in the remotest degree. If Captain Anthony (Roderick) had been a pedestrian it would have been sufficient; but he was not. Still, in the afternoon, he went sometimes for a slow casual stroll, by himself of course, the children having definitely cold-shouldered him, and his only sister being busy with that inflammatory book which was to blaze upon the world a year or more afterwards. It seems however that she was capable of detaching her eyes from her task now and then, if only for a moment, because it was from that garret fitted out for a study that one afternoon she observed her brother and Flora de Barral coming down the road side by side. They had met somewhere accidentally (which of them crossed the other’s path, as the saying is, I don’t know), and were returning to tea together. She noticed that they appeared to be conversing without constraint.

“I had the simplicity to be pleased,” Mrs. Fyne commented with a dry little laugh. “Pleased for both their sakes.” Captain Anthony shook off his indolence from that day forth, and accompanied Miss Flora frequently on her morning walks. Mrs. Fyne remained pleased. She could now forget them comfortably and give herself up to the delights of audacious thought and literary composition. Only a week before the blow fell she, happening to raise her eyes from the paper, saw two figures seated on the grass under the shade of the elms. She could make out the white blouse. There could be no mistake.

“I suppose they imagined themselves concealed by the hedge. They forgot no doubt I was working in the garret,” she said bitterly. “Or perhaps they didn’t care. They were right. I am rather a simple person . . . “ She laughed again . . . “I was incapable of suspecting such duplicity.”

“Duplicity is a strong word, Mrs. Fyne — isn’t it?” I expostulated. “And considering that Captain Anthony himself . . . “

“Oh well — perhaps,” she interrupted me. Her eyes which never strayed away from mine, her set features, her whole immovable figure, how well I knew those appearances of a person who has “made up her mind.” A very hopeless condition that, specially in women. I mistrusted her concession so easily, so stonily made. She reflected a moment. “Yes. I ought to have said — ingratitude, perhaps.”

After having thus disengaged her brother and pushed the poor girl a little further off as it were — isn’t women’s cleverness perfectly diabolic when they are really put on their mettle? — after having done these things and also made me feel that I was no match for her, she went on scrupulously: “One doesn’t like to use that word either. The claim is very small. It’s so little one could do for her. Still . . . “

“I dare say,” I exclaimed, throwing diplomacy to the winds. “But really, Mrs. Fyne, it’s impossible to dismiss your brother like this out of the business . . . “

“She threw herself at his head,” Mrs. Fyne uttered firmly.

“He had no business to put his head in the way, then,” I retorted with an angry laugh. I didn’t restrain myself because her fixed stare seemed to express the purpose to daunt me. I was not afraid of her, but it occurred to me that I was within an ace

of drifting into a downright quarrel with a lady and, besides, my guest. There was the cold teapot, the emptied cups, emblems of hospitality. It could not be. I cut short my angry laugh while Mrs. Fyne murmured with a slight movement of her shoulders, "He! Poor man! Oh come . . ."

By a great effort of will I found myself able to smile amiably, to speak with proper softness.

"My dear Mrs. Fyne, you forget that I don't know him — not even by sight. It's difficult to imagine a victim as passive as all that; but granting you the (I very nearly said: imbecility, but checked myself in time) innocence of Captain Anthony, don't you think now, frankly, that there is a little of your own fault in what has happened. You bring them together, you leave your brother to himself!"

She sat up and leaning her elbow on the table sustained her head in her open palm casting down her eyes. Compunction? It was indeed a very off-hand way of treating a brother come to stay for the first time in fifteen years. I suppose she discovered very soon that she had nothing in common with that sailor, that stranger, fashioned and marked by the sea of long voyages. In her strong-minded way she had scorned pretences, had gone to her writing which interested her immensely. A very praiseworthy thing your sincere conduct, — if it didn't at times resemble brutality so much. But I don't think it was compunction. That sentiment is rare in women . . ."

"Is it?" I interrupted indignantly.

"You know more women than I do," retorted the unabashed Marlow. "You make it your business to know them — don't you? You go about a lot amongst all sorts of people. You are a tolerably honest observer. Well, just try to remember how many instances of compunction you have seen. I am ready to take your bare word for it. Compunction! Have you ever seen as much as its shadow? Have you ever? Just a shadow — a passing shadow! I tell you it is so rare that you may call it non-existent. They are too passionate. Too pedantic. Too courageous with themselves — perhaps. No I don't think for a moment that Mrs. Fyne felt the slightest compunction at her treatment of her sea-going brother. What he thought of it who can tell? It is possible that he wondered why he had been so insistently urged to come. It is possible that he wondered bitterly — or contemptuously — or humbly. And it may be that he was only surprised and bored. Had he been as sincere in his conduct as his only sister he would have probably taken himself off at the end of the second day. But perhaps he was afraid of appearing brutal. I am not far removed from the conviction that between the sincerities of his sister and of his dear nieces, Captain Anthony of the Ferndale must have had his loneliness brought home to his bosom for the first time of his life, at an age, thirty-five or thereabouts, when one is mature enough to feel the pang of such a discovery. Angry or simply sad but certainly disillusioned he wanders about and meets the girl one afternoon and under the sway of a strong feeling forgets his shyness. This is no supposition. It is a fact. There was such a meeting in which the shyness must have perished before we don't know what encouragement, or in the community of mood made apparent by some casual word. You remember that Mrs. Fyne saw them

one afternoon coming back to the cottage together. Don't you think that I have hit on the psychology of the situation? . . . "

"Doubtless . . . " I began to ponder.

"I was very certain of my conclusions at the time," Marlow went on impatiently. "But don't think for a moment that Mrs. Fyne in her new attitude and toying thoughtfully with a teaspoon was about to surrender. She murmured:

"It's the last thing I should have thought could happen."

"You didn't suppose they were romantic enough," I suggested dryly.

She let it pass and with great decision but as if speaking to herself,

"Roderick really must be warned."

She didn't give me the time to ask of what precisely. She raised her head and addressed me.

"I am surprised and grieved more than I can tell you at Mr. Fyne's resistance. We have been always completely at one on every question. And that we should differ now on a point touching my brother so closely is a most painful surprise to me." Her hand rattled the teaspoon brusquely by an involuntary movement. "It is intolerable," she added tempestuously — for Mrs. Fyne that is. I suppose she had nerves of her own like any other woman.

Under the porch where Fyne had sought refuge with the dog there was silence. I took it for a proof of deep sagacity. I don't mean on the part of the dog. He was a confirmed fool.

I said:

"You want absolutely to interfere . . . ?" Mrs. Fyne nodded just perceptibly . . . "Well — for my part . . . but I don't really know how matters stand at the present time. You have had a letter from Miss de Barral. What does that letter say?"

"She asks for her valise to be sent to her town address," Mrs. Fyne uttered reluctantly and stopped. I waited a bit — then exploded.

"Well! What's the matter? Where's the difficulty? Does your husband object to that? You don't mean to say that he wants you to appropriate the girl's clothes?"

"Mr. Marlow!"

"Well, but you talk of a painful difference of opinion with your husband, and then, when I ask for information on the point, you bring out a valise. And only a few moments ago you reproached me for not being serious. I wonder who is the serious person of us two now."

She smiled faintly and in a friendly tone, from which I concluded at once that she did not mean to show me the girl's letter, she said that undoubtedly the letter disclosed an understanding between Captain Anthony and Flora de Barral.

"What understanding?" I pressed her. "An engagement is an understanding."

"There is no engagement — not yet," she said decisively. "That letter, Mr. Marlow, is couched in very vague terms. That is why — "

I interrupted her without ceremony.

“You still hope to interfere to some purpose. Isn’t it so? Yes? But how should you have liked it if anybody had tried to interfere between you and Mr. Fyne at the time when your understanding with each other could still have been described in vague terms?”

She had a genuine movement of astonished indignation. It is with the accent of perfect sincerity that she cried out at me:

“But it isn’t at all the same thing! How can you!”

Indeed how could I! The daughter of a poet and the daughter of a convict are not comparable in the consequences of their conduct if their necessity may wear at times a similar aspect. Amongst these consequences I could perceive undesirable cousins for these dear healthy girls, and such like, possible causes of embarrassment in the future.

“No! You can’t be serious,” Mrs. Fyne’s smouldering resentment broke out again. “You haven’t thought — ”

“Oh yes, Mrs. Fyne! I have thought. I am still thinking. I am even trying to think like you.”

“Mr. Marlow,” she said earnestly. “Believe me that I really am thinking of my brother in all this . . . “ I assured her that I quite believed she was. For there is no law of nature making it impossible to think of more than one person at a time. Then I said:

“She has told him all about herself of course.”

“All about her life,” assented Mrs. Fyne with an air, however, of making some mental reservation which I did not pause to investigate. “Her life!” I repeated. “That girl must have had a mighty bad time of it.”

“Horrible,” Mrs. Fyne admitted with a ready frankness very creditable under the circumstances, and a warmth of tone which made me look at her with a friendly eye. “Horrible! No! You can’t imagine the sort of vulgar people she became dependent on . . . You know her father never attempted to see her while he was still at large. After his arrest he instructed that relative of his — the odious person who took her away from Brighton — not to let his daughter come to the court during the trial. He refused to hold any communication with her whatever.”

I remembered what Mrs. Fyne had told me before of the view she had years ago of de Barral clinging to the child at the side of his wife’s grave and later on of these two walking hand in hand the observed of all eyes by the sea. Pictures from Dickens — pregnant with pathos.

Chapter 6 — Flora

“A very singular prohibition,” remarked Mrs. Fyne after a short silence. “He seemed to love the child.”

She was puzzled. But I surmised that it might have been the sullenness of a man unconscious of guilt and standing at bay to fight his “persecutors,” as he called them; or else the fear of a softer emotion weakening his defiant attitude; perhaps, even, it was

a self-denying ordinance, in order to spare the girl the sight of her father in the dock, accused of cheating, sentenced as a swindler — proving the possession of a certain moral delicacy.

Mrs. Fyne didn't know what to think. She supposed it might have been mere callousness. But the people amongst whom the girl had fallen had positively not a grain of moral delicacy. Of that she was certain. Mrs. Fyne could not undertake to give me an idea of their abominable vulgarity. Flora used to tell her something of her life in that household, over there, down Limehouse way. It was incredible. It passed Mrs. Fyne's comprehension. It was a sort of moral savagery which she could not have thought possible.

I, on the contrary, thought it very possible. I could imagine easily how the poor girl must have been bewildered and hurt at her reception in that household — envied for her past while delivered defenceless to the tender mercies of people without any fineness either of feeling or mind, unable to understand her misery, grossly curious, mistaking her manner for disdain, her silent shrinking for pride. The wife of the "odious person" was witless and fatuously conceited. Of the two girls of the house one was pious and the other a romp; both were coarse-minded — if they may be credited with any mind at all. The rather numerous men of the family were dense and grumpy, or dense and jocose. None in that grubbing lot had enough humanity to leave her alone. At first she was made much of, in an offensively patronising manner. The connection with the great de Barral gratified their vanity even in the moment of the smash. They dragged her to their place of worship, whatever it might have been, where the congregation stared at her, and they gave parties to other beings like themselves at which they exhibited her with ignoble self-satisfaction. She did not know how to defend herself from their importunities, insolence and exigencies. She lived amongst them, a passive victim, quivering in every nerve, as if she were flayed. After the trial her position became still worse. On the least occasion and even on no occasions at all she was scolded, or else taunted with her dependence. The pious girl lectured her on her defects, the romping girl teased her with contemptuous references to her accomplishments, and was always trying to pick insensate quarrels with her about some "fellow" or other. The mother backed up her girls invariably, adding her own silly, wounding remarks. I must say they were probably not aware of the ugliness of their conduct. They were nasty amongst themselves as a matter of course; their disputes were nauseating in origin, in manner, in the spirit of mean selfishness. These women, too, seemed to enjoy greatly any sort of row and were always ready to combine together to make awful scenes to the luckless girl on incredibly flimsy pretences. Thus Flora on one occasion had been reduced to rage and despair, had her most secret feelings lacerated, had obtained a view of the utmost baseness to which common human nature can descend — I won't say *à propos de bottes* as the French would excellently put it, but literally *à propos* of some mislaid cheap lace trimmings for a nightgown the romping one was making for herself. Yes, that was the origin of one of the grossest scenes which, in their repetition, must have had a deplorable effect on the unformed character of the most pitiful of de Barral's

victims. I have it from Mrs. Fyne. The girl turned up at the Fynes' house at half-past nine on a cold, drizzly evening. She had walked bareheaded, I believe, just as she ran out of the house, from somewhere in Poplar to the neighbourhood of Sloane Square — without stopping, without drawing breath, if only for a sob.

“We were having some people to dinner,” said the anxious sister of Captain Anthony.

She had heard the front door bell and wondered what it might mean. The parlour-maid managed to whisper to her without attracting attention. The servants had been frightened by the invasion of that wild girl in a muddy skirt and with wisps of damp hair sticking to her pale cheeks. But they had seen her before. This was not the first occasion, nor yet the last.

Directly she could slip away from her guests Mrs. Fyne ran upstairs.

“I found her in the night nursery crouching on the floor, her head resting on the cot of the youngest of my girls. The eldest was sitting up in bed looking at her across the room.”

Only a nightlight was burning there. Mrs. Fyne raised her up, took her over to Mr. Fyne's little dressing-room on the other side of the landing, to a fire by which she could dry herself, and left her there. She had to go back to her guests.

A most disagreeable surprise it must have been to the Fynes. Afterwards they both went up and interviewed the girl. She jumped up at their entrance. She had shaken her damp hair loose; her eyes were dry — with the heat of rage.

I can imagine little Fyne solemnly sympathetic, solemnly listening, solemnly retreating to the marital bedroom. Mrs. Fyne pacified the girl, and, fortunately, there was a bed which could be made up for her in the dressing-room.

“But — what could one do after all!” concluded Mrs. Fyne.

And this stereotyped exclamation, expressing the difficulty of the problem and the readiness (at any rate) of good intentions, made me, as usual, feel more kindly towards her.

Next morning, very early, long before Fyne had to start for his office, the “odious personage” turned up, not exactly unexpected perhaps, but startling all the same, if only by the promptness of his action. From what Flora herself related to Mrs. Fyne, it seems that without being very perceptibly less “odious” than his family he had in a rather mysterious fashion interposed his authority for the protection of the girl. “Not that he cares,” explained Flora. “I am sure he does not. I could not stand being liked by any of these people. If I thought he liked me I would drown myself rather than go back with him.”

For of course he had come to take “Florrie” home. The scene was the dining-room — breakfast interrupted, dishes growing cold, little Fyne's toast growing leathery, Fyne out of his chair with his back to the fire, the newspaper on the carpet, servants shut out, Mrs. Fyne rigid in her place with the girl sitting beside her — the “odious person,” who had bustled in with hardly a greeting, looking from Fyne to Mrs. Fyne as though he were inwardly amused at something he knew of them; and then beginning ironically his discourse. He did not apologize for disturbing Fyne and his “good lady” at breakfast,

because he knew they did not want (with a nod at the girl) to have more of her than could be helped. He came the first possible moment because he had his business to attend to. He wasn't drawing a tip-top salary (this staring at Fyne) in a luxuriously furnished office. Not he. He had risen to be an employer of labour and was bound to give a good example.

I believe the fellow was aware of, and enjoyed quietly, the consternation his presence brought to the bosom of Mr. and Mrs. Fyne. He turned briskly to the girl. Mrs. Fyne confessed to me that they had remained all three silent and inanimate. He turned to the girl: "What's this game, Florrie? You had better give it up. If you expect me to run all over London looking for you every time you happen to have a tiff with your auntie and cousins you are mistaken. I can't afford it."

Tiff — was the sort of definition to take one's breath away, having regard to the fact that both the word convict and the word pauper had been used a moment before Flora de Barral ran away from the quarrel about the lace trimmings. Yes, these very words! So at least the girl had told Mrs. Fyne the evening before. The word tiff in connection with her tale had a peculiar savour, a paralysing effect. Nobody made a sound. The relative of de Barral proceeded uninterrupted to a display of magnanimity. "Auntie told me to tell you she's sorry — there! And Amelia (the romping sister) shan't worry you again. I'll see to that. You ought to be satisfied. Remember your position."

Emboldened by the utter stillness pervading the room he addressed himself to Mrs. Fyne with stolid effrontery:

"What I say is that people should be good-natured. She can't stand being chaffed. She puts on her grand airs. She won't take a bit of a joke from people as good as herself anyway. We are a plain lot. We don't like it. And that's how trouble begins."

Insensible to the stony stare of three pairs of eyes, which, if the stories of our childhood as to the power of the human eye are true, ought to have been enough to daunt a tiger, that unabashed manufacturer from the East End fastened his fangs, figuratively speaking, into the poor girl and prepared to drag her away for a prey to his cubs of both sexes. "Auntie has thought of sending you your hat and coat. I've got them outside in the cab."

Mrs. Fyne looked mechanically out of the window. A four-wheeler stood before the gate under the weeping sky. The driver in his conical cape and tarpaulin hat, streamed with water. The drooping horse looked as though it had been fished out, half unconscious, from a pond. Mrs. Fyne found some relief in looking at that miserable sight, away from the room in which the voice of the amiable visitor resounded with a vulgar intonation exhorting the strayed sheep to return to the delightful fold. "Come, Florrie, make a move. I can't wait on you all day here."

Mrs. Fyne heard all this without turning her head away from the window. Fyne on the hearthrug had to listen and to look on too. I shall not try to form a surmise as to the real nature of the suspense. Their very goodness must have made it very anxious. The girl's hands were lying in her lap; her head was lowered as if in deep thought; and the other went on delivering a sort of homily. Ingratitude was condemned in it, the

sinfulness of pride was pointed out — together with the proverbial fact that it “goes before a fall.” There were also some sound remarks as to the danger of nonsensical notions and the disadvantages of a quick temper. It sets one’s best friends against one. “And if anybody ever wanted friends in the world it’s you, my girl.” Even respect for parental authority was invoked. “In the first hour of his trouble your father wrote to me to take care of you — don’t forget it. Yes, to me, just a plain man, rather than to any of his fine West-End friends. You can’t get over that. And a father’s a father no matter what a mess he’s got himself into. You ain’t going to throw over your own father — are you?”

It was difficult to say whether he was more absurd than cruel or more cruel than absurd. Mrs. Fyne, with the fine ear of a woman, seemed to detect a jeering intention in his meanly unctuous tone, something more vile than mere cruelty. She glanced quickly over her shoulder and saw the girl raise her two hands to her head, then let them fall again on her lap. Fyne in front of the fire was like the victim of an unholy spell — bereft of motion and speech but obviously in pain. It was a short pause of perfect silence, and then that “odious creature” (he must have been really a remarkable individual in his way) struck out into sarcasm.

“Well? . . . “ Again a silence. “If you have fixed it up with the lady and gentleman present here for your board and lodging you had better say so. I don’t want to interfere in a bargain I know nothing of. But I wonder how your father will take it when he comes out . . . or don’t you expect him ever to come out?”

At that moment, Mrs. Fyne told me she met the girl’s eyes. There was that in them which made her shut her own. She also felt as though she would have liked to put her fingers in her ears. She restrained herself, however; and the “plain man” passed in his appalling versatility from sarcasm to veiled menace.

“You have — eh? Well and good. But before I go home let me ask you, my girl, to think if by any chance you throwing us over like this won’t be rather bad for your father later on? Just think it over.”

He looked at his victim with an air of cunning mystery. She jumped up so suddenly that he started back. Mrs. Fyne rose too, and even the spell was removed from her husband. But the girl dropped again into the chair and turned her head to look at Mrs. Fyne. This time it was no accidental meeting of fugitive glances. It was a deliberate communication. To my question as to its nature Mrs. Fyne said she did not know. “Was it appealing?” I suggested. “No,” she said. “Was it frightened, angry, crushed, resigned?” “No! No! Nothing of these.” But it had frightened her. She remembered it to this day. She had been ever since fancying she could detect the lingering reflection of that look in all the girl’s glances. In the attentive, in the casual — even in the grateful glances — in the expression of the softest moods.

“Has she her soft moods, then?” I asked with interest.

Mrs Fyne, much moved by her recollections, heeded not my inquiry. All her mental energy was concentrated on the nature of that memorable glance. The general tradition of mankind teaches us that glances occupy a considerable place in the self-expression

of women. Mrs. Fyne was trying honestly to give me some idea, as much perhaps to satisfy her own uneasiness as my curiosity. She was frowning in the effort as you see sometimes a child do (what is delightful in women is that they so often resemble intelligent children — I mean the crustiest, the sourest, the most battered of them do — at times). She was frowning, I say, and I was beginning to smile faintly at her when all at once she came out with something totally unexpected.

“It was horribly merry,” she said.

I suppose she must have been satisfied by my sudden gravity because she looked at me in a friendly manner.

“Yes, Mrs. Fyne,” I said, smiling no longer. “I see. It would have been horrible even on the stage.”

“Ah!” she interrupted me — and I really believe her change of attitude back to folded arms was meant to check a shudder. “But it wasn’t on the stage, and it was not with her lips that she laughed.”

“Yes. It must have been horrible,” I assented. “And then she had to go away ultimately — I suppose. You didn’t say anything?”

“No,” said Mrs. Fyne. “I rang the bell and told one of the maids to go and bring the hat and coat out of the cab. And then we waited.”

I don’t think that there ever was such waiting unless possibly in a jail at some moment or other on the morning of an execution. The servant appeared with the hat and coat, and then, still as on the morning of an execution, when the condemned, I believe, is offered a breakfast, Mrs. Fyne, anxious that the white-faced girl should swallow something warm (if she could) before leaving her house for an interminable drive through raw cold air in a damp four-wheeler — Mrs. Fyne broke the awful silence: “You really must try to eat something,” in her best resolute manner. She turned to the “odious person” with the same determination. “Perhaps you will sit down and have a cup of coffee, too.”

The worthy “employer of labour” sat down. He might have been awed by Mrs. Fyne’s peremptory manner — for she did not think of conciliating him then. He sat down, provisionally, like a man who finds himself much against his will in doubtful company. He accepted ungraciously the cup handed to him by Mrs. Fyne, took an unwilling sip or two and put it down as if there were some moral contamination in the coffee of these “swells.” Between whiles he directed mysteriously inexpressive glances at little Fyne, who, I gather, had no breakfast that morning at all. Neither had the girl. She never moved her hands from her lap till her appointed guardian got up, leaving his cup half full.

“Well. If you don’t mean to take advantage of this lady’s kind offer I may just as well take you home at once. I want to begin my day — I do.”

After a few more dumb, leaden-footed minutes while Flora was putting on her hat and jacket, the Fynes without moving, without saying anything, saw these two leave the room.

“She never looked back at us,” said Mrs. Fyne. “She just followed him out. I’ve never had such a crushing impression of the miserable dependence of girls — of women. This was an extreme case. But a young man — any man — could have gone to break stones on the roads or something of that kind — or enlisted — or — ”

It was very true. Women can’t go forth on the high roads and by-ways to pick up a living even when dignity, independence, or existence itself are at stake. But what made me interrupt Mrs. Fyne’s tirade was my profound surprise at the fact of that respectable citizen being so willing to keep in his home the poor girl for whom it seemed there was no place in the world. And not only willing but anxious. I couldn’t credit him with generous impulses. For it seemed obvious to me from what I had learned that, to put it mildly, he was not an impulsive person.

“I confess that I can’t understand his motive,” I exclaimed.

“This is exactly what John wondered at, at first,” said Mrs. Fyne. By that time an intimacy — if not exactly confidence — had sprung up between us which permitted her in this discussion to refer to her husband as John. “You know he had not opened his lips all that time,” she pursued. “I don’t blame his restraint. On the contrary. What could he have said? I could see he was observing the man very thoughtfully.”

“And so, Mr. Fyne listened, observed and meditated,” I said. “That’s an excellent way of coming to a conclusion. And may I ask at what conclusion he had managed to arrive? On what ground did he cease to wonder at the inexplicable? For I can’t admit humanity to be the explanation. It would be too monstrous.”

It was nothing of the sort, Mrs. Fyne assured me with some resentment, as though I had aspersed little Fyne’s sanity. Fyne very sensibly had set himself the mental task of discovering the self-interest. I should not have thought him capable of so much cynicism. He said to himself that for people of that sort (religious fears or the vanity of righteousness put aside) money — not great wealth, but money, just a little money — is the measure of virtue, of expediency, of wisdom — of pretty well everything. But the girl was absolutely destitute. The father was in prison after the most terribly complete and disgraceful smash of modern times. And then it dawned upon Fyne that this was just it. The great smash, in the great dust of vanishing millions! Was it possible that they all had vanished to the last penny? Wasn’t there, somewhere, something palpable; some fragment of the fabric left?

“That’s it,” had exclaimed Fyne, startling his wife by this explosive unseating of his lips less than half an hour after the departure of de Barral’s cousin with de Barral’s daughter. It was still in the dining-room, very near the time for him to go forth affronting the elements in order to put in another day’s work in his country’s service. All he could say at the moment in elucidation of this breakdown from his usual placid solemnity was:

“The fellow imagines that de Barral has got some plunder put away somewhere.”

This being the theory arrived at by Fyne, his comment on it was that a good many bankrupts had been known to have taken such a precaution. It was possible in de

Barral's case. Fyne went so far in his display of cynical pessimism as to say that it was extremely probable.

He explained at length to Mrs. Fyne that de Barral certainly did not take anyone into his confidence. But the beastly relative had made up his low mind that it was so. He was selfish and pitiless in his stupidity, but he had clearly conceived the notion of making a claim on de Barral when de Barral came out of prison on the strength of having "looked after" (as he would have himself expressed it) his daughter. He nursed his hopes, such as they were, in secret, and it is to be supposed kept them even from his wife.

I could see it very well. That belief accounted for his mysterious air while he interfered in favour of the girl. He was the only protector she had. It was as though Flora had been fated to be always surrounded by treachery and lies stifling every better impulse, every instinctive aspiration of her soul to trust and to love. It would have been enough to drive a fine nature into the madness of universal suspicion — into any sort of madness. I don't know how far a sense of humour will stand by one. To the foot of the gallows, perhaps. But from my recollection of Flora de Barral I feared that she hadn't much sense of humour. She had cried at the desertion of the absurd Fyne dog. That animal was certainly free from duplicity. He was frank and simple and ridiculous. The indignation of the girl at his unhypocritical behaviour had been funny but not humorous.

As you may imagine I was not very anxious to resume the discussion on the justice, expediency, effectiveness or what not, of Fyne's journey to London. It isn't that I was unfaithful to little Fyne out in the porch with the dog. (They kept amazingly quiet there. Could they have gone to sleep?) What I felt was that either my sagacity or my conscience would come out damaged from that campaign. And no man will willingly put himself in the way of moral damage. I did not want a war with Mrs. Fyne. I much preferred to hear something more of the girl. I said:

"And so she went away with that respectable ruffian."

Mrs. Fyne moved her shoulders slightly — "What else could she have done?" I agreed with her by another hopeless gesture. It isn't so easy for a girl like Flora de Barral to become a factory hand, a pathetic seamstress or even a barmaid. She wouldn't have known how to begin. She was the captive of the meanest conceivable fate. And she wasn't mean enough for it. It is to be remarked that a good many people are born curiously unfitted for the fate awaiting them on this earth. As I don't want you to think that I am unduly partial to the girl we shall say that she failed decidedly to endear herself to that simple, virtuous and, I believe, teetotal household. It's my conviction that an angel would have failed likewise. It's no use going into details; suffice it to state that before the year was out she was again at the Fynes' door.

This time she was escorted by a stout youth. His large pale face wore a smile of inane cunning soured by annoyance. His clothes were new and the indescribable smartness of their cut, a genre which had never been obtruded on her notice before, astonished Mrs. Fyne, who came out into the hall with her hat on; for she was about to go out to

hear a new pianist (a girl) in a friend's house. The youth addressing Mrs. Fyne easily begged her not to let "that silly thing go back to us any more." There had been, he said, nothing but "ructions" at home about her for the last three weeks. Everybody in the family was heartily sick of quarrelling. His governor had charged him to bring her to this address and say that the lady and gentleman were quite welcome to all there was in it. She hadn't enough sense to appreciate a plain, honest English home and she was better out of it.

The young, pimply-faced fellow was vexed by this job his governor had sprung on him. It was the cause of his missing an appointment for that afternoon with a certain young lady. The lady he was engaged to. But he meant to dash back and try for a sight of her that evening yet "if he were to burst over it." "Good-bye, Florrie. Good luck to you — and I hope I'll never see your face again."

With that he ran out in lover-like haste leaving the hall-door wide open. Mrs. Fyne had not found a word to say. She had been too much taken aback even to gasp freely. But she had the presence of mind to grab the girl's arm just as she, too, was running out into the street — with the haste, I suppose, of despair and to keep I don't know what tragic tryst.

"You stopped her with your own hand, Mrs. Fyne," I said. "I presume she meant to get away. That girl is no comedian — if I am any judge."

"Yes! I had to use some force to drag her in."

Mrs. Fyne had no difficulty in stating the truth. "You see I was in the very act of letting myself out when these two appeared. So that, when that unpleasant young man ran off, I found myself alone with Flora. It was all I could do to hold her in the hall while I called to the servants to come and shut the door."

As is my habit, or my weakness, or my gift, I don't know which, I visualized the story for myself. I really can't help it. And the vision of Mrs. Fyne dressed for a rather special afternoon function, engaged in wrestling with a wild-eyed, white-faced girl had a certain dramatic fascination.

"Really!" I murmured.

"Oh! There's no doubt that she struggled," said Mrs. Fyne. She compressed her lips for a moment and then added: "As to her being a comedian that's another question."

Mrs. Fyne had returned to her attitude of folded arms. I saw before me the daughter of the refined poet accepting life whole with its unavoidable conditions of which one of the first is the instinct of self-preservation and the egoism of every living creature. "The fact remains nevertheless that you — yourself — have, in your own words, pulled her in," I insisted in a jocular tone, with a serious intention.

"What was one to do," exclaimed Mrs. Fyne with almost comic exasperation. "Are you reproaching me with being too impulsive?"

And she went on telling me that she was not that in the least. One of the recommendations she always insisted on (to the girl-friends, I imagine) was to be on guard against impulse. Always! But I had not been there to see the face of Flora at the time.

If I had it would be haunting me to this day. Nobody unless made of iron would have allowed a human being with a face like that to rush out alone into the streets.

“And doesn’t it haunt you, Mrs. Fyne?” I asked.

“No, not now,” she said implacably. “Perhaps if I had let her go it might have done . . . Don’t conclude, though, that I think she was playing a comedy then, because after struggling at first she ended by remaining. She gave up very suddenly. She collapsed in our arms, mine and the maid’s who came running up in response to my calls, and . . .”

“And the door was then shut,” I completed the phrase in my own way.

“Yes, the door was shut,” Mrs. Fyne lowered and raised her head slowly.

I did not ask her for details. Of one thing I am certain, and that is that Mrs. Fyne did not go out to the musical function that afternoon. She was no doubt considerably annoyed at missing the privilege of hearing privately an interesting young pianist (a girl) who, since, had become one of the recognized performers. Mrs. Fyne did not dare leave her house. As to the feelings of little Fyne when he came home from the office, via his club, just half an hour before dinner, I have no information. But I venture to affirm that in the main they were kindly, though it is quite possible that in the first moment of surprise he had to keep down a swear-word or two.

* * * * *

The long and the short of it all is that next day the Fynes made up their minds to take into their confidence a certain wealthy old lady. With certain old ladies the passing years bring back a sort of mellowed youthfulness of feeling, an optimistic outlook, liking for novelty, readiness for experiment. The old lady was very much interested: “Do let me see the poor thing!” She was accordingly allowed to see Flora de Barral in Mrs. Fyne’s drawing-room on a day when there was no one else there, and she preached to her with charming, sympathetic authority: “The only way to deal with our troubles, my dear child, is to forget them. You must forget yours. It’s very simple. Look at me. I always forget mine. At your age one ought to be cheerful.”

Later on when left alone with Mrs. Fyne she said to that lady: “I do hope the child will manage to be cheerful. I can’t have sad faces near me. At my age one needs cheerful companions.”

And in this hope she carried off Flora de Barral to Bournemouth for the winter months in the quality of reader and companion. She had said to her with kindly jocularly: “We shall have a good time together. I am not a grumpy old woman.” But on their return to London she sought Mrs. Fyne at once. She had discovered that Flora was not naturally cheerful. When she made efforts to be it was still worse. The old lady couldn’t stand the strain of that. And then, to have the whole thing out, she could not bear to have for a companion anyone who did not love her. She was certain that Flora did not love her. Why? She couldn’t say. Moreover, she had caught the girl looking at her in a peculiar way at times. Oh no! — it was not an evil look — it was an unusual expression which one could not understand. And when one remembered that her father was in prison shut up together with a lot of criminals and so on — it made

one uncomfortable. If the child had only tried to forget her troubles! But she obviously was incapable or unwilling to do so. And that was somewhat perverse — wasn't it? Upon the whole, she thought it would be better perhaps —

Mrs. Fyne assented hurriedly to the unspoken conclusion: "Oh certainly! Certainly," wondering to herself what was to be done with Flora next; but she was not very much surprised at the change in the old lady's view of Flora de Barral. She almost understood it.

What came next was a German family, the continental acquaintances of the wife of one of Fyne's colleagues in the Home Office. Flora of the enigmatical glances was dispatched to them without much reflection. As it was not considered absolutely necessary to take them into full confidence, they neither expected the girl to be specially cheerful nor were they discomposed unduly by the indescribable quality of her glances. The German woman was quite ordinary; there were two boys to look after; they were ordinary, too, I presume; and Flora, I understand, was very attentive to them. If she taught them anything it must have been by inspiration alone, for she certainly knew nothing of teaching. But it was mostly "conversation" which was demanded from her. Flora de Barral conversing with two small German boys, regularly, industriously, conscientiously, in order to keep herself alive in the world which held for her the past we know and the future of an even more undesirable quality — seems to me a very fantastic combination. But I believe it was not so bad. She was being, she wrote, mercifully drugged by her task. She had learned to "converse" all day long, mechanically, absently, as if in a trance. An uneasy trance it must have been! Her worst moments were when off duty — alone in the evening, shut up in her own little room, her dulled thoughts waking up slowly till she started into the full consciousness of her position, like a person waking up in contact with something venomous — a snake, for instance — experiencing a mad impulse to fling the thing away and run off screaming to hide somewhere.

At this period of her existence Flora de Barral used to write to Mrs. Fyne not regularly but fairly often. I don't know how long she would have gone on "conversing" and, incidentally, helping to supervise the beautifully stocked linen closets of that well-to-do German household, if the man of it had not developed in the intervals of his avocations (he was a merchant and a thoroughly domesticated character) a psychological resemblance to the Bournemouth old lady. It appeared that he, too, wanted to be loved.

He was not, however, of a conquering temperament — a kiss-snatching, door-bursting type of libertine. In the very act of straying from the path of virtue he remained a respectable merchant. It would have been perhaps better for Flora if he had been a mere brute. But he set about his sinister enterprise in a sentimental, cautious, almost paternal manner; and thought he would be safe with a pretty orphan. The girl for all her experience was still too innocent, and indeed not yet sufficiently aware of herself as a woman, to mistrust these masked approaches. She did not see them, in fact. She thought him sympathetic — the first expressively sympathetic

person she had ever met. She was so innocent that she could not understand the fury of the German woman. For, as you may imagine, the wifely penetration was not to be deceived for any great length of time — the more so that the wife was older than the husband. The man with the peculiar cowardice of respectability never said a word in Flora's defence. He stood by and heard her reviled in the most abusive terms, only nodding and frowning vaguely from time to time. It will give you the idea of the girl's innocence when I say that at first she actually thought this storm of indignant reproaches was caused by the discovery of her real name and her relation to a convict. She had been sent out under an assumed name — a highly recommended orphan of honourable parentage. Her distress, her burning cheeks, her endeavours to express her regret for this deception were taken for a confession of guilt. "You attempted to bring dishonour to my home," the German woman screamed at her.

Here's a misunderstanding for you! Flora de Barral, who felt the shame but did not believe in the guilt of her father, retorted fiercely, "Nevertheless I am as honourable as you are." And then the German woman nearly went into a fit from rage. "I shall have you thrown out into the street."

Flora was not exactly thrown out into the street, I believe, but she was bundled bag and baggage on board a steamer for London. Did I tell you these people lived in Hamburg? Well yes — sent to the docks late on a rainy winter evening in charge of some sneering lackey or other who behaved to her insolently and left her on deck burning with indignation, her hair half down, shaking with excitement and, truth to say, scared as near as possible into hysterics. If it had not been for the stewardess who, without asking questions, good soul, took charge of her quietly in the ladies' saloon (luckily it was empty) it is by no means certain she would ever have reached England. I can't tell if a straw ever saved a drowning man, but I know that a mere glance is enough to make despair pause. For in truth we who are creatures of impulse are not creatures of despair. Suicide, I suspect, is very often the outcome of mere mental weariness — not an act of savage energy but the final symptom of complete collapse. The quiet, matter-of-fact attentions of a ship's stewardess, who did not seem aware of other human agonies than sea-sickness, who talked of the probable weather of the passage — it would be a rough night, she thought — and who insisted in a professionally busy manner, "Let me make you comfortable down below at once, miss," as though she were thinking of nothing else but her tip — was enough to dissipate the shades of death gathering round the mortal weariness of bewildered thinking which makes the idea of non-existence welcome so often to the young. Flora de Barral did lie down, and it may be presumed she slept. At any rate she survived the voyage across the North Sea and told Mrs. Fyne all about it, concealing nothing and receiving no rebuke — for Mrs. Fyne's opinions had a large freedom in their pedantry. She held, I suppose, that a woman holds an absolute right — or possesses a perfect excuse — to escape in her own way from a man-mismanaged world.

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What is to be noted is that even in London, having had time to take a reflective view, poor Flora was far from being certain as to the true inwardness of her violent dismissal. She felt the humiliation of it with an almost maddened resentment.

“And did you enlighten her on the point?” I ventured to ask.

Mrs. Fyne moved her shoulders with a philosophical acceptance of all the necessities which ought not to be. Something had to be said, she murmured. She had told the girl enough to make her come to the right conclusion by herself.

“And she did?”

“Yes. Of course. She isn’t a goose,” retorted Mrs. Fyne tartly.

“Then her education is completed,” I remarked with some bitterness. “Don’t you think she ought to be given a chance?”

Mrs. Fyne understood my meaning.

“Not this one,” she snapped in a quite feminine way. “It’s all very well for you to plead, but I — ”

“I do not plead. I simply asked. It seemed natural to ask what you thought.”

“It’s what I feel that matters. And I can’t help my feelings. You may guess,” she added in a softer tone, “that my feelings are mostly concerned with my brother. We were very fond of each other. The difference of our ages was not very great. I suppose you know he is a little younger than I am. He was a sensitive boy. He had the habit of brooding. It is no use concealing from you that neither of us was happy at home. You have heard, no doubt . . . Yes? Well, I was made still more unhappy and hurt — I don’t mind telling you that. He made his way to some distant relations of our mother’s people who I believe were not known to my father at all. I don’t wish to judge their action.”

I interrupted Mrs. Fyne here. I had heard. Fyne was not very communicative in general, but he was proud of his father-in-law — “Carleon Anthony, the poet, you know.” Proud of his celebrity without approving of his character. It was on that account, I strongly suspect, that he seized with avidity upon the theory of poetical genius being allied to madness, which he got hold of in some idiotic book everybody was reading a few years ago. It struck him as being truth itself — illuminating like the sun. He adopted it devoutly. He bored me with it sometimes. Once, just to shut him up, I asked quietly if this theory which he regarded as so incontrovertible did not cause him some uneasiness about his wife and the dear girls? He transfixed me with a pitying stare and requested me in his deep solemn voice to remember the “well-established fact” that genius was not transmissible.

I said only “Oh! Isn’t it?” and he thought he had silenced me by an unanswerable argument. But he continued to talk of his glorious father-in-law, and it was in the course of that conversation that he told me how, when the Liverpool relations of the poet’s late wife naturally addressed themselves to him in considerable concern, suggesting a friendly consultation as to the boy’s future, the incensed (but always refined) poet wrote in answer a letter of mere polished badinage which offended mortally the Liverpool people. This witty outbreak of what was in fact mortification and rage ap-

peared to them so heartless that they simply kept the boy. They let him go to sea not because he was in their way but because he begged hard to be allowed to go.

“Oh! You do know,” said Mrs. Fyne after a pause. “Well — I felt myself very much abandoned. Then his choice of life — so extraordinary, so unfortunate, I may say. I was very much grieved. I should have liked him to have been distinguished — or at any rate to remain in the social sphere where we could have had common interests, acquaintances, thoughts. Don’t think that I am estranged from him. But the precise truth is that I do not know him. I was most painfully affected when he was here by the difficulty of finding a single topic we could discuss together.”

While Mrs. Fyne was talking of her brother I let my thoughts wander out of the room to little Fyne who by leaving me alone with his wife had, so to speak, entrusted his domestic peace to my honour.

“Well, then, Mrs. Fyne, does it not strike you that it would be reasonable under the circumstances to let your brother take care of himself?”

“And suppose I have grounds to think that he can’t take care of himself in a given instance.” She hesitated in a funny, bashful manner which roused my interest. Then:

“Sailors I believe are very susceptible,” she added with forced assurance.

I burst into a laugh which only increased the coldness of her observing stare.

“They are. Immensely! Hopelessly! My dear Mrs. Fyne, you had better give it up! It only makes your husband miserable.”

“And I am quite miserable too. It is really our first difference . . . “

“Regarding Miss de Barral?” I asked.

“Regarding everything. It’s really intolerable that this girl should be the occasion. I think he really ought to give way.”

She turned her chair round a little and picking up the book I had been reading in the morning began to turn the leaves absently.

Her eyes being off me, I felt I could allow myself to leave the room. Its atmosphere had become hopeless for little Fyne’s domestic peace. You may smile. But to the solemn all things are solemn. I had enough sagacity to understand that.

I slipped out into the porch. The dog was slumbering at Fyne’s feet. The muscular little man leaning on his elbow and gazing over the fields presented a forlorn figure. He turned his head quickly, but seeing I was alone, relapsed into his moody contemplation of the green landscape.

I said loudly and distinctly: “I’ve come out to smoke a cigarette,” and sat down near him on the little bench. Then lowering my voice: “Tolerance is an extremely difficult virtue,” I said. “More difficult for some than heroism. More difficult than compassion.”

I avoided looking at him. I knew well enough that he would not like this opening. General ideas were not to his taste. He mistrusted them. I lighted a cigarette, not that I wanted to smoke, but to give another moment to the consideration of the advice — the diplomatic advice I had made up my mind to bowl him over with. And I continued in subdued tones.

"I have been led to make these remarks by what I have discovered since you left us. I suspected from the first. And now I am certain. What your wife cannot tolerate in this affair is Miss de Barral being what she is."

He made a movement, but I kept my eyes away from him and went on steadily. "That is — her being a woman. I have some idea of Mrs. Fyne's mental attitude towards society with its injustices, with its atrocious or ridiculous conventions. As against them there is no audacity of action your wife's mind refuses to sanction. The doctrine which I imagine she stuffs into the pretty heads of your girl-guests is almost vengeful. A sort of moral fire-and-sword doctrine. How far the lesson is wise is not for me to say. I don't permit myself to judge. I seem to see her very delightful disciples singeing themselves with the torches, and cutting their fingers with the swords of Mrs. Fyne's furnishing."

"My wife holds her opinions very seriously," murmured Fyne suddenly.

"Yes. No doubt," I assented in a low voice as before. "But it is a mere intellectual exercise. What I see is that in dealing with reality Mrs. Fyne ceases to be tolerant. In other words, that she can't forgive Miss de Barral for being a woman and behaving like a woman. And yet this is not only reasonable and natural, but it is her only chance. A woman against the world has no resources but in herself. Her only means of action is to be what she is. You understand what I mean."

Fyne mumbled between his teeth that he understood. But he did not seem interested. What he expected of me was to extricate him from a difficult situation. I don't know how far credible this may sound, to less solemn married couples, but to remain at variance with his wife seemed to him a considerable incident. Almost a disaster.

"It looks as though I didn't care what happened to her brother," he said. "And after all if anything . . ."

I became a little impatient but without raising my tone:

"What thing?" I asked. "The liability to get penal servitude is so far like genius that it isn't hereditary. And what else can be objected to the girl? All the energy of her deeper feelings, which she would use up vainly in the danger and fatigue of a struggle with society may be turned into devoted attachment to the man who offers her a way of escape from what can be only a life of moral anguish. I don't mention the physical difficulties."

Glancing at Fyne out of the corner of one eye I discovered that he was attentive. He made the remark that I should have said all this to his wife. It was a sensible enough remark. But I had given Mrs. Fyne up. I asked him if his impression was that his wife meant to entrust him with a letter for her brother?

No. He didn't think so. There were certain reasons which made Mrs. Fyne unwilling to commit her arguments to paper. Fyne was to be primed with them. But he had no doubt that if he persisted in his refusal she would make up her mind to write.

"She does not wish me to go unless with a full conviction that she is right," said Fyne solemnly.

“She’s very exacting,” I commented. And then I reflected that she was used to it. “Would nothing less do for once?”

“You don’t mean that I should give way — do you?” asked Fyne in a whisper of alarmed suspicion.

As this was exactly what I meant, I let his fright sink into him. He fidgeted. If the word may be used of so solemn a personage, he wriggled. And when the horrid suspicion had descended into his very heels, so to speak, he became very still. He sat gazing stonily into space bounded by the yellow, burnt-up slopes of the rising ground a couple of miles away. The face of the down showed the white scar of the quarry where not more than sixteen hours before Fyne and I had been groping in the dark with horrible apprehension of finding under our hands the shattered body of a girl. For myself I had in addition the memory of my meeting with her. She was certainly walking very near the edge — courting a sinister solution. But, now, having by the most unexpected chance come upon a man, she had found another way to escape from the world. Such world as was open to her — without shelter, without bread, without honour. The best she could have found in it would have been a precarious dole of pity diminishing as her years increased. The appeal of the abandoned child Flora to the sympathies of the Fynes had been irresistible. But now she had become a woman, and Mrs. Fyne was presenting an implacable front to a particularly feminine transaction. I may say triumphantly feminine. It is true that Mrs. Fyne did not want women to be women. Her theory was that they should turn themselves into unscrupulous sexless nuisances. An offended theorist dwelt in her bosom somewhere. In what way she expected Flora de Barral to set about saving herself from a most miserable existence I can’t conceive; but I verify believe that she would have found it easier to forgive the girl an actual crime; say the rifling of the Bournemouth old lady’s desk, for instance. And then — for Mrs. Fyne was very much of a woman herself — her sense of proprietorship was very strong within her; and though she had not much use for her brother, yet she did not like to see him annexed by another woman. By a chit of a girl. And such a girl, too. Nothing is truer than that, in this world, the luckless have no right to their opportunities — as if misfortune were a legal disqualification. Fyne’s sentiments (as they naturally would be in a man) had more stability. A good deal of his sympathy survived. Indeed I heard him murmur “Ghastly nuisance,” but I knew it was of the integrity of his domestic accord that he was thinking. With my eyes on the dog lying curled up in sleep in the middle of the porch I suggested in a subdued impersonal tone: “Yes. Why not let yourself be persuaded?”

I never saw little Fyne less solemn. He hissed through his teeth in unexpectedly figurative style that it would take a lot to persuade him to “push under the head of a poor devil of a girl quite sufficiently plucky” — and snorted. He was still gazing at the distant quarry, and I think he was affected by that sight. I assured him that I was far from advising him to do anything so cruel. I am convinced he had always doubted the soundness of my principles, because he turned on me swiftly as though he had been on the watch for a lapse from the straight path.

"Then what do you mean? That I should pretend!"

"No! What nonsense! It would be immoral. I may however tell you that if I had to make a choice I would rather do something immoral than something cruel. What I meant was that, not believing in the efficacy of the interference, the whole question is reduced to your consenting to do what your wife wishes you to do. That would be acting like a gentleman, surely. And acting unselfishly too, because I can very well understand how distasteful it may be to you. Generally speaking, an unselfish action is a moral action. I'll tell you what. I'll go with you."

He turned round and stared at me with surprise and suspicion. "You would go with me?" he repeated.

"You don't understand," I said, amused at the incredulous disgust of his tone. "I must run up to town, to-morrow morning. Let us go together. You have a set of travelling chessmen."

His physiognomy, contracted by a variety of emotions, relaxed to a certain extent at the idea of a game. I told him that as I had business at the Docks he should have my company to the very ship.

"We shall beguile the way to the wilds of the East by improving conversation," I encouraged him.

"My brother-in-law is staying at an hotel — the Eastern Hotel," he said, becoming sombre again. "I haven't the slightest idea where it is."

"I know the place. I shall leave you at the door with the comfortable conviction that you are doing what's right since it pleases a lady and cannot do any harm to anybody whatever."

"You think so? No harm to anybody?" he repeated doubtfully.

"I assure you it's not the slightest use," I said with all possible emphasis which seemed only to increase the solemn discontent of his expression.

"But in order that my going should be a perfectly candid proceeding I must first convince my wife that it isn't the slightest use," he objected portentously.

"Oh, you casuist!" I said. And I said nothing more because at that moment Mrs. Fyne stepped out into the porch. We rose together at her appearance. Her clear, colourless, unflinching glance enveloped us both critically. I sustained the chill smilingly, but Fyne stooped at once to release the dog. He was some time about it; then simultaneously with his recovery of upright position the animal passed at one bound from profoundest slumber into most tumultuous activity. Enveloped in the tornado of his inane scurryings and barkings I took Mrs. Fyne's hand extended to me woodenly and bowed over it with deference. She walked down the path without a word; Fyne had preceded her and was waiting by the open gate. They passed out and walked up the road surrounded by a low cloud of dust raised by the dog gyrating madly about their two figures progressing side by side with rectitude and propriety, and (I don't know why) looking to me as if they had annexed the whole country-side. Perhaps it was that they had impressed me somehow with the sense of their superiority. What superiority? Perhaps it consisted just in their limitations. It was obvious that neither of them had carried away a high

opinion of me. But what affected me most was the indifference of the Fyne dog. He used to precipitate himself at full speed and with a frightful final upward spring upon my waistcoat, at least once at each of our meetings. He had neglected that ceremony this time notwithstanding my correct and even conventional conduct in offering him a cake; it seemed to me symbolic of my final separation from the Fyne household. And I remembered against him how on a certain day he had abandoned poor Flora de Barral — who was morbidly sensitive.

I sat down in the porch and, maybe inspired by secret antagonism to the Fynes, I said to myself deliberately that Captain Anthony must be a fine fellow. Yet on the facts as I knew them he might have been a dangerous trifier or a downright scoundrel. He had made a miserable, hopeless girl follow him clandestinely to London. It is true that the girl had written since, only Mrs. Fyne had been remarkably vague as to the contents. They were unsatisfactory. They did not positively announce imminent nuptials as far as I could make it out from her rather mysterious hints. But then her inexperience might have led her astray. There was no fathoming the innocence of a woman like Mrs. Fyne who, venturing as far as possible in theory, would know nothing of the real aspect of things. It would have been comic if she were making all this fuss for nothing. But I rejected this suspicion for the honour of human nature.

I imagined to myself Captain Anthony as simple and romantic. It was much more pleasant. Genius is not hereditary but temperament may be. And he was the son of a poet with an admirable gift of individualising, of etherealizing the common-place; of making touching, delicate, fascinating the most hopeless conventions of the, so-called, refined existence.

What I could not understand was Mrs. Fyne's dog-in-the-manger attitude. Sentimentally she needed that brother of hers so little! What could it matter to her one way or another — setting aside common humanity which would suggest at least a neutral attitude. Unless indeed it was the blind working of the law that in our world of chances the luckless must be put in the wrong somehow.

And musing thus on the general inclination of our instincts towards injustice I met unexpectedly, at the turn of the road, as it were, a shape of duplicity. It might have been unconscious on Mrs. Fyne's part, but her leading idea appeared to me to be not to keep, not to preserve her brother, but to get rid of him definitely. She did not hope to stop anything. She had too much sense for that. Almost anyone out of an idiot asylum would have had enough sense for that. She wanted the protest to be made, emphatically, with Fyne's fullest concurrence in order to make all intercourse for the future impossible. Such an action would estrange the pair for ever from the Fynes. She understood her brother and the girl too. Happy together, they would never forgive that outspoken hostility — and should the marriage turn out badly . . . Well, it would be just the same. Neither of them would be likely to bring their troubles to such a good prophet of evil.

Yes. That must have been her motive. The inspiration of a possibly unconscious Machiavellism! Either she was afraid of having a sister-in-law to look after during the

husband's long absences; or dreaded the more or less distant eventuality of her brother being persuaded to leave the sea, the friendly refuge of his unhappy youth, and to settle on shore, bringing to her very door this undesirable, this embarrassing connection. She wanted to be done with it — maybe simply from the fatigue of continuous effort in good or evil, which, in the bulk of common mortals, accounts for so many surprising inconsistencies of conduct.

I don't know that I had classed Mrs. Fyne, in my thoughts, amongst common mortals. She was too quietly sure of herself for that. But little Fyne, as I spied him next morning (out of the carriage window) speeding along the platform, looked very much like a common, flustered mortal who has made a very near thing of catching his train: the starting wild eyes, the tense and excited face, the distracted gait, all the common symptoms were there, rendered more impressive by his native solemnity which flapped about him like a disordered garment. Had he — I asked myself with interest — resisted his wife to the very last minute and then bolted up the road from the last conclusive argument, as though it had been a loaded gun suddenly produced? I opened the carriage door, and a vigorous porter shoved him in from behind just as the end of the rustic platform went gliding swiftly from under his feet. He was very much out of breath, and I waited with some curiosity for the moment he would recover his power of speech. That moment came. He said "Good morning" with a slight gasp, remained very still for another minute and then pulled out of his pocket the travelling chessboard, and holding it in his hand, directed at me a glance of inquiry.

"Yes. Certainly," I said, very much disappointed.

Chapter 7 — On the Pavement

Fyne was not willing to talk; but as I had been already let into the secret, the fair-minded little man recognized that I had some right to information if I insisted on it. And I did insist, after the third game. We were yet some way from the end of our journey.

"Oh, if you want to know," was his somewhat impatient opening. And then he talked rather volubly. First of all his wife had not given him to read the letter received from Flora (I had suspected him of having it in his pocket), but had told him all about the contents. It was not at all what it should have been even if the girl had wished to affirm her right to disregard the feelings of all the world. Her own had been trampled in the dirt out of all shape. Extraordinary thing to say — I would admit, for a young girl of her age. The whole tone of that letter was wrong, quite wrong. It was certainly not the product of a — say, of a well-balanced mind.

"If she were given some sort of footing in this world," I said, "if only no bigger than the palm of my hand, she would probably learn to keep a better balance."

Fyne ignored this little remark. His wife, he said, was not the sort of person to be addressed mockingly on a serious subject. There was an unpleasant strain of levity

in that letter, extending even to the references to Captain Anthony himself. Such a disposition was enough, his wife had pointed out to him, to alarm one for the future, had all the circumstances of that preposterous project been as satisfactory as in fact they were not. Other parts of the letter seemed to have a challenging tone — as if daring them (the Fynes) to approve her conduct. And at the same time implying that she did not care, that it was for their own sakes that she hoped they would “go against the world — the horrid world which had crushed poor papa.”

Fyne called upon me to admit that this was pretty cool — considering. And there was another thing, too. It seems that for the last six months (she had been assisting two ladies who kept a kindergarten school in Bayswater — a mere pittance), Flora had insisted on devoting all her spare time to the study of the trial. She had been looking up files of old newspapers, and working herself up into a state of indignation with what she called the injustice and the hypocrisy of the prosecution. Her father, Fyne reminded me, had made some palpable hits in his answers in Court, and she had fastened on them triumphantly. She had reached the conclusion of her father’s innocence, and had been brooding over it. Mrs. Fyne had pointed out to him the danger of this.

The train ran into the station and Fyne, jumping out directly it came to a standstill, seemed glad to cut short the conversation. We walked in silence a little way, boarded a bus, then walked again. I don’t suppose that since the days of his childhood, when surely he was taken to see the Tower, he had been once east of Temple Bar. He looked about him sullenly; and when I pointed out in the distance the rounded front of the Eastern Hotel at the bifurcation of two very broad, mean, shabby thoroughfares, rising like a grey stucco tower above the lowly roofs of the dirty-yellow, two-storey houses, he only grunted disapprovingly.

“I wouldn’t lay too much stress on what you have been telling me,” I observed quietly as we approached that unattractive building. “No man will believe a girl who has just accepted his suit to be not well balanced, — you know.”

“Oh! Accepted his suit,” muttered Fyne, who seemed to have been very thoroughly convinced indeed. “It may have been the other way about.” And then he added: “I am going through with it.”

I said that this was very praiseworthy but that a certain moderation of statement . . . He waved his hand at me and mended his pace. I guessed that he was anxious to get his mission over as quickly as possible. He barely gave himself time to shake hands with me and made a rush at the narrow glass door with the words Hotel Entrance on it. It swung to behind his back with no more noise than the snap of a toothless jaw.

The absurd temptation to remain and see what would come of it got over my better judgment. I hung about irresolute, wondering how long an embassy of that sort would take, and whether Fyne on coming out would consent to be communicative. I feared he would be shocked at finding me there, would consider my conduct incorrect, conceivably treat me with contempt. I walked off a few paces. Perhaps it would be possible to read something on Fyne’s face as he came out; and, if necessary, I could always eclipse myself discreetly through the door of one of the bars. The ground floor

of the Eastern Hotel was an unabashed pub, with plate-glass fronts, a display of brass rails, and divided into many compartments each having its own entrance.

But of course all this was silly. The marriage, the love, the affairs of Captain Anthony were none of my business. I was on the point of moving down the street for good when my attention was attracted by a girl approaching the hotel entrance from the west. She was dressed very modestly in black. It was the white straw hat of a good form and trimmed with a bunch of pale roses which had caught my eye. The whole figure seemed familiar. Of course! Flora de Barral. She was making for the hotel, she was going in. And Fyne was with Captain Anthony! To meet him could not be pleasant for her. I wished to save her from the awkwardness, and as I hesitated what to do she looked up and our eyes happened to meet just as she was turning off the pavement into the hotel doorway. Instinctively I extended my arm. It was enough to make her stop. I suppose she had some faint notion that she had seen me before somewhere. She walked slowly forward, prudent and attentive, watching my faint smile.

"Excuse me," I said directly she had approached me near enough. "Perhaps you would like to know that Mr. Fyne is upstairs with Captain Anthony at this moment."

She uttered a faint "Ah! Mr. Fyne!" I could read in her eyes that she had recognized me now. Her serious expression extinguished the imbecile grin of which I was conscious. I raised my hat. She responded with a slow inclination of the head while her luminous, mistrustful, maiden's glance seemed to whisper, "What is this one doing here?"

"I came up to town with Fyne this morning," I said in a businesslike tone. "I have to see a friend in East India Dock. Fyne and I parted this moment at the door here . . . " The girl regarded me with darkening eyes . . . "Mrs. Fyne did not come with her husband," I went on, then hesitated before that white face so still in the pearly shadow thrown down by the hat-brim. "But she sent him," I murmured by way of warning.

Her eyelids fluttered slowly over the fixed stare. I imagine she was not much disconcerted by this development. "I live a long way from here," she whispered.

I said perfunctorily, "Do you?" And we remained gazing at each other. The uniform paleness of her complexion was not that of an anaemic girl. It had a transparent vitality and at that particular moment the faintest possible rosy tinge, the merest suspicion of colour; an equivalent, I suppose, in any other girl to blushing like a peony while she told me that Captain Anthony had arranged to show her the ship that morning.

It was easy to understand that she did not want to meet Fyne. And when I mentioned in a discreet murmur that he had come because of her letter she glanced at the hotel door quickly, and moved off a few steps to a position where she could watch the entrance without being seen. I followed her. At the junction of the two thoroughfares she stopped in the thin traffic of the broad pavement and turned to me with an air of challenge. "And so you know."

I told her that I had not seen the letter. I had only heard of it. She was a little impatient. "I mean all about me."

Yes. I knew all about her. The distress of Mr. and Mrs. Fyne — especially of Mrs. Fyne — was so great that they would have shared it with anybody almost — not belonging to their circle of friends. I happened to be at hand — that was all.

“You understand that I am not their friend. I am only a holiday acquaintance.”

“She was not very much upset?” queried Flora de Barral, meaning, of course, Mrs. Fyne. And I admitted that she was less so than her husband — and even less than myself. Mrs. Fyne was a very self-possessed person which nothing could startle out of her extreme theoretical position. She did not seem startled when Fyne and I proposed going to the quarry.

“You put that notion into their heads,” the girl said.

I advanced that the notion was in their heads already. But it was much more vividly in my head since I had seen her up there with my own eyes, tempting Providence.

She was looking at me with extreme attention, and murmured:

“Is that what you called it to them? Tempting . . . “

“No. I told them that you were making up your mind and I came along just then. I told them that you were saved by me. My shout checked you . . . “ She moved her head gently from right to left in negation . . . “No? Well, have it your own way.”

I thought to myself: She has found another issue. She wants to forget now. And no wonder. She wants to persuade herself that she had never known such an ugly and poignant minute in her life. “After all,” I conceded aloud, “things are not always what they seem.”

Her little head with its deep blue eyes, eyes of tenderness and anger under the black arch of fine eyebrows was very still. The mouth looked very red in the white face peeping from under the veil, the little pointed chin had in its form something aggressive. Slight and even angular in her modest black dress she was an appealing and — yes — she was a desirable little figure.

Her lips moved very fast asking me:

“And they believed you at once?”

“Yes, they believed me at once. Mrs. Fyne’s word to us was “Go!”

A white gleam between the red lips was so short that I remained uncertain whether it was a smile or a ferocious baring of little even teeth. The rest of the face preserved its innocent, tense and enigmatical expression. She spoke rapidly.

“No, it wasn’t your shout. I had been there some time before you saw me. And I was not there to tempt Providence, as you call it. I went up there for — for what you thought I was going to do. Yes. I climbed two fences. I did not mean to leave anything to Providence. There seem to be people for whom Providence can do nothing. I suppose you are shocked to hear me talk like that?”

I shook my head. I was not shocked. What had kept her back all that time, till I appeared on the scene below, she went on, was neither fear nor any other kind of hesitation. One reaches a point, she said with appalling youthful simplicity, where nothing that concerns one matters any longer. But something did keep her back. I

should have never guessed what it was. She herself confessed that it seemed absurd to say. It was the Fyne dog.

Flora de Barral paused, looking at me, with a peculiar expression and then went on. You see, she imagined the dog had become extremely attached to her. She took it into her head that he might fall over or jump down after her. She tried to drive him away. She spoke sternly to him. It only made him more frisky. He barked and jumped about her skirt in his usual, idiotic, high spirits. He scampered away in circles between the pines charging upon her and leaping as high as her waist. She commanded, "Go away. Go home." She even picked up from the ground a bit of a broken branch and threw it at him. At this his delight knew no bounds; his rushes became faster, his yapping louder; he seemed to be having the time of his life. She was convinced that the moment she threw herself down he would spring over after her as if it were part of the game. She was vexed almost to tears. She was touched too. And when he stood still at some distance as if suddenly rooted to the ground wagging his tail slowly and watching her intensely with his shining eyes another fear came to her. She imagined herself gone and the creature sitting on the brink, its head thrown up to the sky and howling for hours. This thought was not to be borne. Then my shout reached her ears.

She told me all this with simplicity. My voice had destroyed her poise — the suicide poise of her mind. Every act of ours, the most criminal, the most mad presupposes a balance of thought, feeling and will, like a correct attitude for an effective stroke in a game. And I had destroyed it. She was no longer in proper form for the act. She was not very much annoyed. Next day would do. She would have to slip away without attracting the notice of the dog. She thought of the necessity almost tenderly. She came down the path carrying her despair with lucid calmness. But when she saw herself deserted by the dog, she had an impulse to turn round, go up again and be done with it. Not even that animal cared for her — in the end.

"I really did think that he was attached to me. What did he want to pretend for, like this? I thought nothing could hurt me any more. Oh yes. I would have gone up, but I felt suddenly so tired. So tired. And then you were there. I didn't know what you would do. You might have tried to follow me and I didn't think I could run — not up hill — not then."

She had raised her white face a little, and it was queer to hear her say these things. At that time of the morning there are comparatively few people out in that part of the town. The broad interminable perspective of the East India Dock Road, the great perspective of drab brick walls, of grey pavement, of muddy roadway rumbling dismally with loaded carts and vans lost itself in the distance, imposing and shabby in its spacious meanness of aspect, in its immeasurable poverty of forms, of colouring, of life — under a harsh, unconcerned sky dried by the wind to a clear blue. It had been raining during the night. The sunshine itself seemed poor. From time to time a few bits of paper, a little dust and straw whirled past us on the broad flat promontory of the pavement before the rounded front of the hotel.

Flora de Barral was silent for a while. I said:

“And next day you thought better of it.”

Again she raised her eyes to mine with that peculiar expression of informed innocence; and again her white cheeks took on the faintest tinge of pink — the merest shadow of a blush.

“Next day,” she uttered distinctly, “I didn’t think. I remembered. That was enough. I remembered what I should never have forgotten. Never. And Captain Anthony arrived at the cottage in the evening.”

“Ah yes. Captain Anthony,” I murmured. And she repeated also in a murmur, “Yes! Captain Anthony.” The faint flush of warm life left her face. I subdued my voice still more and not looking at her: “You found him sympathetic?” I ventured.

Her long dark lashes went down a little with an air of calculated discretion. At least so it seemed to me. And yet no one could say that I was inimical to that girl. But there you are! Explain it as you may, in this world the friendless, like the poor, are always a little suspect, as if honesty and delicacy were only possible to the privileged few.

“Why do you ask?” she said after a time, raising her eyes suddenly to mine in an effect of candour which on the same principle (of the disinherited not being to be trusted) might have been judged equivocal.

“If you mean what right I have . . . “ She move slightly a hand in a worn brown glove as much as to say she could not question anyone’s right against such an outcast as herself.

I ought to have been moved perhaps; but I only noted the total absence of humility . . . “No right at all,” I continued, “but just interest. Mrs. Fyne — it’s too difficult to explain how it came about — has talked to me of you — well — extensively.”

No doubt Mrs. Fyne had told me the truth, Flora said brusquely with an unexpected hoarseness of tone. This very dress she was wearing had been given her by Mrs. Fyne. Of course I looked at it. It could not have been a recent gift. Close-fitting and black, with heliotrope silk facings under a figured net, it looked far from new, just on this side of shabbiness; in fact, it accentuated the slightness of her figure, it went well in its suggestion of half mourning with the white face in which the unsmiling red lips alone seemed warm with the rich blood of life and passion.

Little Fyne was staying up there an unconscionable time. Was he arguing, preaching, remonstrating? Had he discovered in himself a capacity and a taste for that sort of thing? Or was he perhaps, in an intense dislike for the job, beating about the bush and only puzzling Captain Anthony, the providential man, who, if he expected the girl to appear at any moment, must have been on tenterhooks all the time, and beside himself with impatience to see the back of his brother-in-law. How was it that he had not got rid of Fyne long before in any case? I don’t mean by actually throwing him out of the window, but in some other resolute manner.

Surely Fyne had not impressed him. That he was an impressionable man I could not doubt. The presence of the girl there on the pavement before me proved this up to the hilt — and, well, yes, touchingly enough.

It so happened that in their wanderings to and fro our glances met. They met and remained in contact more familiar than a hand-clasp, more communicative, more expressive. There was something comic too in the whole situation, in the poor girl and myself waiting together on the broad pavement at a corner public-house for the issue of Fyne's ridiculous mission. But the comic when it is human becomes quickly painful. Yes, she was infinitely anxious. And I was asking myself whether this poignant tension of her suspense depended — to put it plainly — on hunger or love.

The answer would have been of some interest to Captain Anthony. For my part, in the presence of a young girl I always become convinced that the dreams of sentiment — like the consoling mysteries of Faith — are invincible; that it is never never reason which governs men and women.

Yet what sentiment could there have been on her part? I remembered her tone only a moment since when she said: "That evening Captain Anthony arrived at the cottage." And considering, too, what the arrival of Captain Anthony meant in this connection, I wondered at the calmness with which she could mention that fact. He arrived at the cottage. In the evening. I knew that late train. He probably walked from the station. The evening would be well advanced. I could almost see a dark indistinct figure opening the wicket gate of the garden. Where was she? Did she see him enter? Was she somewhere near by and did she hear without the slightest premonition his chance and fateful footsteps on the flagged path leading to the cottage door? In the shadow of the night made more cruelly sombre for her by the very shadow of death he must have appeared too strange, too remote, too unknown to impress himself on her thought as a living force — such a force as a man can bring to bear on a woman's destiny.

She glanced towards the hotel door again; I followed suit and then our eyes met once more, this time intentionally. A tentative, uncertain intimacy was springing up between us two. She said simply: "You are waiting for Mr. Fyne to come out; are you?"

I admitted to her that I was waiting to see Mr. Fyne come out. That was all. I had nothing to say to him.

"I have said yesterday all I had to say to him," I added meaningly. "I have said it to them both, in fact. I have also heard all they had to say."

"About me?" she murmured.

"Yes. The conversation was about you."

"I wonder if they told you everything."

If she wondered I could do nothing else but wonder too. But I did not tell her that. I only smiled. The material point was that Captain Anthony should be told everything. But as to that I was very certain that the good sister would see to it. Was there anything more to disclose — some other misery, some other deception of which that girl had been a victim? It seemed hardly probable. It was not even easy to imagine. What struck me most was her — I suppose I must call it — composure. One could not tell whether she understood what she had done. One wondered. She was not so much

unreadable as blank; and I did not know whether to admire her for it or dismiss her from my thoughts as a passive butt of ferocious misfortune.

Looking back at the occasion when we first got on speaking terms on the road by the quarry, I had to admit that she presented some points of a problematic appearance. I don't know why I imagined Captain Anthony as the sort of man who would not be likely to take the initiative; not perhaps from indifference but from that peculiar timidity before women which often enough is found in conjunction with chivalrous instincts, with a great need for affection and great stability of feelings. Such men are easily moved. At the least encouragement they go forward with the eagerness, with the recklessness of starvation. This accounted for the suddenness of the affair. No! With all her inexperience this girl could not have found any great difficulty in her conquering enterprise. She must have begun it. And yet there she was, patient, almost unmoved, almost pitiful, waiting outside like a beggar, without a right to anything but compassion, for a promised dole.

Every moment people were passing close by us, singly, in two and threes; the inhabitants of that end of the town where life goes on unadorned by grace or splendour; they passed us in their shabby garments, with sallow faces, haggard, anxious or weary, or simply without expression, in an unsmiling sombre stream not made up of lives but of mere unconsidered existences whose joys, struggles, thoughts, sorrows and their very hopes were miserable, glamourless, and of no account in the world. And when one thought of their reality to themselves one's heart became oppressed. But of all the individuals who passed by none appeared to me for the moment so pathetic in unconscious patience as the girl standing before me; none more difficult to understand. It is perhaps because I was thinking of things which I could not ask her about.

In fact we had nothing to say to each other; but we two, strangers as we really were to each other, had dealt with the most intimate and final of subjects, the subject of death. It had created a sort of bond between us. It made our silence weighty and uneasy. I ought to have left her there and then; but, as I think I've told you before, the fact of having shouted her away from the edge of a precipice seemed somehow to have engaged my responsibility as to this other leap. And so we had still an intimate subject between us to lend more weight and more uneasiness to our silence. The subject of marriage. I use the word not so much in reference to the ceremony itself (I had no doubt of this, Captain Anthony being a decent fellow) or in view of the social institution in general, as to which I have no opinion, but in regard to the human relation. The first two views are not particularly interesting. The ceremony, I suppose, is adequate; the institution, I dare say, is useful or it would not have endured. But the human relation thus recognized is a mysterious thing in its origins, character and consequences. Unfortunately you can't buttonhole familiarly a young girl as you would a young fellow. I don't think that even another woman could really do it. She would not be trusted. There is not between women that fund of at least conditional loyalty which men may depend on in their dealings with each other. I believe that any woman

would rather trust a man. The difficulty in such a delicate case was how to get on terms.

So we held our peace in the odious uproar of that wide roadway thronged with heavy carts. Great vans carrying enormous piled-up loads advanced swaying like mountains. It was as if the whole world existed only for selling and buying and those who had nothing to do with the movement of merchandise were of no account.

“You must be tired,” I said. One had to say something if only to assert oneself against that wearisome, passionless and crushing uproar. She raised her eyes for a moment. No, she was not. Not very. She had not walked all the way. She came by train as far as Whitechapel Station and had only walked from there.

She had had an ugly pilgrimage; but whether of love or of necessity who could tell? And that precisely was what I should have liked to get at. This was not however a question to be asked point-blank, and I could not think of any effective circumlocution. It occurred to me too that she might conceivably know nothing of it herself — I mean by reflection. That young woman had been obviously considering death. She had gone the length of forming some conception of it. But as to its companion fatality — love, she, I was certain, had never reflected upon its meaning.

With that man in the hotel, whom I did not know, and this girl standing before me in the street I felt that it was an exceptional case. He had broken away from his surroundings; she stood outside the pale. One aspect of conventions which people who declaim against them lose sight of is that conventions make both joy and suffering easier to bear in a becoming manner. But those two were outside all conventions. They would be as untrammelled in a sense as the first man and the first woman. The trouble was that I could not imagine anything about Flora de Barral and the brother of Mrs. Fyne. Or, if you like, I could imagine anything which comes practically to the same thing. Darkness and chaos are first cousins. I should have liked to ask the girl for a word which would give my imagination its line. But how was one to venture so far? I can be rough sometimes but I am not naturally impertinent. I would have liked to ask her for instance: “Do you know what you have done with yourself?” A question like that. Anyhow it was time for one of us to say something. A question it must be. And the question I asked was: “So he’s going to show you the ship?”

She seemed glad I had spoken at last and glad of the opportunity to speak herself.

“Yes. He said he would — this morning. Did you say you did not know Captain Anthony?”

“No. I don’t know him. Is he anything like his sister?”

She looked startled and murmured “Sister!” in a puzzled tone which astonished me. “Oh! Mrs. Fyne,” she exclaimed, recollecting herself, and avoiding my eyes while I looked at her curiously.

What an extraordinary detachment! And all the time the stream of shabby people was hastening by us, with the continuous dreary shuffling of weary footsteps on the flagstones. The sunshine falling on the grime of surfaces, on the poverty of tones and

forms seemed of an inferior quality, its joy faded, its brilliance tarnished and dusty. I had to raise my voice in the dull vibrating noise of the roadway.

“You don’t mean to say you have forgotten the connection?”

She cried readily enough: “I wasn’t thinking.” And then, while I wondered what could have been the images occupying her brain at this time, she asked me: “You didn’t see my letter to Mrs. Fyne — did you?”

“No. I didn’t,” I shouted. Just then the racket was distracting, a pair-horse trolley lightly loaded with loose rods of iron passing slowly very near us. “I wasn’t trusted so far.” And remembering Mrs. Fyne’s hints that the girl was unbalanced, I added: “Was it an unreserved confession you wrote?”

She did not answer me for a time, and as I waited I thought that there’s nothing like a confession to make one look mad; and that of all confessions a written one is the most detrimental all round. Never confess! Never, never! An untimely joke is a source of bitter regret always. Sometimes it may ruin a man; not because it is a joke, but because it is untimely. And a confession of whatever sort is always untimely. The only thing which makes it supportable for a while is curiosity. You smile? Ah, but it is so, or else people would be sent to the rightabout at the second sentence. How many sympathetic souls can you reckon on in the world? One in ten, one in a hundred — in a thousand — in ten thousand? Ah! What a sell these confessions are! What a horrible sell! You seek sympathy, and all you get is the most evanescent sense of relief — if you get that much. For a confession, whatever it may be, stirs the secret depths of the hearer’s character. Often depths that he himself is but dimly aware of. And so the righteous triumph secretly, the lucky are amused, the strong are disgusted, the weak either upset or irritated with you according to the measure of their sincerity with themselves. And all of them in their hearts brand you for either mad or impudent . . .

“

I had seldom seen Marlow so vehement, so pessimistic, so earnestly cynical before. I cut his declamation short by asking what answer Flora de Barral had given to his question. “Did the poor girl admit firing off her confidences at Mrs. Fyne — eight pages of close writing — that sort of thing?”

Marlow shook his head.

“She did not tell me. I accepted her silence, as a kind of answer and remarked that it would have been better if she had simply announced the fact to Mrs. Fyne at the cottage. “Why didn’t you do it?” I asked point-blank.

She said: “I am not a very plucky girl.” She looked up at me and added meaningly: “And you know it. And you know why.”

I must remark that she seemed to have become very subdued since our first meeting at the quarry. Almost a different person from the defiant, angry and despairing girl with quivering lips and resentful glances.

“I thought it was very sensible of you to get away from that sheer drop,” I said.

She looked up with something of that old expression.

“That’s not what I mean. I see you will have it that you saved my life. Nothing of the kind. I was concerned for that vile little beast of a dog. No! It was the idea of — of doing away with myself which was cowardly. That’s what I meant by saying I am not a very plucky girl.”

“Oh!” I retorted airily. “That little dog. He isn’t really a bad little dog.” But she lowered her eyelids and went on:

“I was so miserable that I could think only of myself. This was mean. It was cruel too. And besides I had not given it up — not then.”

* * * * *

Marlow changed his tone.

“I don’t know much of the psychology of self-destruction. It’s a sort of subject one has few opportunities to study closely. I knew a man once who came to my rooms one evening, and while smoking a cigar confessed to me moodily that he was trying to discover some graceful way of retiring out of existence. I didn’t study his case, but I had a glimpse of him the other day at a cricket match, with some women, having a good time. That seems a fairly reasonable attitude. Considered as a sin, it is a case for repentance before the throne of a merciful God. But I imagine that Flora de Barral’s religion under the care of the distinguished governess could have been nothing but outward formality. Remorse in the sense of gnawing shame and unavailing regret is only understandable to me when some wrong had been done to a fellow-creature. But why she, that girl who existed on sufferance, so to speak — why she should writhe inwardly with remorse because she had once thought of getting rid of a life which was nothing in every respect but a curse — that I could not understand. I thought it was very likely some obscure influence of common forms of speech, some traditional or inherited feeling — a vague notion that suicide is a legal crime; words of old moralists and preachers which remain in the air and help to form all the authorized moral conventions. Yes, I was surprised at her remorse. But lowering her glance unexpectedly till her dark eye-lashes seemed to rest against her white cheeks she presented a perfectly demure aspect. It was so attractive that I could not help a faint smile. That Flora de Barral should ever, in any aspect, have the power to evoke a smile was the very last thing I should have believed. She went on after a slight hesitation:

“One day I started for there, for that place.”

Look at the influence of a mere play of physiognomy! If you remember what we were talking about you will hardly believe that I caught myself grinning down at that demure little girl. I must say too that I felt more friendly to her at the moment than ever before.

“Oh, you did? To take that jump? You are a determined young person. Well, what happened that time?”

An almost imperceptible alteration in her bearing; a slight droop of her head perhaps — a mere nothing — made her look more demure than ever.

“I had left the cottage,” she began a little hurriedly. “I was walking along the road — you know, the road. I had made up my mind I was not coming back this time.”

I won't deny that these words spoken from under the brim of her hat (oh yes, certainly, her head was down — she had put it down) gave me a thrill; for indeed I had never doubted her sincerity. It could never have been a make-believe despair.

"Yes," I whispered. "You were going along the road."

"When . . ." Again she hesitated with an effect of innocent shyness worlds asunder from tragic issues; then glided on . . . "When suddenly Captain Anthony came through a gate out of a field."

I coughed down the beginning of a most improper fit of laughter, and felt ashamed of myself. Her eyes raised for a moment seemed full of innocent suffering and unexpressed menace in the depths of the dilated pupils within the rings of sombre blue. It was — how shall I say it? — a night effect when you seem to see vague shapes and don't know what reality you may come upon at any time. Then she lowered her eyelids again, shutting all mysteriousness out of the situation except for the sobering memory of that glance, nightlike in the sunshine, expressively still in the brutal unrest of the street.

"So Captain Anthony joined you — did he?"

"He opened a field-gate and walked out on the road. He crossed to my side and went on with me. He had his pipe in his hand. He said: 'Are you going far this morning?'"

These words (I was watching her white face as she spoke) gave me a slight shudder. She remained demure, almost prim. And I remarked:

"You have been talking together before, of course."

"Not more than twenty words altogether since he arrived," she declared without emphasis. "That day he had said 'Good morning' to me when we met at breakfast two hours before. And I said good morning to him. I did not see him afterwards till he came out on the road."

I thought to myself that this was not accidental. He had been observing her. I felt certain also that he had not been asking any questions of Mrs. Fyne.

"I wouldn't look at him," said Flora de Barral. "I had done with looking at people. He said to me: 'My sister does not put herself out much for us. We had better keep each other company. I have read every book there is in that cottage.' I walked on. He did not leave me. I thought he ought to. But he didn't. He didn't seem to notice that I would not talk to him."

She was now perfectly still. The wretched little parasol hung down against her dress from her joined hands. I was rigid with attention. It isn't every day that one culls such a volunteered tale on a girl's lips. The ugly street-noises swelling up for a moment covered the next few words she said. It was vexing. The next word I heard was "worried."

"It worried you to have him there, walking by your side."

"Yes. Just that," she went on with downcast eyes. There was something prettily comical in her attitude and her tone, while I pictured to myself a poor white-faced girl walking to her death with an unconscious man striding by her side. Unconscious? I don't know. First of all, I felt certain that this was no chance meeting. Something had

happened before. Was he a man for a coup-de-foudre, the lightning stroke of love? I don't think so. That sort of susceptibility is luckily rare. A world of inflammable lovers of the Romeo and Juliet type would very soon end in barbarism and misery. But it is a fact that in every man (not in every woman) there lives a lover; a lover who is called out in all his potentialities often by the most insignificant little things — as long as they come at the psychological moment: the glimpse of a face at an unusual angle, an evanescent attitude, the curve of a cheek often looked at before, perhaps, but then, at the moment, charged with astonishing significance. These are great mysteries, of course. Magic signs.

I don't know in what the sign consisted in this case. It might have been her pallor (it wasn't pasty nor yet papery) that white face with eyes like blue gleams of fire and lips like red coals. In certain lights, in certain poises of head it suggested tragic sorrow. Or it might have been her wavy hair. Or even just that pointed chin stuck out a little, resentful and not particularly distinguished, doing away with the mysterious aloofness of her fragile presence. But any way at a given moment Anthony must have suddenly seen the girl. And then, that something had happened to him. Perhaps nothing more than the thought coming into his head that this was "a possible woman."

Followed this waylaying! Its resolute character makes me think it was the chin's doing; that "common mortal" touch which stands in such good stead to some women. Because men, I mean really masculine men, those whose generations have evolved an ideal woman, are often very timid. Who wouldn't be before the ideal? It's your sentimental trifle, who has just missed being nothing at all, who is enterprising, simply because it is easy to appear enterprising when one does not mean to put one's belief to the test.

Well, whatever it was that encouraged him, Captain Anthony stuck to Flora de Barral in a manner which in a timid man might have been called heroic if it had not been so simple. Whether policy, diplomacy, simplicity, or just inspiration, he kept up his talk, rather deliberate, with very few pauses. Then suddenly as if recollecting himself:

"It's funny. I don't think you are annoyed with me for giving you my company unasked. But why don't you say something?"

I asked Miss de Barral what answer she made to this query.

"I made no answer," she said in that even, unemotional low voice which seemed to be her voice for delicate confidences. "I walked on. He did not seem to mind. We came to the foot of the quarry where the road winds up hill, past the place where you were sitting by the roadside that day. I began to wonder what I should do. After we reached the top Captain Anthony said that he had not been for a walk with a lady for years and years — almost since he was a boy. We had then come to where I ought to have turned off and struck across a field. I thought of making a run of it. But he would have caught me up. I knew he would; and, of course, he would not have allowed me. I couldn't give him the slip."

"Why didn't you ask him to leave you?" I inquired curiously.

“He would not have taken any notice,” she went on steadily. “And what could I have done then? I could not have started quarrelling with him — could I? I hadn’t enough energy to get angry. I felt very tired suddenly. I just stumbled on straight along the road. Captain Anthony told me that the family — some relations of his mother — he used to know in Liverpool was broken up now, and he had never made any friends since. All gone their different ways. All the girls married. Nice girls they were and very friendly to him when he was but little more than a boy. He repeated: ‘Very nice, cheery, clever girls.’ I sat down on a bank against a hedge and began to cry.”

“You must have astonished him not a little,” I observed.

Anthony, it seems, remained on the road looking down at her. He did not offer to approach her, neither did he make any other movement or gesture. Flora de Barral told me all this. She could see him through her tears, blurred to a mere shadow on the white road, and then again becoming more distinct, but always absolutely still and as if lost in thought before a strange phenomenon which demanded the closest possible attention.

Flora learned later that he had never seen a woman cry; not in that way, at least. He was impressed and interested by the mysteriousness of the effect. She was very conscious of being looked at, but was not able to stop herself crying. In fact, she was not capable of any effort. Suddenly he advanced two steps, stooped, caught hold of her hands lying on her lap and pulled her up to her feet; she found herself standing close to him almost before she realized what he had done. Some people were coming briskly along the road and Captain Anthony muttered: “You don’t want to be stared at. What about that stile over there? Can we go back across the fields?”

She snatched her hands out of his grasp (it seems he had omitted to let them go), marched away from him and got over the stile. It was a big field sprinkled profusely with white sheep. A trodden path crossed it diagonally. After she had gone more than half way she turned her head for the first time. Keeping five feet or so behind, Captain Anthony was following her with an air of extreme interest. Interest or eagerness. At any rate she caught an expression on his face which frightened her. But not enough to make her run. And indeed it would have had to be something incredibly awful to scare into a run a girl who had come to the end of her courage to live.

As if encouraged by this glance over the shoulder Captain Anthony came up boldly, and now that he was by her side, she felt his nearness intimately, like a touch. She tried to disregard this sensation. But she was not angry with him now. It wasn’t worth while. She was thankful that he had the sense not to ask questions as to this crying. Of course he didn’t ask because he didn’t care. No one in the world cared for her, neither those who pretended nor yet those who did not pretend. She preferred the latter.

Captain Anthony opened for her a gate into another field; when they got through he kept walking abreast, elbow to elbow almost. His voice growled pleasantly in her very ear. Staying in this dull place was enough to give anyone the blues. His sister scribbled all day. It was positively unkind. He alluded to his nieces as rude, selfish monkeys, without either feelings or manners. And he went on to talk about his ship

being laid up for a month and dismantled for repairs. The worst was that on arriving in London he found he couldn't get the rooms he was used to, where they made him as comfortable as such a confirmed sea-dog as himself could be anywhere on shore.

In the effort to subdue by dint of talking and to keep in check the mysterious, the profound attraction he felt already for that delicate being of flesh and blood, with pale cheeks, with darkened eyelids and eyes scalded with hot tears, he went on speaking of himself as a confirmed enemy of life on shore — a perfect terror to a simple man, what with the fads and proprieties and the ceremonies and affectations. He hated all that. He wasn't fit for it. There was no rest and peace and security but on the sea.

This gave one a view of Captain Anthony as a hermit withdrawn from a wicked world. It was amusingly unexpected to me and nothing more. But it must have appealed straight to that bruised and battered young soul. Still shrinking from his nearness she had ended by listening to him with avidity. His deep murmuring voice soothed her. And she thought suddenly that there was peace and rest in the grave too.

She heard him say: "Look at my sister. She isn't a bad woman by any means. She asks me here because it's right and proper, I suppose, but she has no use for me. There you have your shore people. I quite understand anybody crying. I would have been gone already, only, truth to say, I haven't any friends to go to." He added brusquely: "And you?"

She made a slight negative sign. He must have been observing her, putting two and two together. After a pause he said simply: "When I first came here I thought you were governess to these girls. My sister didn't say a word about you to me."

Then Flora spoke for the first time.

"Mrs. Fyne is my best friend."

"So she is mine," he said without the slightest irony or bitterness, but added with conviction: "That shows you what life ashore is. Much better be out of it."

As they were approaching the cottage he was heard again as though a long silent walk had not intervened: "But anyhow I shan't ask her anything about you."

He stopped short and she went on alone. His last words had impressed her. Everything he had said seemed somehow to have a special meaning under its obvious conversational sense. Till she went in at the door of the cottage she felt his eyes resting on her.

That is it. He had made himself felt. That girl was, one may say, washing about with slack limbs in the ugly surf of life with no opportunity to strike out for herself, when suddenly she had been made to feel that there was somebody beside her in the bitter water. A most considerable moral event for her; whether she was aware of it or not. They met again at the one o'clock dinner. I am inclined to think that, being a healthy girl under her frail appearance, and fast walking and what I may call relief-crying (there are many kinds of crying) making one hungry, she made a good meal. It was Captain Anthony who had no appetite. His sister commented on it in a curt, businesslike manner, and the eldest of his delightful nieces said mockingly: "You have been taking too much exercise this morning, Uncle Roderick." The mild Uncle Roderick

turned upon her with a “What do you know about it, young lady?” so charged with suppressed savagery that the whole round table gave one gasp and went dumb for the rest of the meal. He took no notice whatever of Flora de Barral. I don’t think it was from prudence or any calculated motive. I believe he was so full of her aspects that he did not want to look in her direction when there were other people to hamper his imagination.

You understand I am piecing here bits of disconnected statements. Next day Flora saw him leaning over the field-gate. When she told me this, I didn’t of course ask her how it was she was there. Probably she could not have told me how it was she was there. The difficulty here is to keep steadily in view the then conditions of her existence, a combination of dreariness and horror.

That hermit-like but not exactly misanthropic sailor was leaning over the gate moodily. When he saw the white-faced restless Flora drifting like a lost thing along the road he put his pipe in his pocket and called out “Good morning, Miss Smith” in a tone of amazing happiness. She, with one foot in life and the other in a nightmare, was at the same time inert and unstable, and very much at the mercy of sudden impulses. She swerved, came distractedly right up to the gate and looking straight into his eyes: “I am not Miss Smith. That’s not my name. Don’t call me by it.”

She was shaking as if in a passion. His eyes expressed nothing; he only unlatched the gate in silence, grasped her arm and drew her in. Then closing it with a kick —

“Not your name? That’s all one to me. Your name’s the least thing about you I care for.” He was leading her firmly away from the gate though she resisted slightly. There was a sort of joy in his eyes which frightened her. “You are not a princess in disguise,” he said with an unexpected laugh she found blood-curdling. “And that’s all I care for. You had better understand that I am not blind and not a fool. And then it’s plain for even a fool to see that things have been going hard with you. You are on a lee shore and eating your heart out with worry.”

What seemed most awful to her was the elated light in his eyes, the rapacious smile that would come and go on his lips as if he were gloating over her misery. But her misery was his opportunity and he rejoiced while the tenderest pity seemed to flood his whole being. He pointed out to her that she knew who he was. He was Mrs. Fyne’s brother. And, well, if his sister was the best friend she had in the world, then, by Jove, it was about time somebody came along to look after her a little.

Flora had tried more than once to free herself, but he tightened his grasp of her arm each time and even shook it a little without ceasing to speak. The nearness of his face intimidated her. He seemed striving to look her through. It was obvious the world had been using her ill. And even as he spoke with indignation the very marks and stamp of this ill-usage of which he was so certain seemed to add to the inexplicable attraction he felt for her person. It was not pity alone, I take it. It was something more spontaneous, perverse and exciting. It gave him the feeling that if only he could get hold of her, no woman would belong to him so completely as this woman.

“Whatever your troubles,” he said, “I am the man to take you away from them; that is, if you are not afraid. You told me you had no friends. Neither have I. Nobody ever cared for me as far as I can remember. Perhaps you could. Yes, I live on the sea. But who would you be parting from? No one. You have no one belonging to you.”

At this point she broke away from him and ran. He did not pursue her. The tall hedges tossing in the wind, the wide fields, the clouds driving over the sky and the sky itself wheeled about her in masses of green and white and blue as if the world were breaking up silently in a whirl, and her foot at the next step were bound to find the void. She reached the gate all right, got out, and, once on the road, discovered that she had not the courage to look back. The rest of that day she spent with the Fyne girls who gave her to understand that she was a slow and unprofitable person. Long after tea, nearly at dusk, Captain Anthony (the son of the poet) appeared suddenly before her in the little garden in front of the cottage. They were alone for the moment. The wind had dropped. In the calm evening air the voices of Mrs. Fyne and the girls strolling aimlessly on the road could be heard. He said to her severely:

“You have understood?”

She looked at him in silence.

“That I love you,” he finished.

She shook her head the least bit.

“Don’t you believe me?” he asked in a low, infuriated voice.

“Nobody would love me,” she answered in a very quiet tone. “Nobody could.”

He was dumb for a time, astonished beyond measure, as he well might have been. He doubted his ears. He was outraged.

“Eh? What? Can’t love you? What do you know about it? It’s my affair, isn’t it? You dare say that to a man who has just told you! You must be mad!”

“Very nearly,” she said with the accent of pent-up sincerity, and even relieved because she was able to say something which she felt was true. For the last few days she had felt herself several times near that madness which is but an intolerable lucidity of apprehension.

The clear voices of Mrs. Fyne and the girls were coming nearer, sounding affected in the peace of the passion-laden earth. He began storming at her hastily.

“Nonsense! Nobody can . . . Indeed! Pah! You’ll have to be shown that somebody can. I can. Nobody . . .” He made a contemptuous hissing noise. “More likely you can’t. They have done something to you. Something’s crushed your pluck. You can’t face a man — that’s what it is. What made you like this? Where do you come from? You have been put upon. The scoundrels — whoever they are, men or women, seem to have robbed you of your very name. You say you are not Miss Smith. Who are you, then?”

She did not answer. He muttered, “Not that I care,” and fell silent, because the fatuous self-confident chatter of the Fyne girls could be heard at the very gate. But they were not going to bed yet. They passed on. He waited a little in silence and immobility, then stamped his foot and lost control of himself. He growled at her in

a savage passion. She felt certain that he was threatening her and calling her names. She was no stranger to abuse, as we know, but there seemed to be a particular kind of ferocity in this which was new to her. She began to tremble. The especially terrifying thing was that she could not make out the nature of these awful menaces and names. Not a word. Yet it was not the shrinking anguish of her other experiences of angry scenes. She made a mighty effort, though her knees were knocking together, and in an expiring voice demanded that he should let her go indoors. "Don't stop me. It's no use. It's no use," she repeated faintly, feeling an invincible obstinacy rising within her, yet without anger against that raging man.

He became articulate suddenly, and, without raising his voice, perfectly audible.

"No use! No use! You dare stand here and tell me that — you white-faced wisp, you wreath of mist, you little ghost of all the sorrow in the world. You dare! Haven't I been looking at you? You are all eyes. What makes your cheeks always so white as if you had seen something . . . Don't speak. I love it . . . No use! And you really think that I can now go to sea for a year or more, to the other side of the world somewhere, leaving you behind. Why! You would vanish . . . what little there is of you. Some rough wind will blow you away altogether. You have no holding ground on earth. Well, then trust yourself to me — to the sea — which is deep like your eyes."

She said: "Impossible." He kept quiet for a while, then asked in a totally changed tone, a tone of gloomy curiosity:

"You can't stand me then? Is that it?"

"No," she said, more steady herself. "I am not thinking of you at all."

The inane voices of the Fyne girls were heard over the sombre fields calling to each other, thin and clear. He muttered: "You could try to. Unless you are thinking of somebody else."

"Yes. I am thinking of somebody else, of someone who has nobody to think of him but me."

His shadowy form stepped out of her way, and suddenly leaned sideways against the wooden support of the porch. And as she stood still, surprised by this staggering movement, his voice spoke up in a tone quite strange to her.

"Go in then. Go out of my sight — I thought you said nobody could love you."

She was passing him when suddenly he struck her as so forlorn that she was inspired to say: "No one has ever loved me — not in that way — if that's what you mean. Nobody would."

He detached himself brusquely from the post, and she did not shrink; but Mrs. Fyne and the girls were already at the gate.

All he understood was that everything was not over yet. There was no time to lose; Mrs. Fyne and the girls had come in at the gate. He whispered "Wait" with such authority (he was the son of Carleon Anthony, the domestic autocrat) that it did arrest her for a moment, long enough to hear him say that he could not be left like this to puzzle over her nonsense all night. She was to slip down again into the garden later on, as soon as she could do so without being heard. He would be there waiting for her

till — till daylight. She didn't think he could go to sleep, did she? And she had better come, or — he broke off on an unfinished threat.

She vanished into the unlighted cottage just as Mrs. Fyne came up to the porch. Nervous, holding her breath in the darkness of the living-room, she heard her best friend say: "You ought to have joined us, Roderick." And then: "Have you seen Miss Smith anywhere?"

Flora shuddered, expecting Anthony to break out into betraying imprecations on Miss Smith's head, and cause a painful and humiliating explanation. She imagined him full of his mysterious ferocity. To her great surprise, Anthony's voice sounded very much as usual, with perhaps a slight tinge of grimness. "Miss Smith! No. I've seen no Miss Smith."

Mrs. Fyne seemed satisfied — and not much concerned really.

Flora, relieved, got clear away to her room upstairs, and shutting her door quietly, dropped into a chair. She was used to reproaches, abuse, to all sorts of wicked ill usage — short of actual beating on her body. Otherwise inexplicable angers had cut and slashed and trampled down her youth without mercy — and mainly, it appeared, because she was the financier de Barral's daughter and also condemned to a degrading sort of poverty through the action of treacherous men who had turned upon her father in his hour of need. And she thought with the tenderest possible affection of that upright figure buttoned up in a long frock-coat, soft-voiced and having but little to say to his girl. She seemed to feel his hand closed round hers. On his flying visits to Brighton he would always walk hand in hand with her. People stared covertly at them; the band was playing; and there was the sea — the blue gaiety of the sea. They were quietly happy together . . . It was all over!

An immense anguish of the present wrung her heart, and she nearly cried aloud. That dread of what was before her which had been eating up her courage slowly in the course of odious years, flamed up into an access of panic, that sort of headlong panic which had already driven her out twice to the top of the cliff-like quarry. She jumped up saying to herself: "Why not now? At once! Yes. I'll do it now — in the dark!" The very horror of it seemed to give her additional resolution.

She came down the staircase quietly, and only on the point of opening the door and because of the discovery that it was unfastened, she remembered Captain Anthony's threat to stay in the garden all night. She hesitated. She did not understand the mood of that man clearly. He was violent. But she had gone beyond the point where things matter. What would he think of her coming down to him — as he would naturally suppose. And even that didn't matter. He could not despise her more than she despised herself. She must have been light-headed because the thought came into her mind that should he get into ungovernable fury from disappointment, and perchance strangle her, it would be as good a way to be done with it as any.

"You had that thought," I exclaimed in wonder.

With downcast eyes and speaking with an almost painstaking precision (her very lips, her red lips, seemed to move just enough to be heard and no more), she said that,

yes, the thought came into her head. This makes one shudder at the mysterious ways girls acquire knowledge. For this was a thought, wild enough, I admit, but which could only have come from the depths of that sort of experience which she had not had, and went far beyond a young girl's possible conception of the strongest and most veiled of human emotions.

"He was there, of course?" I said.

"Yes, he was there." She saw him on the path directly she stepped outside the porch. He was very still. It was as though he had been standing there with his face to the door for hours.

Shaken up by the changing moods of passion and tenderness, he must have been ready for any extravagance of conduct. Knowing the profound silence each night brought to that nook of the country, I could imagine them having the feeling of being the only two people on the wide earth. A row of six or seven lofty elms just across the road opposite the cottage made the night more obscure in that little garden. If these two could just make out each other that was all.

"Well! And were you very much terrified?" I asked.

She made me wait a little before she said, raising her eyes: "He was gentleness itself."

I noticed three abominable, drink-sodden loafers, sallow and dirty, who had come to range themselves in a row within ten feet of us against the front of the public-house. They stared at Flora de Barral's back with unseeing, mournful fixity.

"Let's move this way a little," I proposed.

She turned at once and we made a few paces; not too far to take us out of sight of the hotel door, but very nearly. I could just keep my eyes on it. After all, I had not been so very long with the girl. If you were to disentangle the words we actually exchanged from my comments you would see that they were not so very many, including everything she had so unexpectedly told me of her story. No, not so very many. And now it seemed as though there would be no more. No! I could expect no more. The confidence was wonderful enough in its nature as far as it went, and perhaps not to have been expected from any other girl under the sun. And I felt a little ashamed. The origin of our intimacy was too gruesome. It was as if listening to her I had taken advantage of having seen her poor bewildered, scared soul without its veils. But I was curious, too; or, to render myself justice without false modesty — I was anxious; anxious to know a little more.

I felt like a blackmailer all the same when I made my attempt with a light-hearted remark.

"And so you gave up that walk you proposed to take?"

"Yes, I gave up the walk," she said slowly before raising her downcast eyes. When she did so it was with an extraordinary effect. It was like catching sight of a piece of blue sky, of a stretch of open water. And for a moment I understood the desire of that man to whom the sea and sky of his solitary life had appeared suddenly incomplete without that glance which seemed to belong to them both. He was not for nothing the son of a poet. I looked into those unabashed eyes while the girl went on, her demure

appearance and precise tone changed to a very earnest expression. Woman is various indeed.

“But I want you to understand, Mr. . . . “ she had actually to think of my name . . . “Mr. Marlow, that I have written to Mrs. Fyne that I haven’t been — that I have done nothing to make Captain Anthony behave to me as he had behaved. I haven’t. I haven’t. It isn’t my doing. It isn’t my fault — if she likes to put it in that way. But she, with her ideas, ought to understand that I couldn’t, that I couldn’t . . . I know she hates me now. I think she never liked me. I think nobody ever cared for me. I was told once nobody could care for me; and I think it is true. At any rate I can’t forget it.”

Her abominable experience with the governess had implanted in her unlucky breast a lasting doubt, an ineradicable suspicion of herself and of others. I said:

“Remember, Miss de Barral, that to be fair you must trust a man altogether — or not at all.”

She dropped her eyes suddenly. I thought I heard a faint sigh. I tried to take a light tone again, and yet it seemed impossible to get off the ground which gave me my standing with her.

“Mrs. Fyne is absurd. She’s an excellent woman, but really you could not be expected to throw away your chance of life simply that she might cherish a good opinion of your memory. That would be excessive.”

“It was not of my life that I was thinking while Captain Anthony was — was speaking to me,” said Flora de Barral with an effort.

I told her that she was wrong then. She ought to have been thinking of her life, and not only of her life but of the life of the man who was speaking to her too. She let me finish, then shook her head impatiently.

“I mean — death.”

“Well,” I said, “when he stood before you there, outside the cottage, he really stood between you and that. I have it out of your own mouth. You can’t deny it.”

“If you will have it that he saved my life, then he has got it. It was not for me. Oh no! It was not for me that I — It was not fear! There!” She finished petulantly: “And you may just as well know it.”

She hung her head and swung the parasol slightly to and fro. I thought a little.

“Do you know French, Miss de Barral?” I asked.

She made a sign with her head that she did, but without showing any surprise at the question and without ceasing to swing her parasol.

“Well then, somehow or other I have the notion that Captain Anthony is what the French call un galant homme. I should like to think he is being treated as he deserves.”

The form of her lips (I could see them under the brim of her hat) was suddenly altered into a line of seriousness. The parasol stopped swinging.

“I have given him what he wanted — that’s myself,” she said without a tremor and with a striking dignity of tone.

Impressed by the manner and the directness of the words, I hesitated for a moment what to say. Then made up my mind to clear up the point.

“And you have got what you wanted? Is that it?”

The daughter of the egregious financier de Barral did not answer at once this question going to the heart of things. Then raising her head and gazing wistfully across the street noisy with the endless transit of innumerable bargains, she said with intense gravity:

“He has been most generous.”

I was pleased to hear these words. Not that I doubted the infatuation of Roderick Anthony, but I was pleased to hear something which proved that she was sensible and open to the sentiment of gratitude which in this case was significant. In the face of man’s desire a girl is excusable if she thinks herself priceless. I mean a girl of our civilization which has established a dithyrambic phraseology for the expression of love. A man in love will accept any convention exalting the object of his passion and in this indirect way his passion itself. In what way the captain of the ship Ferndale gave proofs of lover-like lavishness I could not guess very well. But I was glad she was appreciative. It is lucky that small things please women. And it is not silly of them to be thus pleased. It is in small things that the deepest loyalty, that which they need most, the loyalty of the passing moment, is best expressed.

She had remained thoughtful, letting her deep motionless eyes rest on the streaming jumble of traffic. Suddenly she said:

“And I wanted to ask you . . . I was really glad when I saw you actually here. Who would have expected you here, at this spot, before this hotel! I certainly never . . . You see it meant a lot to me. You are the only person who knows . . . who knows for certain . . . “

“Knows what?” I said, not discovering at first what she had in her mind. Then I saw it. “Why can’t you leave that alone?” I remonstrated, rather annoyed at the invidious position she was forcing on me in a sense. “It’s true that I was the only person to see,” I added. “But, as it happens, after your mysterious disappearance I told the Fynes the story of our meeting.”

Her eyes raised to mine had an expression of dreamy, unfathomable candour, if I dare say so. And if you wonder what I mean I can only say that I have seen the sea wear such an expression on one or two occasions shortly before sunrise on a calm, fresh day. She said as if meditating aloud that she supposed the Fynes were not likely to talk about that. She couldn’t imagine any connection in which . . . Why should they?

As her tone had become interrogatory I assented. “To be sure. There’s no reason whatever — ” thinking to myself that they would be more likely indeed to keep quiet about it. They had other things to talk of. And then remembering little Fyne stuck upstairs for an unconscionable time, enough to blurt out everything he ever knew in his life, I reflected that he would assume naturally that Captain Anthony had nothing to learn from him about Flora de Barral. It had been up to now my assumption too.

I saw my mistake. The sincerest of women will make no unnecessary confidences to a man. And this is as it should be.

“No — no!” I said reassuringly. “It’s most unlikely. Are you much concerned?”

“Well, you see, when I came down,” she said again in that precise demure tone, “when I came down — into the garden Captain Anthony misunderstood — ”

“Of course he would. Men are so conceited,” I said.

I saw it well enough that he must have thought she had come down to him. What else could he have thought? And then he had been “gentleness itself.” A new experience for that poor, delicate, and yet so resisting creature. Gentleness in passion! What could have been more seductive to the scared, starved heart of that girl? Perhaps had he been violent, she might have told him that what she came down to keep was the tryst of death — not of love. It occurred to me as I looked at her, young, fragile in aspect, and intensely alive in her quietness, that perhaps she did not know herself then what sort of tryst she was coming down to keep.

She smiled faintly, almost awkwardly as if she were totally unused to smiling, at my cheap jocularly. Then she said with that forced precision, a sort of conscious primness:

“I didn’t want him to know.”

I approved heartily. Quite right. Much better. Let him ever remain under his misapprehension which was so much more flattering for him.

I tried to keep it in the tone of comedy; but she was, I believe, too simple to understand my intention. She went on, looking down.

“Oh! You think so? When I saw you I didn’t know why you were here. I was glad when you spoke to me because this is exactly what I wanted to ask you for. I wanted to ask you if you ever meet Captain Anthony — by any chance — anywhere — you are a sailor too, are you not? — that you would never mention — never — that — that you had seen me over there.”

“My dear young lady,” I cried, horror-struck at the supposition. “Why should I? What makes you think I should dream of . . . ”

She had raised her head at my vehemence. She did not understand it. The world had treated her so dishonourably that she had no notion even of what mere decency of feeling is like. It was not her fault. Indeed, I don’t know why she should have put her trust in anybody’s promises.

But I thought it would be better to promise. So I assured her that she could depend on my absolute silence.

“I am not likely to ever set eyes on Captain Anthony,” I added with conviction — as a further guarantee.

She accepted my assurance in silence, without a sign. Her gravity had in it something acute, perhaps because of that chin. While we were still looking at each other she declared:

“There’s no deception in it really. I want you to believe that if I am here, like this, to-day, it is not from fear. It is not!”

"I quite understand," I said. But her firm yet self-conscious gaze became doubtful. "I do," I insisted. "I understand perfectly that it was not of death that you were afraid."

She lowered her eyes slowly, and I went on:

"As to life, that's another thing. And I don't know that one ought to blame you very much — though it seemed rather an excessive step. I wonder now if it isn't the ugliness rather than the pain of the struggle which . . ."

She shuddered visibly: "But I do blame myself," she exclaimed with feeling. "I am ashamed." And, dropping her head, she looked in a moment the very picture of remorse and shame.

"Well, you will be going away from all its horrors," I said. "And surely you are not afraid of the sea. You are a sailor's granddaughter, I understand."

She sighed deeply. She remembered her grandfather only a little. He was a clean-shaven man with a ruddy complexion and long, perfectly white hair. He used to take her on his knee, and putting his face near hers, talk to her in loving whispers. If only he were alive now . . . !

She remained silent for a while.

"Aren't you anxious to see the ship?" I asked.

She lowered her head still more so that I could not see anything of her face.

"I don't know," she murmured.

I had already the suspicion that she did not know her own feelings. All this work of the merest chance had been so unexpected, so sudden. And she had nothing to fall back upon, no experience but such as to shake her belief in every human being. She was dreadfully and pitifully forlorn. It was almost in order to comfort my own depression that I remarked cheerfully:

"Well, I know of somebody who must be growing extremely anxious to see you."

"I am before my time," she confessed simply, rousing herself. "I had nothing to do. So I came out."

I had the sudden vision of a shabby, lonely little room at the other end of the town. It had grown intolerable to her restlessness. The mere thought of it oppressed her. Flora de Barral was looking frankly at her chance confidant,

"And I came this way," she went on. "I appointed the time myself yesterday, but Captain Anthony would not have minded. He told me he was going to look over some business papers till I came."

The idea of the son of the poet, the rescuer of the most forlorn damsel of modern times, the man of violence, gentleness and generosity, sitting up to his neck in ship's accounts amused me. "I am sure he would not have minded," I said, smiling. But the girl's stare was sombre, her thin white face seemed pathetically careworn.

"I can hardly believe yet," she murmured anxiously.

"It's quite real. Never fear," I said encouragingly, but had to change my tone at once. "You had better go down that way a little," I directed her abruptly.

* * * * *

I had seen Fyne come striding out of the hotel door. The intelligent girl, without staying to ask questions, walked away from me quietly down one street while I hurried on to meet Fyne coming up the other at his efficient pedestrian gait. My object was to stop him getting as far as the corner. He must have been thinking too hard to be aware of his surroundings. I put myself in his way, and he nearly walked into me.

"Hallo!" I said.

His surprise was extreme. "You here! You don't mean to say you have been waiting for me?"

I said negligently that I had been detained by unexpected business in the neighbourhood, and thus happened to catch sight of him coming out.

He stared at me with solemn distraction, obviously thinking of something else. I suggested that he had better take the next city-ward tramcar. He was inattentive, and I perceived that he was profoundly perturbed. As Miss de Barral (she had moved out of sight) could not possibly approach the hotel door as long as we remained where we were I proposed that we should wait for the car on the other side of the street. He obeyed rather the slight touch on his arm than my words, and while we were crossing the wide roadway in the midst of the lumbering wheeled traffic, he exclaimed in his deep tone, "I don't know which of these two is more mad than the other!"

"Really!" I said, pulling him forward from under the noses of two enormous sleepy-headed cart-horses. He skipped wildly out of the way and up on the curbstone with a purely instinctive precision; his mind had nothing to do with his movements. In the middle of his leap, and while in the act of sailing gravely through the air, he continued to relieve his outraged feelings.

"You would never believe! They are mad!"

I took care to place myself in such a position that to face me he had to turn his back on the hotel across the road. I believe he was glad I was there to talk to. But I thought there was some misapprehension in the first statement he shot out at me without loss of time, that Captain Anthony had been glad to see him. It was indeed difficult to believe that, directly he opened the door, his wife's "sailor-brother" had positively shouted: "Oh, it's you! The very man I wanted to see."

"I found him sitting there," went on Fyne impressively in his effortless, grave chest voice, "drafting his will."

This was unexpected, but I preserved a noncommittal attitude, knowing full well that our actions in themselves are neither mad nor sane. But I did not see what there was to be excited about. And Fyne was distinctly excited. I understood it better when I learned that the captain of the Ferndale wanted little Fyne to be one of the trustees. He was leaving everything to his wife. Naturally, a request which involved him into sanctioning in a way a proceeding which he had been sent by his wife to oppose, must have appeared sufficiently mad to Fyne.

"Me! Me, of all people in the world!" he repeated portentously. But I could see that he was frightened. Such want of tact!

"He knew I came from his sister. You don't put a man into such an awkward position," complained Fyne. "It made me speak much more strongly against all this very painful business than I would have had the heart to do otherwise."

I pointed out to him concisely, and keeping my eyes on the door of the hotel, that he and his wife were the only bond with the land Captain Anthony had. Who else could he have asked?

"I explained to him that he was breaking this bond," declared Fyne solemnly. "Breaking it once for all. And for what — for what?"

He glared at me. I could perhaps have given him an inkling for what, but I said nothing. He started again:

"My wife assures me that the girl does not love him a bit. She goes by that letter she received from her. There is a passage in it where she practically admits that she was quite unscrupulous in accepting this offer of marriage, but says to my wife that she supposes she, my wife, will not blame her — as it was in self-defence. My wife has her own ideas, but this is an outrageous misapprehension of her views. Outrageous."

The good little man paused and then added weightily:

"I didn't tell that to my brother-in-law — I mean, my wife's views."

"No," I said. "What would have been the good?"

"It's positive infatuation," agreed little Fyne, in the tone as though he had made an awful discovery. "I have never seen anything so hopeless and inexplicable in my life. I — I felt quite frightened and sorry," he added, while I looked at him curiously asking myself whether this excellent civil servant and notable pedestrian had felt the breath of a great and fatal love-spell passing him by in the room of that East-end hotel. He did look for a moment as though he had seen a ghost, an other-world thing. But that look vanished instantaneously, and he nodded at me with mere exasperation at something quite of this world — whatever it was. "It's a bad business. My brother-in-law knows nothing of women," he cried with an air of profound, experienced wisdom.

What he imagined he knew of women himself I can't tell. I did not know anything of the opportunities he might have had. But this is a subject which, if approached with undue solemnity, is apt to elude one's grasp entirely. No doubt Fyne knew something of a woman who was Captain Anthony's sister. But that, admittedly, had been a very solemn study. I smiled at him gently, and as if encouraged or provoked, he completed his thought rather explosively.

"And that girl understands nothing . . . It's sheer lunacy."

"I don't know," I said, "whether the circumstances of isolation at sea would be any alleviation to the danger. But it's certain that they shall have the opportunity to learn everything about each other in a lonely tête-à-tête."

"But dash it all," he cried in hollow accents which at the same time had the tone of bitter irony — I had never before heard a sound so quaintly ugly and almost horrible — "You forget Mr. Smith."

"What Mr. Smith?" I asked innocently.

Fyne made an extraordinary simiesque grimace. I believe it was quite involuntary, but you know that a grave, much-lined, shaven countenance when distorted in an unusual way is extremely apelike. It was a surprising sight, and rendered me not only speechless but stopped the progress of my thought completely. I must have presented a remarkably imbecile appearance.

“My brother-in-law considered it amusing to chaff me about us introducing the girl as Miss Smith,” said Fyne, going surly in a moment. “He said that perhaps if he had heard her real name from the first it might have restrained him. As it was, he made the discovery too late. Asked me to tell Zoe this together with a lot more nonsense.”

Fyne gave me the impression of having escaped from a man inspired by a grimly playful ebullition of high spirits. It must have been most distasteful to him; and his solemnity got damaged somehow in the process, I perceived. There were holes in it through which I could see a new, an unknown Fyne.

“You wouldn’t believe it,” he went on, “but she looks upon her father exclusively as a victim. I don’t know,” he burst out suddenly through an enormous rent in his solemnity, “if she thinks him absolutely a saint, but she certainly imagines him to be a martyr.”

It is one of the advantages of that magnificent invention, the prison, that you may forget people which are put there as though they were dead. One needn’t worry about them. Nothing can happen to them that you can help. They can do nothing which might possibly matter to anybody. They come out of it, though, but that seems hardly an advantage to themselves or anyone else. I had completely forgotten the financier de Barral. The girl for me was an orphan, but now I perceived suddenly the force of Fyne’s qualifying statement, “to a certain extent.” It would have been infinitely more kind all round for the law to have shot, beheaded, strangled, or otherwise destroyed this absurd de Barral, who was a danger to a moral world inhabited by a credulous multitude not fit to take care of itself. But I observed to Fyne that, however insane was the view she held, one could not declare the girl mad on that account.

“So she thinks of her father — does she? I suppose she would appear to us saner if she thought only of herself.”

“I am positive,” Fyne said earnestly, “that she went and made desperate eyes at Anthony . . . “

“Oh come!” I interrupted. “You haven’t seen her make eyes. You don’t know the colour of her eyes.”

“Very well! It don’t matter. But it could hardly have come to that if she hadn’t . . . It’s all one, though. I tell you she has led him on, or accepted him, if you like, simply because she was thinking of her father. She doesn’t care a bit about Anthony, I believe. She cares for no one. Never cared for anyone. Ask Zoe. For myself I don’t blame her,” added Fyne, giving me another view of unsuspected things through the rags and tatters of his damaged solemnity. “No! by heavens, I don’t blame her — the poor devil.”

I agreed with him silently. I suppose affections are, in a sense, to be learned. If there exists a native spark of love in all of us, it must be fanned while we are young. Hers, if she ever had it, had been drenched in as ugly a lot of corrosive liquid as could be imagined. But I was surprised at Fyne obscurely feeling this.

"She loves no one except that preposterous advertising shark," he pursued venomously, but in a more deliberate manner. "And Anthony knows it."

"Does he?" I said doubtfully.

"She's quite capable of having told him herself," affirmed Fyne, with amazing insight. "But whether or no, I've told him."

"You did? From Mrs. Fyne, of course."

Fyne only blinked owlishly at this piece of my insight.

"And how did Captain Anthony receive this interesting information?" I asked further.

"Most improperly," said Fyne, who really was in a state in which he didn't mind what he blurted out. "He isn't himself. He begged me to tell his sister that he offered no remarks on her conduct. Very improper and inconsequent. He said . . . I was tired of this wrangling. I told him I made allowances for the state of excitement he was in."

"You know, Fyne," I said, "a man in jail seems to me such an incredible, cruel, nightmarish sort of thing that I can hardly believe in his existence. Certainly not in relation to any other existences."

"But dash it all," cried Fyne, "he isn't shut up for life. They are going to let him out. He's coming out! That's the whole trouble. What is he coming out to, I want to know? It seems a more cruel business than the shutting him up was. This has been the worry for weeks. Do you see now?"

I saw, all sorts of things! Immediately before me I saw the excitement of little Fyne — mere food for wonder. Further off, in a sort of gloom and beyond the light of day and the movement of the street, I saw the figure of a man, stiff like a ramrod, moving with small steps, a slight girlish figure by his side. And the gloom was like the gloom of villainous slums, of misery, of wretchedness, of a starved and degraded existence. It was a relief that I could see only their shabby hopeless backs. He was an awful ghost. But indeed to call him a ghost was only a refinement of polite speech, and a manner of concealing one's terror of such things. Prisons are wonderful contrivances. Shut — open. Very neat. Shut — open. And out comes some sort of corpse, to wander awfully in a world in which it has no possible connections and carrying with it the appalling tainted atmosphere of its silent abode. Marvellous arrangement. It works automatically, and, when you look at it, the perfection makes you sick; which for a mere mechanism is no mean triumph. Sick and scared. It had nearly scared that poor girl to her death. Fancy having to take such a thing by the hand! Now I understood the remorseful strain I had detected in her speeches.

"By Jove!" I said. "They are about to let him out! I never thought of that."

Fyne was contemptuous either of me or of things at large.

"You didn't suppose he was to be kept in jail for life?"

At that moment I caught sight of Flora de Barral at the junction of the two streets. Then some vehicles following each other in quick succession hid from my sight the black slight figure with just a touch of colour in her hat. She was walking slowly; and it might have been caution or reluctance. While listening to Fyne I stared hard past his shoulder trying to catch sight of her again. He was going on with positive heat, the rags of his solemnity dropping off him at every second sentence.

That was just it. His wife and he had been perfectly aware of it. Of course the girl never talked of her father with Mrs. Fyne. I suppose with her theory of innocence she found it difficult. But she must have been thinking of it day and night. What to do with him? Where to go? How to keep body and soul together? He had never made any friends. The only relations were the atrocious East-end cousins. We know what they were. Nothing but wretchedness, whichever way she turned in an unjust and prejudiced world. And to look at him helplessly she felt would be too much for her.

I won't say I was thinking these thoughts. It was not necessary. This complete knowledge was in my head while I stared hard across the wide road, so hard that I failed to hear little Fyne till he raised his deep voice indignantly.

"I don't blame the girl," he was saying. "He is infatuated with her. Anybody can see that. Why she should have got such a hold on him I can't understand. She said "Yes" to him only for the sake of that fatuous, swindling father of hers. It's perfectly plain if one thinks it over a moment. One needn't even think of it. We have it under her own hand. In that letter to my wife she says she has acted unscrupulously. She has owned up, then, for what else can it mean, I should like to know. And so they are to be married before that old idiot comes out . . . He will be surprised," commented Fyne suddenly in a strangely malignant tone. "He shall be met at the jail door by a Mrs. Anthony, a Mrs. Captain Anthony. Very pleasant for Zoe. And for all I know, my brother-in-law means to turn up dutifully too. A little family event. It's extremely pleasant to think of. Delightful. A charming family party. We three against the world — and all that sort of thing. And what for. For a girl that doesn't care twopence for him."

The demon of bitterness had entered into little Fyne. He amazed me as though he had changed his skin from white to black. It was quite as wonderful. And he kept it up, too.

"Luckily there are some advantages in the — the profession of a sailor. As long as they defy the world away at sea somewhere eighteen thousand miles from here, I don't mind so much. I wonder what that interesting old party will say. He will have another surprise. They mean to drag him along with them on board the ship straight away. Rescue work. Just think of Roderick Anthony, the son of a gentleman, after all . . . "

He gave me a little shock. I thought he was going to say the "son of the poet" as usual; but his mind was not running on such vanities now. His unspoken thought must have gone on "and uncle of my girls." I suspect that he had been roughly handled by Captain Anthony up there, and the resentment gave a tremendous fillip to the slow play of his wits. Those men of sober fancy, when anything rouses their imaginative

faculty, are very thorough. "Just think!" he cried. "The three of them crowded into a four-wheeler, and Anthony sitting deferentially opposite that astonished old jail-bird!"

The good little man laughed. An improper sound it was to come from his manly chest; and what made it worse was the thought that for the least thing, by a mere hair's breadth, he might have taken this affair sentimentally. But clearly Anthony was no diplomatist. His brother-in-law must have appeared to him, to use the language of shore people, a perfect philistine with a heart like a flint. What Fyne precisely meant by "wrangling" I don't know, but I had no doubt that these two had "wrangled" to a profoundly disturbing extent. How much the other was affected I could not even imagine; but the man before me was quite amazingly upset.

"In a four-wheeler! Take him on board!" I muttered, startled by the change in Fyne.

"That's the plan — nothing less. If I am to believe what I have been told, his feet will scarcely touch the ground between the prison-gates and the deck of that ship."

The transformed Fyne spoke in a forcibly lowered tone which I heard without difficulty. The rumbling, composite noises of the street were hushed for a moment, during one of these sudden breaks in the traffic as if the stream of commerce had dried up at its source. Having an unobstructed view past Fyne's shoulder, I was astonished to see that the girl was still there. I thought she had gone up long before. But there was her black slender figure, her white face under the roses of her hat. She stood on the edge of the pavement as people stand on the bank of a stream, very still, as if waiting — or as if unconscious of where she was. The three dismal, sodden loafers (I could see them too; they hadn't budged an inch) seemed to me to be watching her. Which was horrible.

Meantime Fyne was telling me rather remarkable things — for him. He declared first it was a mercy in a sense. Then he asked me if it were not real madness, to saddle one's existence with such a perpetual reminder. The daily existence. The isolated sea-bound existence. To bring such an additional strain into the solitude already trying enough for two people was the craziest thing. Undesirable relations were bad enough on shore. One could cut them or at least forget their existence now and then. He himself was preparing to forget his brother-in-law's existence as much as possible.

That was the general sense of his remarks, not his exact words. I thought that his wife's brother's existence had never been very embarrassing to him but that now of course he would have to abstain from his allusions to the "son of the poet — you know." I said "yes, yes" in the pauses because I did not want him to turn round; and all the time I was watching the girl intently. I thought I knew now what she meant with her — "He was most generous." Yes. Generosity of character may carry a man through any situation. But why didn't she go then to her generous man? Why stand there as if clinging to this solid earth which she surely hated as one must hate the place where one has been tormented, hopeless, unhappy? Suddenly she stirred. Was she going to cross over? No. She turned and began to walk slowly close to the curbstone, reminding me of the time when I discovered her walking near the edge of a ninety-foot sheer drop. It was the same impression, the same carriage, straight, slim, with rigid head and the

two hands hanging lightly clasped in front — only now a small sunshade was dangling from them. I saw something fateful in that deliberate pacing towards the inconspicuous door with the words Hotel Entrance on the glass panels.

She was abreast of it now and I thought that she would stop again; but no! She swerved rigidly — at the moment there was no one near her; she had that bit of pavement to herself — with inanimate slowness as if moved by something outside herself.

“A confounded convict,” Fyne burst out.

With the sound of that word offending my ears I saw the girl extend her arm, push the door open a little way and glide in. I saw plainly that movement, the hand put out in advance with the gesture of a sleep-walker.

She had vanished, her black figure had melted in the darkness of the open door. For some time Fyne said nothing; and I thought of the girl going upstairs, appearing before the man. Were they looking at each other in silence and feeling they were alone in the world as lovers should at the moment of meeting? But that fine forgetfulness was surely impossible to Anthony the seaman directly after the wrangling interview with Fyne the emissary of an order of things which stops at the edge of the sea. How much he was disturbed I couldn't tell because I did not know what that impetuous lover had had to listen to.

“Going to take the old fellow to sea with them,” I said. “Well I really don't see what else they could have done with him. You told your brother-in-law what you thought of it? I wonder how he took it.”

“Very improperly,” repeated Fyne. “His manner was offensive, derisive, from the first. I don't mean he was actually rude in words. Hang it all, I am not a contemptible ass. But he was exulting at having got hold of a miserable girl.”

“It is pretty certain that she will be much less poor and miserable,” I murmured.

It looked as if the exultation of Captain Anthony had got on Fyne's nerves. “I told the fellow very plainly that he was abominably selfish in this,” he affirmed unexpectedly.

“You did! Selfish!” I said rather taken aback. “But what if the girl thought that, on the contrary, he was most generous.”

“What do you know about it,” growled Fyne. The rents and slashes of his solemnity were closing up gradually but it was going to be a surly solemnity. “Generosity! I am disposed to give it another name. No. Not folly,” he shot out at me as though I had meant to interrupt him. “Still another. Something worse. I need not tell you what it is,” he added with grim meaning.

“Certainly. You needn't — unless you like,” I said blankly. Little Fyne had never interested me so much since the beginning of the de Barral-Anthony affair when I first perceived possibilities in him. The possibilities of dull men are exciting because when they happen they suggest legendary cases of “possession,” not exactly by the devil but, anyhow, by a strange spirit.

“I told him it was a shame,” said Fyne. “Even if the girl did make eyes at him — but I think with you that she did not. Yes! A shame to take advantage of a girl’s — a distressed girl that does not love him in the least.”

“You think it’s so bad as that?” I said. “Because you know I don’t.”

“What can you think about it,” he retorted on me with a solemn stare. “I go by her letter to my wife.”

“Ah! that famous letter. But you haven’t actually read it,” I said.

“No, but my wife told me. Of course it was a most improper sort of letter to write considering the circumstances. It pained Mrs. Fyne to discover how thoroughly she had been misunderstood. But what is written is not all. It’s what my wife could read between the lines. She says that the girl is really terrified at heart.”

“She had not much in life to give her any very special courage for it, or any great confidence in mankind. That’s very true. But this seems an exaggeration.”

“I should like to know what reasons you have to say that,” asked Fyne with offended solemnity. “I really don’t see any. But I had sufficient authority to tell my brother-in-law that if he thought he was going to do something chivalrous and fine he was mistaken. I can see very well that he will do everything she asks him to do — but, all the same, it is rather a pitiless transaction.”

For a moment I felt it might be so. Fyne caught sight of an approaching tram-car and stepped out on the road to meet it. “Have you a more compassionate scheme ready?” I called after him. He made no answer, clambered on to the rear platform, and only then looked back. We exchanged a perfunctory wave of the hand. We also looked at each other, he rather angrily, I fancy, and I with wonder. I may also mention that it was for the last time. From that day I never set eyes on the Fynes. As usual the unexpected happened to me. It had nothing to do with Flora de Barral. The fact is that I went away. My call was not like her call. Mine was not urged on me with passionate vehemence or tender gentleness made all the finer and more compelling by the allurements of generosity which is a virtue as mysterious as any other but having a glamour of its own. No, it was just a prosaic offer of employment on rather good terms which, with a sudden sense of having wasted my time on shore long enough, I accepted without misgivings. And once started out of my indolence I went, as my habit was, very, very far away and for a long, long time. Which is another proof of my indolence. How far Flora went I can’t say. But I will tell you my idea: my idea is that she went as far as she was able — as far as she could bear it — as far as she had to . . . “

Part 2 — The Knight

Chapter 1 — The Ferndale

I have said that the story of Flora de Barral was imparted to me in stages. At this stage I did not see Marlow for some time. At last, one evening rather early, very soon after dinner, he turned up in my rooms.

I had been waiting for his call primed with a remark which had not occurred to me till after he had gone away.

“I say,” I tackled him at once, “how can you be certain that Flora de Barral ever went to sea? After all, the wife of the captain of the Ferndale — ” the lady that mustn’t be disturbed “of the old ship-keeper — may not have been Flora.”

“Well, I do know,” he said, “if only because I have been keeping in touch with Mr. Powell.”

“You have!” I cried. “This is the first I hear of it. And since when?”

“Why, since the first day. You went up to town leaving me in the inn. I slept ashore. In the morning Mr. Powell came in for breakfast; and after the first awkwardness of meeting a man you have been yarning with over-night had worn off, we discovered a liking for each other.”

As I had discovered the fact of their mutual liking before either of them, I was not surprised.

“And so you kept in touch,” I said.

“It was not so very difficult. As he was always knocking about the river I hired Dingle’s sloop-rigged three-tonner to be more on an equality. Powell was friendly but elusive. I don’t think he ever wanted to avoid me. But it is a fact that he used to disappear out of the river in a very mysterious manner sometimes. A man may land anywhere and bolt inland — but what about his five-ton cutter? You can’t carry that in your hand like a suit-case.

“Then as suddenly he would reappear in the river, after one had given him up. I did not like to be beaten. That’s why I hired Dingle’s decked boat. There was just the accommodation in her to sleep a man and a dog. But I had no dog-friend to invite. Fyne’s dog who saved Flora de Barral’s life is the last dog-friend I had. I was rather lonely cruising about; but that, too, on the river has its charm, sometimes. I chased the mystery of the vanishing Powell dreamily, looking about me at the ships, thinking of the girl Flora, of life’s chances — and, do you know, it was very simple.”

“What was very simple?” I asked innocently.

“The mystery.”

“They generally are that,” I said.

Marlow eyed me for a moment in a peculiar manner.

“Well, I have discovered the mystery of Powell’s disappearances. The fellow used to run into one of these narrow tidal creeks on the Essex shore. These creeks are so inconspicuous that till I had studied the chart pretty carefully I did not know of their existence. One afternoon, I made Powell’s boat out, heading into the shore. By the time I got close to the mud-flat his craft had disappeared inland. But I could see the mouth of the creek by then. The tide being on the turn I took the risk of getting stuck in the mud suddenly and headed in. All I had to guide me was the top of the roof of some sort of small building. I got in more by good luck than by good management. The sun had set some time before; my boat glided in a sort of winding ditch between two low grassy banks; on both sides of me was the flatness of the Essex marsh, perfectly still. All I saw moving was a heron; he was flying low, and disappeared in the murk. Before I had gone half a mile, I was up with the building the roof of which I had seen from the river. It looked like a small barn. A row of piles driven into the soft bank in front of it and supporting a few planks made a sort of wharf. All this was black in the falling dusk, and I could just distinguish the whitish ruts of a cart-track stretching over the marsh towards the higher land, far away. Not a sound was to be heard. Against the low streak of light in the sky I could see the mast of Powell’s cutter moored to the bank some twenty yards, no more, beyond that black barn or whatever it was. I hailed him with a loud shout. Got no answer. After making fast my boat just astern, I walked along the bank to have a look at Powell’s. Being so much bigger than mine she was aground already. Her sails were furled; the slide of her scuttle hatch was closed and padlocked. Powell was gone. He had walked off into that dark, still marsh somewhere. I had not seen a single house anywhere near; there did not seem to be any human habitation for miles; and now as darkness fell denser over the land I couldn’t see the glimmer of a single light. However, I supposed that there must be some village or hamlet not very far away; or only one of these mysterious little inns one comes upon sometimes in most unexpected and lonely places.

“The stillness was oppressive. I went back to my boat, made some coffee over a spirit-lamp, devoured a few biscuits, and stretched myself aft, to smoke and gaze at the stars. The earth was a mere shadow, formless and silent, and empty, till a bullock turned up from somewhere, quite shadowy too. He came smartly to the very edge of the bank as though he meant to step on board, stretched his muzzle right over my boat, blew heavily once, and walked off contemptuously into the darkness from which he had come. I had not expected a call from a bullock, though a moment’s thought would have shown me that there must be lots of cattle and sheep on that marsh. Then everything became still as before. I might have imagined myself arrived on a desert island. In fact, as I reclined smoking a sense of absolute loneliness grew on me. And just as it had become intense, very abruptly and without any preliminary sound I heard firm, quick footsteps on the little wharf. Somebody coming along the cart-track

had just stepped at a swinging gait on to the planks. That somebody could only have been Mr. Powell. Suddenly he stopped short, having made out that there were two masts alongside the bank where he had left only one. Then he came on silent on the grass. When I spoke to him he was astonished.

“Who would have thought of seeing you here!” he exclaimed, after returning my good evening.

“I told him I had run in for company. It was rigorously true.”

“You knew I was here?” he exclaimed.

“Of course,” I said. “I tell you I came in for company.”

“He is a really good fellow,” went on Marlow. “And his capacity for astonishment is quickly exhausted, it seems. It was in the most matter-of-fact manner that he said, ‘Come on board of me, then; I have here enough supper for two.’ He was holding a bulky parcel in the crook of his arm. I did not wait to be asked twice, as you may guess. His cutter has a very neat little cabin, quite big enough for two men not only to sleep but to sit and smoke in. We left the scuttle wide open, of course. As to his provisions for supper, they were not of a luxurious kind. He complained that the shops in the village were miserable. There was a big village within a mile and a half. It struck me he had been very long doing his shopping; but naturally I made no remark. I didn’t want to talk at all except for the purpose of setting him going.”

“And did you set him going?” I asked.

“I did,” said Marlow, composing his features into an impenetrable expression which somehow assured me of his success better than an air of triumph could have done.

* * * * *

“You made him talk?” I said after a silence.

“Yes, I made him . . . about himself.”

“And to the point?”

“If you mean by this,” said Marlow, “that it was about the voyage of the *Ferndale*, then again, yes. I brought him to talk about that voyage, which, by the by, was not the first voyage of *Flora de Barral*. The man himself, as I told you, is simple, and his faculty of wonder not very great. He’s one of those people who form no theories about facts. Straightforward people seldom do. Neither have they much penetration. But in this case it did not matter. I — we — have already the inner knowledge. We know the history of *Flora de Barral*. We know something of Captain Anthony. We have the secret of the situation. The man was intoxicated with the pity and tenderness of his part. Oh yes! Intoxicated is not too strong a word; for you know that love and desire take many disguises. I believe that the girl had been frank with him, with the frankness of women to whom perfect frankness is impossible, because so much of their safety depends on judicious reticences. I am not indulging in cheap sneers. There is necessity in these things. And moreover she could not have spoken with a certain voice in the face of his impetuosity, because she did not have time to understand either the state of her feelings, or the precise nature of what she was doing.

Had she spoken ever so clearly he was, I take it, too elated to hear her distinctly. I don't mean to imply that he was a fool. Oh dear no! But he had no training in the usual conventions, and we must remember that he had no experience whatever of women. He could only have an ideal conception of his position. An ideal is often but a flaming vision of reality.

To him enters Fyne, wound up, if I may express myself so irreverently, wound up to a high pitch by his wife's interpretation of the girl's letter. He enters with his talk of meanness and cruelty, like a bucket of water on the flame. Clearly a shock. But the effects of a bucket of water are diverse. They depend on the kind of flame. A mere blaze of dry straw, of course . . . but there can be no question of straw there. Anthony of the Ferndale was not, could not have been, a straw-stuffed specimen of a man. There are flames a bucket of water sends leaping sky-high.

We may well wonder what happened when, after Fyne had left him, the hesitating girl went up at last and opened the door of that room where our man, I am certain, was not extinguished. Oh no! Nor cold; whatever else he might have been.

It is conceivable he might have cried at her in the first moment of humiliation, of exasperation, "Oh, it's you! Why are you here? If I am so odious to you that you must write to my sister to say so, I give you back your word." But then, don't you see, it could not have been that. I have the practical certitude that soon afterwards they went together in a hansom to see the ship — as agreed. That was my reason for saying that Flora de Barral did go to sea . . . "

"Yes. It seems conclusive," I agreed. "But even without that — if, as you seem to think, the very desolation of that girlish figure had a sort of perversely seductive charm, making its way through his compassion to his senses (and everything is possible) — then such words could not have been spoken."

"They might have escaped him involuntarily," observed Marlow. "However, a plain fact settles it. They went off together to see the ship."

"Do you conclude from this that nothing whatever was said?" I inquired.

"I should have liked to see the first meeting of their glances upstairs there," mused Marlow. "And perhaps nothing was said. But no man comes out of such a 'wrangle' (as Fyne called it) without showing some traces of it. And you may be sure that a girl so bruised all over would feel the slightest touch of anything resembling coldness. She was mistrustful; she could not be otherwise; for the energy of evil is so much more forcible than the energy of good that she could not help looking still upon her abominable governess as an authority. How could one have expected her to throw off the unholy prestige of that long domination? She could not help believing what she had been told; that she was in some mysterious way odious and unlovable. It was cruelly true — to her. The oracle of so many years had spoken finally. Only other people did not find her out at once . . . I would not go so far as to say she believed it altogether. That would be hardly possible. But then haven't the most flattered, the most conceited of us their moments of doubt? Haven't they? Well, I don't know. There may be lucky beings in this world unable to believe any evil of themselves. For my own part I'll tell you that

once, many years ago now, it came to my knowledge that a fellow I had been mixed up with in a certain transaction — a clever fellow whom I really despised — was going around telling people that I was a consummate hypocrite. He could know nothing of it. It suited his humour to say so. I had given him no ground for that particular calumny. Yet to this day there are moments when it comes into my mind, and involuntarily I ask myself, ‘What if it were true?’ It’s absurd, but it has on one or two occasions nearly affected my conduct. And yet I was not an impressionable ignorant young girl. I had taken the exact measure of the fellow’s utter worthlessness long before. He had never been for me a person of prestige and power, like that awful governess to Flora de Barral. See the might of suggestion? We live at the mercy of a malevolent word. A sound, a mere disturbance of the air, sinks into our very soul sometimes. Flora de Barral had been more astounded than convinced by the first impetuosity of Roderick Anthony. She let herself be carried along by a mysterious force which her person had called into being, as her father had been carried away out of his depth by the unexpected power of successful advertising.

They went on board that morning. The Ferndale had just come to her loading berth. The only living creature on board was the ship-keeper — whether the same who had been described to us by Mr. Powell, or another, I don’t know. Possibly some other man. He, looking over the side, saw, in his own words, ‘the captain come sailing round the corner of the nearest cargo-shed, in company with a girl.’ He lowered the accommodation ladder down on to the jetty . . . “

“How do you know all this?” I interrupted.

Marlow interjected an impatient:

“You shall see by and by . . . Flora went up first, got down on deck and stood stock-still till the captain took her by the arm and led her aft. The ship-keeper let them into the saloon. He had the keys of all the cabins, and stumped in after them. The captain ordered him to open all the doors, every blessed door; state-rooms, passages, pantry, fore-cabin — and then sent him away.

“The Ferndale had magnificent accommodation. At the end of a passage leading from the quarter-deck there was a long saloon, its sumptuousness slightly tarnished perhaps, but having a grand air of roominess and comfort. The harbour carpets were down, the swinging lamps hung, and everything in its place, even to the silver on the sideboard. Two large stern cabins opened out of it, one on each side of the rudder casing. These two cabins communicated through a small bathroom between them, and one was fitted up as the captain’s state-room. The other was vacant, and furnished with arm-chairs and a round table, more like a room on shore, except for the long curved settee following the shape of the ship’s stern. In a dim inclined mirror, Flora caught sight down to the waist of a pale-faced girl in a white straw hat trimmed with roses, distant, shadowy, as if immersed in water, and was surprised to recognize herself in those surroundings. They seemed to her arbitrary, bizarre, strange. Captain Anthony moved on, and she followed him. He showed her the other cabins. He talked all the time loudly in a voice she seemed to have known extremely well for a long time; and yet, she reflected, she

had not heard it often in her life. What he was saying she did not quite follow. He was speaking of comparatively indifferent things in a rather moody tone, but she felt it round her like a caress. And when he stopped she could hear, alarming in the sudden silence, the precipitated beating of her heart.

The ship-keeper dodged about the quarter-deck, out of hearing, and trying to keep out of sight. At the same time, taking advantage of the open doors with skill and prudence, he could see the captain and "that girl" the captain had brought aboard. The captain was showing her round very thoroughly. Through the whole length of the passage, far away aft in the perspective of the saloon the ship-keeper had interesting glimpses of them as they went in and out of the various cabins, crossing from side to side, remaining invisible for a time in one or another of the state-rooms, and then reappearing again in the distance. The girl, always following the captain, had her sunshade in her hands. Mostly she would hang her head, but now and then she would look up. They had a lot to say to each other, and seemed to forget they weren't alone in the ship. He saw the captain put his hand on her shoulder, and was preparing himself with a certain zest for what might follow, when the "old man" seemed to recollect himself, and came striding down all the length of the saloon. At this move the ship-keeper promptly dodged out of sight, as you may believe, and heard the captain slam the inner door of the passage. After that disappointment the ship-keeper waited resentfully for them to clear out of the ship. It happened much sooner than he had expected. The girl walked out on deck first. As before she did not look round. She didn't look at anything; and she seemed to be in such a hurry to get ashore that she made for the gangway and started down the ladder without waiting for the captain.

What struck the ship-keeper most was the absent, unseeing expression of the captain, striding after the girl. He passed him, the ship-keeper, without notice, without an order, without so much as a look. The captain had never done so before. Always had a nod and a pleasant word for a man. From this slight the ship-keeper drew a conclusion unfavourable to the strange girl. He gave them time to get down on the wharf before crossing the deck to steal one more look at the pair over the rail. The captain took hold of the girl's arm just before a couple of railway trucks drawn by a horse came rolling along and hid them from the ship-keeper's sight for good.

Next day, when the chief mate joined the ship, he told him the tale of the visit, and expressed himself about the girl "who had got hold of the captain" disparagingly. She didn't look healthy, he explained. "Shabby clothes, too," he added spitefully.

The mate was very much interested. He had been with Anthony for several years, and had won for himself in the course of many long voyages, a footing of familiarity, which was to be expected with a man of Anthony's character. But in that slowly-grown intimacy of the sea, which in its duration and solitude had its unguarded moments, no words had passed, even of the most casual, to prepare him for the vision of his captain associated with any kind of girl. His impression had been that women did not exist for Captain Anthony. Exhibiting himself with a girl! A girl! What did he want with a

girl? Bringing her on board and showing her round the cabin! That was really a little bit too much. Captain Anthony ought to have known better.

Franklin (the chief mate's name was Franklin) felt disappointed; almost disillusioned. Silly thing to do! Here was a confounded old ship-keeper set talking. He snubbed the ship-keeper, and tried to think of that insignificant bit of foolishness no more; for it diminished Captain Anthony in his eyes of a jealously devoted subordinate.

Franklin was over forty; his mother was still alive. She stood in the forefront of all women for him, just as Captain Anthony stood in the forefront of all men. We may suppose that these groups were not very large. He had gone to sea at a very early age. The feeling which caused these two people to partly eclipse the rest of mankind were of course not similar; though in time he had acquired the conviction that he was "taking care" of them both. The "old lady" of course had to be looked after as long as she lived. In regard to Captain Anthony, he used to say that: why should he leave him? It wasn't likely that he would come across a better sailor or a better man or a more comfortable ship. As to trying to better himself in the way of promotion, commands were not the sort of thing one picked up in the streets, and when it came to that, Captain Anthony was as likely to give him a lift on occasion as anyone in the world.

From Mr. Powell's description Franklin was a short, thick black-haired man, bald on the top. His head sunk between the shoulders, his staring prominent eyes and a florid colour, gave him a rather apoplectic appearance. In repose, his congested face had a humorously melancholy expression.

The ship-keeper having given him up all the keys and having been chased forward with the admonition to mind his own business and not to chatter about what did not concern him, Mr. Franklin went under the poop. He opened one door after another; and, in the saloon, in the captain's state-room and everywhere, he stared anxiously as if expecting to see on the bulkheads, on the deck, in the air, something unusual — sign, mark, emanation, shadow — he hardly knew what — some subtle change wrought by the passage of a girl. But there was nothing. He entered the unoccupied stern cabin and spent some time there unscrewing the two stern ports. In the absence of all material evidences his uneasiness was passing away. With a last glance round he came out and found himself in the presence of his captain advancing from the other end of the saloon.

Franklin, at once, looked for the girl. She wasn't to be seen. The captain came up quickly. 'Oh! you are here, Mr. Franklin.' And the mate said, 'I was giving a little air to the place, sir.' Then the captain, his hat pulled down over his eyes, laid his stick on the table and asked in his kind way: 'How did you find your mother, Franklin?' — 'The old lady's first-rate, sir, thank you.' And then they had nothing to say to each other. It was a strange and disturbing feeling for Franklin. He, just back from leave, the ship just come to her loading berth, the captain just come on board, and apparently nothing to say! The several questions he had been anxious to ask as to various things which had to be done had slipped out of his mind. He, too, felt as though he had nothing to say.

The captain, picking up his stick off the table, marched into his state-room and shut the door after him. Franklin remained still for a moment and then started slowly to go on deck. But before he had time to reach the other end of the saloon he heard himself called by name. He turned round. The captain was staring from the doorway of his state-room. Franklin said, "Yes, sir." But the captain, silent, leaned a little forward grasping the door handle. So he, Franklin, walked aft keeping his eyes on him. When he had come up quite close he said again, "Yes, sir?" interrogatively. Still silence. The mate didn't like to be stared at in that manner, a manner quite new in his captain, with a defiant and self-conscious stare, like a man who feels ill and dares you to notice it. Franklin gazed at his captain, felt that there was something wrong, and in his simplicity voiced his feelings by asking point-blank:

"What's wrong, sir?"

The captain gave a slight start, and the character of his stare changed to a sort of sinister surprise. Franklin grew very uncomfortable, but the captain asked negligently:

"What makes you think that there's something wrong?"

"I can't say exactly. You don't look quite yourself, sir," Franklin owned up.

"You seem to have a confoundedly piercing eye," said the captain in such an aggressive tone that Franklin was moved to defend himself.

"We have been together now over six years, sir, so I suppose I know you a bit by this time. I could see there was something wrong directly you came on board."

"Mr. Franklin," said the captain, "we have been more than six years together, it is true, but I didn't know you for a reader of faces. You are not a correct reader though. It's very far from being wrong. You understand? As far from being wrong as it can very well be. It ought to teach you not to make rash surmises. You should leave that to the shore people. They are great hands at spying out something wrong. I dare say they know what they have made of the world. A dam' poor job of it and that's plain. It's a confoundedly ugly place, Mr. Franklin. You don't know anything of it? Well — no, we sailors don't. Only now and then one of us runs against something cruel or underhand, enough to make your hair stand on end. And when you do see a piece of their wickedness you find that to set it right is not so easy as it looks . . . Oh! I called you back to tell you that there will be a lot of workmen, joiners and all that sent down on board first thing to-morrow morning to start making alterations in the cabin. You will see to it that they don't loaf. There isn't much time."

Franklin was impressed by this unexpected lecture upon the wickedness of the solid world surrounded by the salt, uncorruptible waters on which he and his captain had dwelt all their lives in happy innocence. What he could not understand was why it should have been delivered, and what connection it could have with such a matter as the alterations to be carried out in the cabin. The work did not seem to him to be called for in such a hurry. What was the use of altering anything? It was a very good accommodation, spacious, well-distributed, on a rather old-fashioned plan, and with its decorations somewhat tarnished. But a dab of varnish, a touch of gilding here and there, was all that was necessary. As to comfort, it could not be improved by any

alterations. He resented the notion of change; but he said dutifully that he would keep his eye on the workmen if the captain would only let him know what was the nature of the work he had ordered to be done.

“You’ll find a note of it on this table. I’ll leave it for you as I go ashore,” said Captain Anthony hastily. Franklin thought there was no more to hear, and made a movement to leave the saloon. But the captain continued after a slight pause, “You will be surprised, no doubt, when you look at it. There’ll be a good many alterations. It’s on account of a lady coming with us. I am going to get married, Mr. Franklin!”

Chapter 2 — Young Powell Sees and Hears

“You remember,” went on Marlow, “how I feared that Mr. Powell’s want of experience would stand in his way of appreciating the unusual. The unusual I had in my mind was something of a very subtle sort: the unusual in marital relations. I may well have doubted the capacity of a young man too much concerned with the creditable performance of his professional duties to observe what in the nature of things is not easily observable in itself, and still less so under the special circumstances. In the majority of ships a second officer has not many points of contact with the captain’s wife. He sits at the same table with her at meals, generally speaking; he may now and then be addressed more or less kindly on insignificant matters, and have the opportunity to show her some small attentions on deck. And that is all. Under such conditions, signs can be seen only by a sharp and practised eye. I am alluding now to troubles which are subtle often to the extent of not being understood by the very hearts they devastate or uplift.

Yes, Mr. Powell, whom the chance of his name had thrown upon the floating stage of that tragicomedy would have been perfectly useless for my purpose if the unusual of an obvious kind had not aroused his attention from the first.

We know how he joined that ship so suddenly offered to his anxious desire to make a real start in his profession. He had come on board breathless with the hurried winding up of his shore affairs, accompanied by two horrible night-birds, escorted by a dock policeman on the make, received by an asthmatic shadow of a ship-keeper, warned not to make a noise in the darkness of the passage because the captain and his wife were already on board. That in itself was already somewhat unusual. Captains and their wives do not, as a rule, join a moment sooner than is necessary. They prefer to spend the last moments with their friends and relations. A ship in one of London’s older docks with their restrictions as to lights and so on is not the place for a happy evening. Still, as the tide served at six in the morning, one could understand them coming on board the evening before.

Just then young Powell felt as if anybody ought to be glad enough to be quit of the shore. We know he was an orphan from a very early age, without brothers or sisters — no near relations of any kind, I believe, except that aunt who had quarrelled with his

father. No affection stood in the way of the quiet satisfaction with which he thought that now all the worries were over, that there was nothing before him but duties, that he knew what he would have to do as soon as the dawn broke and for a long succession of days. A most soothing certitude. He enjoyed it in the dark, stretched out in his bunk with his new blankets pulled over him. Some clock ashore beyond the dock-gates struck two. And then he heard nothing more, because he went off into a light sleep from which he woke up with a start. He had not taken his clothes off, it was hardly worth while. He jumped up and went on deck.

The morning was clear, colourless, grey overhead; the dock like a sheet of darkling glass crowded with upside-down reflections of warehouses, of hulls and masts of silent ships. Rare figures moved here and there on the distant quays. A knot of men stood alongside with clothes-bags and wooden chests at their feet. Others were coming down the lane between tall, blind walls, surrounding a hand-cart loaded with more bags and boxes. It was the crew of the Ferndale. They began to come on board. He scanned their faces as they passed forward filling the roomy deck with the shuffle of their footsteps and the murmur of voices, like the awakening to life of a world about to be launched into space.

Far away down the clear glassy stretch in the middle of the long dock Mr. Powell watched the tugs coming in quietly through the open gates. A subdued firm voice behind him interrupted this contemplation. It was Franklin, the thick chief mate, who was addressing him with a watchful appraising stare of his prominent black eyes: "You'd better take a couple of these chaps with you and look out for her aft. We are going to cast off."

"Yes, sir," Powell said with proper alacrity; but for a moment they remained looking at each other fixedly. Something like a faint smile altered the set of the chief mate's lips just before he moved off forward with his brisk step.

Mr. Powell, getting up on the poop, touched his cap to Captain Anthony, who was there alone. He tells me that it was only then that he saw his captain for the first time. The day before, in the shipping office, what with the bad light and his excitement at this berth obtained as if by a brusque and unscrupulous miracle, did not count. He had then seemed to him much older and heavier. He was surprised at the lithe figure, broad of shoulder, narrow at the hips, the fire of the deep-set eyes, the springiness of the walk. The captain gave him a steady stare, nodded slightly, and went on pacing the poop with an air of not being aware of what was going on, his head rigid, his movements rapid.

Powell stole several glances at him with a curiosity very natural under the circumstances. He wore a short grey jacket and a grey cap. In the light of the dawn, growing more limpid rather than brighter, Powell noticed the slightly sunken cheeks under the trimmed beard, the perpendicular fold on the forehead, something hard and set about the mouth.

It was too early yet for the work to have begun in the dock. The water gleamed placidly, no movement anywhere on the long straight lines of the quays, no one about

to be seen except the few dock hands busy alongside the Ferndale, knowing their work, mostly silent or exchanging a few words in low tones as if they, too, had been aware of that lady 'who mustn't be disturbed.' The Ferndale was the only ship to leave that tide. The others seemed still asleep, without a sound, and only here and there a figure, coming up on the forecastle, leaned on the rail to watch the proceedings idly. Without trouble and fuss and almost without a sound was the Ferndale leaving the land, as if stealing away. Even the tugs, now with their engines stopped, were approaching her without a ripple, the burly-looking paddle-boat sheering forward, while the other, a screw, smaller and of slender shape, made for her quarter so gently that she did not divide the smooth water, but seemed to glide on its surface as if on a sheet of plate-glass, a man in her bow, the master at the wheel visible only from the waist upwards above the white screen of the bridge, both of them so still-eyed as to fascinate young Powell into curious self-forgetfulness and immobility. He was steeped, sunk in the general quietness, remembering the statement 'she's a lady that mustn't be disturbed,' and repeating to himself idly: 'No. She won't be disturbed. She won't be disturbed.' Then the first loud words of that morning breaking that strange hush of departure with a sharp hail: 'Look out for that line there,' made him start. The line whizzed past his head, one of the sailors aft caught it, and there was an end to the fascination, to the quietness of spirit which had stolen on him at the very moment of departure. From that moment till two hours afterwards, when the ship was brought up in one of the lower reaches of the Thames off an apparently uninhabited shore, near some sort of inlet where nothing but two anchored barges flying a red flag could be seen, Powell was too busy to think of the lady 'that mustn't be disturbed,' or of his captain — or of anything else unconnected with his immediate duties. In fact, he had no occasion to go on the poop, or even look that way much; but while the ship was about to anchor, casting his eyes in that direction, he received an absurd impression that his captain (he was up there, of course) was sitting on both sides of the aftermost skylight at once. He was too occupied to reflect on this curious delusion, this phenomenon of seeing double as though he had had a drop too much. He only smiled at himself.

As often happens after a grey daybreak the sun had risen in a warm and glorious splendour above the smooth immense gleam of the enlarged estuary. Wisps of mist floated like trails of luminous dust, and in the dazzling reflections of water and vapour, the shores had the murky semi-transparent darkness of shadows cast mysteriously from below. Powell, who had sailed out of London all his young seaman's life, told me that it was then, in a moment of entranced vision an hour or so after sunrise, that the river was revealed to him for all time, like a fair face often seen before, which is suddenly perceived to be the expression of an inner and unsuspected beauty, of that something unique and only its own which rouses a passion of wonder and fidelity and an unappeasable memory of its charm. The hull of the Ferndale, swung head to the eastward, caught the light, her tall spars and rigging steeped in a bath of red-gold, from the water-line full of glitter to the trucks slight and gleaming against the delicate expanse of the blue.

“Time we had a mouthful to eat,” said a voice at his side. It was Mr. Franklin, the chief mate, with his head sunk between his shoulders, and melancholy eyes. “Let the men have their breakfast, bo’sun,” he went on, “and have the fire out in the galley in half an hour at the latest, so that we can call these barges of explosives alongside. Come along, young man. I don’t know your name. Haven’t seen the captain, to speak to, since yesterday afternoon when he rushed off to pick up a second mate somewhere. How did he get you?”

Young Powell, a little shy notwithstanding the friendly disposition of the other, answered him smilingly, aware somehow that there was something marked in this inquisitiveness, natural, after all — something anxious. His name was Powell, and he was put in the way of this berth by Mr. Powell, the shipping master. He blushed.

“Ah, I see. Well, you have been smart in getting ready. The ship-keeper, before he went away, told me you joined at one o’clock. I didn’t sleep on board last night. Not I. There was a time when I never cared to leave this ship for more than a couple of hours in the evening, even while in London, but now, since — ”

He checked himself with a roll of his prominent eyes towards that youngster, that stranger. Meantime, he was leading the way across the quarter-deck under the poop into the long passage with the door of the saloon at the far end. It was shut. But Mr. Franklin did not go so far. After passing the pantry he opened suddenly a door on the left of the passage, to Powell’s great surprise.

“Our mess-room,” he said, entering a small cabin painted white, bare, lighted from part of the foremost skylight, and furnished only with a table and two settees with movable backs. “That surprises you? Well, it isn’t usual. And it wasn’t so in this ship either, before. It’s only since — ”

He checked himself again. “Yes. Here we shall feed, you and I, facing each other for the next twelve months or more — God knows how much more! The bo’sun keeps the deck at meal-times in fine weather.”

He talked not exactly wheezing, but like a man whose breath is somewhat short, and the spirit (young Powell could not help thinking) embittered by some mysterious grievance.

There was enough of the unusual there to be recognized even by Powell’s inexperience. The officers kept out of the cabin against the custom of the service, and then this sort of accent in the mate’s talk. Franklin did not seem to expect conversational ease from the new second mate. He made several remarks about the old, deploring the accident. Awkward. Very awkward this thing to happen on the very eve of sailing.

“Collar-bone and arm broken,” he sighed. “Sad, very sad. Did you notice if the captain was at all affected? Eh? Must have been.”

Before this congested face, these globular eyes turned yearningly upon him, young Powell (one must keep in mind he was but a youngster then) who could not remember any signs of visible grief, confessed with an embarrassed laugh that, owing to the suddenness of this lucky chance coming to him, he was not in a condition to notice the state of other people.

"I was so pleased to get a ship at last," he murmured, further disconcerted by the sort of pent-up gravity in Mr. Franklin's aspect.

"One man's food another man's poison," the mate remarked. "That holds true beyond mere victuals. I suppose it didn't occur to you that it was a dam' poor way for a good man to be knocked out."

Mr. Powell admitted openly that he had not thought of that. He was ready to admit that it was very reprehensible of him. But Franklin had no intention apparently to moralize. He did not fall silent either. His further remarks were to the effect that there had been a time when Captain Anthony would have showed more than enough concern for the least thing happening to one of his officers. Yes, there had been a time!

"And mind," he went on, laying down suddenly a half-consumed piece of bread and butter and raising his voice, "poor Mathews was the second man the longest on board. I was the first. He joined a month later — about the same time as the steward by a few days. The bo'sun and the carpenter came the voyage after. Steady men. Still here. No good man need ever have thought of leaving the Ferndale unless he were a fool. Some good men are fools. Don't know when they are well off. I mean the best of good men; men that you would do anything for. They go on for years, then all of a sudden —"

Our young friend listened to the mate with a queer sense of discomfort growing on him. For it was as though Mr. Franklin were thinking aloud, and putting him into the delicate position of an unwilling eavesdropper. But there was in the mess-room another listener. It was the steward, who had come in carrying a tin coffee-pot with a long handle, and stood quietly by: a man with a middle-aged, sallow face, long features, heavy eyelids, a soldierly grey moustache. His body encased in a short black jacket with narrow sleeves, his long legs in very tight trousers, made up an agile, youthful, slender figure. He moved forward suddenly, and interrupted the mate's monologue.

"More coffee, Mr. Franklin? Nice fresh lot. Piping hot. I am going to give breakfast to the saloon directly, and the cook is raking his fire out. Now's your chance."

The mate who, on account of his peculiar build, could not turn his head freely, twisted his thick trunk slightly, and ran his black eyes in the corners towards the steward.

"And is the precious pair of them out?" he growled.

The steward, pouring out the coffee into the mate's cup, muttered moodily but distinctly: "The lady wasn't when I was laying the table."

Powell's ears were fine enough to detect something hostile in this reference to the captain's wife. For of what other person could they be speaking? The steward added with a gloomy sort of fairness: "But she will be before I bring the dishes in. She never gives that sort of trouble. That she doesn't."

"No. Not in that way," Mr. Franklin agreed, and then both he and the steward, after glancing at Powell — the stranger to the ship — said nothing more.

But this had been enough to rouse his curiosity. Curiosity is natural to man. Of course it was not a malevolent curiosity which, if not exactly natural, is to be met fairly

frequently in men and perhaps more frequently in women — especially if a woman be in question; and that woman under a cloud, in a manner of speaking. For under a cloud Flora de Barral was fated to be even at sea. Yes. Even that sort of darkness which attends a woman for whom there is no clear place in the world hung over her. Yes. Even at sea!

* * * * *

And this is the pathos of being a woman. A man can struggle to get a place for himself or perish. But a woman's part is passive, say what you like, and shuffle the facts of the world as you may, hinting at lack of energy, of wisdom, of courage. As a matter of fact, almost all women have all that — of their own kind. But they are not made for attack. Wait they must. I am speaking here of women who are really women. And it's no use talking of opportunities, either. I know that some of them do talk of it. But not the genuine women. Those know better. Nothing can beat a true woman for a clear vision of reality; I would say a cynical vision if I were not afraid of wounding your chivalrous feelings — for which, by the by, women are not so grateful as you may think, to fellows of your kind . . .

“Upon my word, Marlow,” I cried, “what are you flying out at me for like this? I wouldn't use an ill-sounding word about women, but what right have you to imagine that I am looking for gratitude?”

Marlow raised a soothing hand.

“There! There! I take back the ill-sounding word, with the remark, though, that cynicism seems to me a word invented by hypocrites. But let that pass. As to women, they know that the clamour for opportunities for them to become something which they cannot be is as reasonable as if mankind at large started asking for opportunities of winning immortality in this world, in which death is the very condition of life. You must understand that I am not talking here of material existence. That naturally is implied; but you won't maintain that a woman who, say, enlisted, for instance (there have been cases) has conquered her place in the world. She has only got her living in it — which is quite meritorious, but not quite the same thing.

All these reflections which arise from my picking up the thread of Flora de Barral's existence did not, I am certain, present themselves to Mr. Powell — not the Mr. Powell we know taking solitary week-end cruises in the estuary of the Thames (with mysterious dashes into lonely creeks) but to the young Mr. Powell, the chance second officer of the ship *Ferndale*, commanded (and for the most part owned) by Roderick Anthony, the son of the poet — you know. A Mr. Powell, much slenderer than our robust friend is now, with the bloom of innocence not quite rubbed off his smooth cheeks, and apt not only to be interested but also to be surprised by the experience life was holding in store for him. This would account for his remembering so much of it with considerable vividness. For instance, the impressions attending his first breakfast on board the *Ferndale*, both visual and mental, were as fresh to him as if received yesterday.

The surprise, it is easy to understand, would arise from the inability to interpret aright the signs which experience (a thing mysterious in itself) makes to our under-

standing and emotions. For it is never more than that. Our experience never gets into our blood and bones. It always remains outside of us. That's why we look with wonder at the past. And this persists even when from practice and through growing callousness of fibre we come to the point when nothing that we meet in that rapid blinking stumble across a flick of sunshine — which our life is — nothing, I say, which we run against surprises us any more. Not at the time, I mean. If, later on, we recover the faculty with some such exclamation: 'Well! Well! I'll be hanged if I ever, . . . ' it is probably because this very thing that there should be a past to look back upon, other people's, is very astounding in itself when one has the time, a fleeting and immense instant to think of it . . . "

I was on the point of interrupting Marlow when he stopped of himself, his eyes fixed on vacancy, or — perhaps — (I wouldn't be too hard on him) on a vision. He has the habit, or, say, the fault, of defective mantelpiece clocks, of suddenly stopping in the very fulness of the tick. If you have ever lived with a clock afflicted with that perversity, you know how vexing it is — such a stoppage. I was vexed with Marlow. He was smiling faintly while I waited. He even laughed a little. And then I said acidly:

"Am I to understand that you have ferreted out something comic in the history of Flora de Barral?"

"Comic!" he exclaimed. "No! What makes you say? . . . Oh, I laughed — did I? But don't you know that people laugh at absurdities that are very far from being comic? Didn't you read the latest books about laughter written by philosophers, psychologists? There is a lot of them . . . "

"I dare say there has been a lot of nonsense written about laughter — and tears, too, for that matter," I said impatiently.

"They say," pursued the unabashed Marlow, "that we laugh from a sense of superiority. Therefore, observe, simplicity, honesty, warmth of feeling, delicacy of heart and of conduct, self-confidence, magnanimity are laughed at, because the presence of these traits in a man's character often puts him into difficult, cruel or absurd situations, and makes us, the majority who are fairly free as a rule from these peculiarities, feel pleasantly superior."

"Speak for yourself," I said. "But have you discovered all these fine things in the story; or has Mr. Powell discovered them to you in his artless talk? Have you two been having good healthy laughs together? Come! Are your sides aching yet, Marlow?"

Marlow took no offence at my banter. He was quite serious.

"I should not like to say off-hand how much of that there was," he pursued with amusing caution. "But there was a situation, tense enough for the signs of it to give many surprises to Mr. Powell — neither of them shocking in itself, but with a cumulative effect which made the whole unforgettable in the detail of its progress. And the first surprise came very soon, when the explosives (to which he owed his sudden chance of engagement) — dynamite in cases and blasting powder in barrels — taken on board, main hatch battened for sea, cook restored to his functions in the galley, anchor fished and the tug ahead, rounding the South Foreland, and with the sun sinking clear and

red down the purple vista of the channel, he went on the poop, on duty, it is true, but with time to take the first freer breath in the busy day of departure. The pilot was still on board, who gave him first a silent glance, and then passed an insignificant remark before resuming his lounging to and fro between the steering wheel and the binnacle. Powell took his station modestly at the break of the poop. He had noticed across the skylight a head in a grey cap. But when, after a time, he crossed over to the other side of the deck he discovered that it was not the captain's head at all. He became aware of grey hairs curling over the nape of the neck. How could he have made that mistake? But on board ship away from the land one does not expect to come upon a stranger.

Powell walked past the man. A thin, somewhat sunken face, with a tightly closed mouth, stared at the distant French coast, vague like a suggestion of solid darkness, lying abeam beyond the evening light reflected from the level waters, themselves growing more sombre than the sky; a stare, across which Powell had to pass and did pass with a quick side glance, noting its immovable stillness. His passage disturbed those eyes no more than if he had been as immaterial as a ghost. And this failure of his person in producing an impression affected him strangely. Who could that old man be?

He was so curious that he even ventured to ask the pilot in a low voice. The pilot turned out to be a good-natured specimen of his kind, condescending, sententious. He had been down to his meals in the main cabin, and had something to impart.

"That? Queer fish — eh? Mrs. Anthony's father. I've been introduced to him in the cabin at breakfast time. Name of Smith. Wonder if he has all his wits about him. They take him about with them, it seems. Don't look very happy — eh?"

Then, changing his tone abruptly, he desired Powell to get all hands on deck and make sail on the ship. "I shall be leaving you in half an hour. You'll have plenty of time to find out all about the old gent," he added with a thick laugh.

* * * * *

In the secret emotion of giving his first order as a fully responsible officer, young Powell forgot the very existence of that old man in a moment. The following days, in the interest of getting in touch with the ship, with the men in her, with his duties, in the rather anxious period of settling down, his curiosity slumbered; for of course the pilot's few words had not extinguished it.

This settling down was made easy for him by the friendly character of his immediate superior — the chief. Powell could not defend himself from some sympathy for that thick, bald man, comically shaped, with his crimson complexion and something pathetic in the rolling of his very movable black eyes in an apparently immovable head, who was so tactfully ready to take his competency for granted.

There can be nothing more reassuring to a young man tackling his life's work for the first time. Mr. Powell, his mind at ease about himself, had time to observe the people around with friendly interest. Very early in the beginning of the passage, he had discovered with some amusement that the marriage of Captain Anthony was resented

by those to whom Powell (conscious of being looked upon as something of an outsider) referred in his mind as 'the old lot.'

They had the funny, regretful glances, intonations, nods of men who had seen other, better times. What difference it could have made to the bo'sun and the carpenter Powell could not very well understand. Yet these two pulled long faces and even gave hostile glances to the poop. The cook and the steward might have been more directly concerned. But the steward used to remark on occasion, 'Oh, she gives no extra trouble,' with scrupulous fairness of the most gloomy kind. He was rather a silent man with a great sense of his personal worth which made his speeches guarded. The cook, a neat man with fair side whiskers, who had been only three years in the ship, seemed the least concerned. He was even known to have inquired once or twice as to the success of some of his dishes with the captain's wife. This was considered a sort of disloyal falling away from the ruling feeling.

The mate's annoyance was yet the easiest to understand. As he let it out to Powell before the first week of the passage was over: 'You can't expect me to be pleased at being chucked out of the saloon as if I weren't good enough to sit down to meat with that woman.' But he hastened to add: 'Don't you think I'm blaming the captain. He isn't a man to be found fault with. You, Mr. Powell, are too young yet to understand such matters.'

Some considerable time afterwards, at the end of a conversation of that aggrieved sort, he enlarged a little more by repeating: 'Yes! You are too young to understand these things. I don't say you haven't plenty of sense. You are doing very well here. Jolly sight better than I expected, though I liked your looks from the first.'

It was in the trade-winds, at night, under a velvety, bespangled sky; a great multitude of stars watching the shadows of the sea gleaming mysteriously in the wake of the ship; while the leisurely swishing of the water to leeward was like a drowsy comment on her progress. Mr. Powell expressed his satisfaction by a half-bashful laugh. The mate mused on: 'And of course you haven't known the ship as she used to be. She was more than a home to a man. She was not like any other ship; and Captain Anthony was not like any other master to sail with. Neither is she now. But before one never had a care in the world as to her — and as to him, too. No, indeed, there was never anything to worry about.'

Young Powell couldn't see what there was to worry about even then. The serenity of the peaceful night seemed as vast as all space, and as enduring as eternity itself. It's true the sea is an uncertain element, but no sailor remembers this in the presence of its bewitching power any more than a lover ever thinks of the proverbial inconstancy of women. And Mr. Powell, being young, thought naïvely that the captain being married, there could be no occasion for anxiety as to his condition. I suppose that to him life, perhaps not so much his own as that of others, was something still in the nature of a fairy-tale with a 'they lived happy ever after' termination. We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical, and in possession of incontrovertible theories. Powell

felt in that way the more because the captain of a ship at sea is a remote, inaccessible creature, something like a prince of a fairy-tale, alone of his kind, depending on nobody, not to be called to account except by powers practically invisible and so distant, that they might well be looked upon as supernatural for all that the rest of the crew knows of them, as a rule.

So he did not understand the aggrieved attitude of the mate — or rather he understood it obscurely as a result of simple causes which did not seem to him adequate. He would have dismissed all this out of his mind with a contemptuous: ‘What the devil do I care?’ if the captain’s wife herself had not been so young. To see her the first time had been something of a shock to him. He had some preconceived ideas as to captain’s wives which, while he did not believe the testimony of his eyes, made him open them very wide. He had stared till the captain’s wife noticed it plainly and turned her face away. Captain’s wife! That girl covered with rugs in a long chair. Captain’s . . . ! He gasped mentally. It had never occurred to him that a captain’s wife could be anything but a woman to be described as stout or thin, as jolly or crabbed, but always mature, and even, in comparison with his own years, frankly old. But this! It was a sort of moral upset as though he had discovered a case of abduction or something as surprising as that. You understand that nothing is more disturbing than the upsetting of a preconceived idea. Each of us arranges the world according to his own notion of the fitness of things. To behold a girl where your average mediocre imagination had placed a comparatively old woman may easily become one of the strongest shocks . . . “

Marlow paused, smiling to himself.

“Powell remained impressed after all these years by the very recollection,” he continued in a voice, amused perhaps but not mocking. “He said to me only the other day with something like the first awe of that discovery lingering in his tone — he said to me: ‘Why, she seemed so young, so girlish, that I looked round for some woman which would be the captain’s wife, though of course I knew there was no other woman on board that voyage.’” The voyage before, it seems, there had been the steward’s wife to act as maid to Mrs. Anthony; but she was not taken that time for some reason he didn’t know. Mrs. Anthony . . . ! If it hadn’t been the captain’s wife he would have referred to her mentally as a kid, he said. I suppose there must be a sort of divinity hedging in a captain’s wife (however incredible) which prevented him applying to her that contemptuous definition in the secret of his thoughts.

I asked him when this had happened; and he told me that it was three days after parting from the tug, just outside the channel — to be precise. A head wind had set in with unpleasant damp weather. He had come up to leeward of the poop, still feeling very much of a stranger, and an untried officer, at six in the evening to take his watch. To see her was quite as unexpected as seeing a vision. When she turned away her head he recollected himself and dropped his eyes. What he could see then was only, close to the long chair on which she reclined, a pair of long, thin legs ending in black cloth boots tucked in close to the skylight seat. Whence he concluded that the ‘old gentleman,’

who wore a grey cap like the captain's, was sitting by her — his daughter. In his first astonishment he had stopped dead short, with the consequence that now he felt very much abashed at having betrayed his surprise. But he couldn't very well turn tail and bolt off the poop. He had come there on duty. So, still with downcast eyes, he made his way past them. Only when he got as far as the wheel-grating did he look up. She was hidden from him by the back of her deck-chair; but he had the view of the owner of the thin, aged legs seated on the skylight, his clean-shaved cheek, his thin compressed mouth with a hollow in each corner, the sparse grey locks escaping from under the tweed cap, and curling slightly on the collar of the coat. He leaned forward a little over Mrs. Anthony, but they were not talking. Captain Anthony, walking with a springy hurried gait on the other side of the poop from end to end, gazed straight before him. Young Powell might have thought that his captain was not aware of his presence either. However, he knew better, and for that reason spent a most uncomfortable hour motionless by the compass before his captain stopped in his swift pacing and with an almost visible effort made some remark to him about the weather in a low voice. Before Powell, who was startled, could find a word of answer, the captain swung off again on his endless tramp with a fixed gaze. And till the supper bell rang silence dwelt over that poop like an evil spell. The captain walked up and down looking straight before him, the helmsman steered, looking upwards at the sails, the old gent on the skylight looked down on his daughter — and Mr. Powell confessed to me that he didn't know where to look, feeling as though he had blundered in where he had no business — which was absurd. At last he fastened his eyes on the compass card, took refuge, in spirit, inside the binnacle. He felt chilled more than he should have been by the chilly dusk falling on the muddy green sea of the soundings from a smoothly clouded sky. A fitful wind swept the cheerless waste, and the ship, hauled up so close as to check her way, seemed to progress by languid fits and starts against the short seas which swept along her sides with a snarling sound.

Young Powell thought that this was the dreariest evening aspect of the sea he had ever seen. He was glad when the other occupants of the poop left it at the sound of the bell. The captain first, with a sudden swerve in his walk towards the companion, and not even looking once towards his wife and his wife's father. Those two got up and moved towards the companion, the old gent very erect, his thin locks stirring gently about the nape of his neck, and carrying the rugs over his arm. The girl who was Mrs. Anthony went down first. The murky twilight had settled in deep shadow on her face. She looked at Mr. Powell in passing. He thought that she was very pale. Cold perhaps. The old gent stopped a moment, thin and stiff, before the young man, and in a voice which was low but distinct enough, and without any particular accent — not even of inquiry — he said:

“You are the new second officer, I believe.”

Mr. Powell answered in the affirmative, wondering if this were a friendly overture. He had noticed that Mr. Smith's eyes had a sort of inward look as though he had disliked or disdained his surroundings. The captain's wife had disappeared then down

the companion stairs. Mr. Smith said 'Ah!' and waited a little longer to put another question in his incurious voice.

"And did you know the man who was here before you?"

"No," said young Powell, "I didn't know anybody belonging to this ship before I joined."

"He was much older than you. Twice your age. Perhaps more. His hair was iron grey. Yes. Certainly more."

The low, repressed voice paused, but the old man did not move away. He added: "Isn't it unusual?"

Mr. Powell was surprised not only by being engaged in conversation, but also by its character. It might have been the suggestion of the word uttered by this old man, but it was distinctly at that moment that he became aware of something unusual not only in this encounter but generally around him, about everybody, in the atmosphere. The very sea, with short flashes of foam bursting out here and there in the gloomy distances, the unchangeable, safe sea sheltering a man from all passions, except its own anger, seemed queer to the quick glance he threw to windward where the already effaced horizon traced no reassuring limit to the eye. In the expiring, diffused twilight, and before the clouded night dropped its mysterious veil, it was the immensity of space made visible — almost palpable. Young Powell felt it. He felt it in the sudden sense of his isolation; the trustworthy, powerful ship of his first acquaintance reduced to a speck, to something almost undistinguishable, the mere support for the soles of his two feet before that unexpected old man becoming so suddenly articulate in a darkening universe.

It took him a moment or so to seize the drift of the question. He repeated slowly: 'Unusual . . . Oh, you mean for an elderly man to be the second of a ship. I don't know. There are a good many of us who don't get on. He didn't get on, I suppose.'

The other, his head bowed a little, had the air of listening with acute attention.

"And now he has been taken to the hospital," he said.

"I believe so. Yes. I remember Captain Anthony saying so in the shipping office."

"Possibly about to die," went on the old man, in his careful deliberate tone. "And perhaps glad enough to die."

Mr. Powell was young enough to be startled at the suggestion, which sounded confidential and blood-curdling in the dusk. He said sharply that it was not very likely, as if defending the absent victim of the accident from an unkind aspersion. He felt, in fact, indignant. The other emitted a short stifled laugh of a conciliatory nature. The second bell rang under the poop. He made a movement at the sound, but lingered.

"What I said was not meant seriously," he murmured, with that strange air of fearing to be overheard. "Not in this case. I know the man."

The occasion, or rather the want of occasion, for this conversation, had sharpened the perceptions of the unsophisticated second officer of the Ferndale. He was alive to the slightest shade of tone, and felt as if this "I know the man" should have been

followed by a "he was no friend of mine." But after the shortest possible break the old gentleman continued to murmur distinctly and evenly:

"Whereas you have never seen him. Nevertheless, when you have gone through as many years as I have, you will understand how an event putting an end to one's existence may not be altogether unwelcome. Of course there are stupid accidents. And even then one needn't be very angry. What is it to be deprived of life? It's soon done. But what would you think of the feelings of a man who should have had his life stolen from him? Cheated out of it, I say!"

He ceased abruptly, and remained still long enough for the astonished Powell to stammer out an indistinct: "What do you mean? I don't understand." Then, with a low 'Good-night' glided a few steps, and sank through the shadow of the companion into the lamplight below which did not reach higher than the turn of the staircase.

The strange words, the cautious tone, the whole person left a strong uneasiness in the mind of Mr. Powell. He started walking the poop in great mental confusion. He felt all adrift. This was funny talk and no mistake. And this cautious low tone as though he were watched by someone was more than funny. The young second officer hesitated to break the established rule of every ship's discipline; but at last could not resist the temptation of getting hold of some other human being, and spoke to the man at the wheel.

"Did you hear what this gentleman was saying to me?"

"No, sir," answered the sailor quietly. Then, encouraged by this evidence of laxity in his officer, made bold to add, "A queer fish, sir." This was tentative, and Mr. Powell, busy with his own view, not saying anything, he ventured further. "They are more like passengers. One sees some queer passengers."

"Who are like passengers?" asked Powell gruffly.

"Why, these two, sir."

Chapter 3 — Devoted Servants — and the Light of a Flare

Young Powell thought to himself: "The men, too, are noticing it." Indeed, the captain's behaviour to his wife and to his wife's father was noticeable enough. It was as if they had been a pair of not very congenial passengers. But perhaps it was not always like that. The captain might have been put out by something.

When the aggrieved Franklin came on deck Mr. Powell made a remark to that effect. For his curiosity was aroused.

The mate grumbled "Seems to you? . . . Putout? . . . eh?" He buttoned his thick jacket up to the throat, and only then added a gloomy "Aye, likely enough," which discouraged further conversation. But no encouragement would have induced the newly-joined second mate to enter the way of confidences. His was an instinctive prudence.

Powell did not know why it was he had resolved to keep his own counsel as to his colloquy with Mr. Smith. But his curiosity did not slumber. Some time afterwards, again at the relief of watches, in the course of a little talk, he mentioned Mrs. Anthony's father quite casually, and tried to find out from the mate who he was.

"It would take a clever man to find that out, as things are on board now," Mr. Franklin said, unexpectedly communicative. "The first I saw of him was when she brought him alongside in a four-wheeler one morning about half-past eleven. The captain had come on board early, and was down in the cabin that had been fitted out for him. Did I tell you that if you want the captain for anything you must stamp on the port side of the deck? That's so. This ship is not only unlike what she used to be, but she is like no other ship, anyhow. Did you ever hear of the captain's room being on the port side? Both of them stern cabins have been fitted up afresh like a blessed palace. A gang of people from some tip-top West-End house were fussing here on board with hangings and furniture for a fortnight, as if the Queen were coming with us. Of course the starboard cabin is the bedroom one, but the poor captain hangs out to port on a couch, so that in case we want him on deck at night, Mrs. Anthony should not be startled. Nervous! Phoo! A woman who marries a sailor and makes up her mind to come to sea should have no blamed jumpiness about her, I say. But never mind. Directly the old cab pointed round the corner of the warehouse I called out to the captain that his lady was coming aboard. He answered me, but as I didn't see him coming, I went down the gangway myself to help her alight. She jumps out excitedly without touching my arm, or as much as saying "thank you" or "good morning" or anything, turns back to the cab, and then that old joker comes out slowly. I hadn't noticed him inside. I hadn't expected to see anybody. It gave me a start. She says: "My father — Mr. Franklin." He was staring at me like an owl. "How do you do, sir?" says I. Both of them looked funny. It was as if something had happened to them on the way. Neither of them moved, and I stood by waiting. The captain showed himself on the poop; and I saw him at the side looking over, and then he disappeared; on the way to meet them on shore, I expected. But he just went down below again. So, not seeing him, I said: "Let me help you on board, sir." "On board!" says he in a silly fashion. "On board!" "It's not a very good ladder, but it's quite firm," says I, as he seemed to be afraid of it. And he didn't look a broken-down old man, either. You can see yourself what he is. Straight as a poker, and life enough in him yet. But he made no move, and I began to feel foolish. Then she comes forward. "Oh! Thank you, Mr. Franklin. I'll help my father up." Flabbergasted me — to be choked off like this. Pushed in between him and me without as much as a look my way. So of course I dropped it. What do you think? I fell back. I would have gone up on board at once and left them on the quay to come up or stay there till next week, only they were blocking the way. I couldn't very well shove them on one side. Devil only knows what was up between them. There she was, pale as death, talking to him very fast. He got as red as a turkey-cock — dash me if he didn't. A bad-tempered old bloke, I can tell you. And a bad lot, too. Never mind. I couldn't hear what she was saying to him, but she put force enough into it to

shake her. It seemed — it seemed, mind! — that he didn't want to go on board. Of course it couldn't have been that. I know better. Well, she took him by the arm, above the elbow, as if to lead him, or push him rather. I was standing not quite ten feet off. Why should I have gone away? I was anxious to get back on board as soon as they would let me. I didn't want to overhear her blamed whispering either. But I couldn't stay there for ever, so I made a move to get past them if I could. And that's how I heard a few words. It was the old chap — something nasty about being "under the heel" of somebody or other. Then he says, "I don't want this sacrifice." What it meant I can't tell. It was a quarrel — of that I am certain. She looks over her shoulder, and sees me pretty close to them. I don't know what she found to say into his ear, but he gave way suddenly. He looked round at me too, and they went up together so quickly then that when I got on the quarter-deck I was only in time to see the inner door of the passage close after them. Queer — eh? But if it were only queerness one wouldn't mind. Some luggage in new trunks came on board in the afternoon. We undocked at midnight. And may I be hanged if I know who or what he was or is. I haven't been able to find out. No, I don't know. He may have been anything. All I know is that once, years ago when I went to see the Derby with a friend, I saw a pea-and-thimble chap who looked just like that old mystery father out of a cab."

All this the goggle-eyed mate had said in a resentful and melancholy voice, with pauses, to the gentle murmur of the sea. It was for him a bitter sort of pleasure to have a fresh pair of ears, a newcomer, to whom he could repeat all these matters of grief and suspicion talked over endlessly by the band of Captain Anthony's faithful subordinates. It was evidently so refreshing to his worried spirit that it made him forget the advisability of a little caution with a complete stranger. But really with Mr. Powell there was no danger. Amused, at first, at these complaints, he provoked them for fun. Afterwards, turning them over in his mind, he became impressed, and as the impression grew stronger with the days his resolution to keep it to himself grew stronger too.

* * * * *

What made it all the easier to keep — I mean the resolution — was that Powell's sentiment of amused surprise at what struck him at first as mere absurdity was not unmingled with indignation. And his years were too few, his position too novel, his reliance on his own opinion not yet firm enough to allow him to express it with any effect. And then — what would have been the use, anyhow — and where was the necessity?

But this thing, familiar and mysterious at the same time, occupied his imagination. The solitude of the sea intensifies the thoughts and the facts of one's experience which seems to lie at the very centre of the world, as the ship which carries one always remains the centre figure of the round horizon. He viewed the apoplectic, goggle-eyed mate and the saturnine, heavy-eyed steward as the victims of a peculiar and secret form of lunacy which poisoned their lives. But he did not give them his sympathy on that account. No. That strange affliction awakened in him a sort of suspicious wonder.

Once — and it was at night again; for the officers of the Ferndale keeping watch and watch as was customary in those days, had but few occasions for intercourse — once, I say, the thick Mr. Franklin, a quaintly bulky figure under the stars, the usual witnesses of his outpourings, asked him with an abruptness which was not callous, but in his simple way:

“I believe you have no parents living?”

Mr. Powell said that he had lost his father and mother at a very early age.

“My mother is still alive,” declared Mr. Franklin in a tone which suggested that he was gratified by the fact. “The old lady is lasting well. Of course she’s got to be made comfortable. A woman must be looked after, and, if it comes to that, I say, give me a mother. I dare say if she had not lasted it out so well I might have gone and got married. I don’t know, though. We sailors haven’t got much time to look about us to any purpose. Anyhow, as the old lady was there I haven’t, I may say, looked at a girl in all my life. Not that I wasn’t partial to female society in my time,” he added with a pathetic intonation, while the whites of his goggle eyes gleamed amorously under the clear night sky. “Very partial, I may say.”

Mr. Powell was amused; and as these communications took place only when the mate was relieved off duty he had no serious objection to them. The mate’s presence made the first half-hour and sometimes even more of his watch on deck pass away. If his senior did not mind losing some of his rest it was not Mr. Powell’s affair. Franklin was a decent fellow. His intention was not to boast of his filial piety.

“Of course I mean respectable female society,” he explained. “The other sort is neither here nor there. I blame no man’s conduct, but a well-brought-up young fellow like you knows that there’s precious little fun to be got out of it.” He fetched a deep sigh. “I wish Captain Anthony’s mother had been a lasting sort like my old lady. He would have had to look after her and he would have done it well. Captain Anthony is a proper man. And it would have saved him from the most foolish — ”

He did not finish the phrase which certainly was turning bitter in his mouth. Mr. Powell thought to himself: “There he goes again.” He laughed a little.

“I don’t understand why you are so hard on the captain, Mr. Franklin. I thought you were a great friend of his.”

Mr. Franklin exclaimed at this. He was not hard on the captain. Nothing was further from his thoughts. Friend! Of course he was a good friend and a faithful servant. He begged Powell to understand that if Captain Anthony chose to strike a bargain with Old Nick to-morrow, and Old Nick were good to the captain, he (Franklin) would find it in his heart to love Old Nick for the captain’s sake. That was so. On the other hand, if a saint, an angel with white wings came along and — ”

He broke off short again as if his own vehemence had frightened him. Then in his strained pathetic voice (which he had never raised) he observed that it was no use talking. Anybody could see that the man was changed.

“As to that,” said young Powell, “it is impossible for me to judge.”

“Good Lord!” whispered the mate. “An educated, clever young fellow like you with a pair of eyes on him and some sense too! Is that how a happy man looks? Eh? Young you may be, but you aren’t a kid; and I dare you to say ‘Yes!’”

Mr. Powell did not take up the challenge. He did not know what to think of the mate’s view. Still, it seemed as if it had opened his understanding in a measure. He conceded that the captain did not look very well.

“Not very well,” repeated the mate mournfully. “Do you think a man with a face like that can hope to live his life out? You haven’t knocked about long in this world yet, but you are a sailor, you have been in three or four ships, you say. Well, have you ever seen a shipmaster walking his own deck as if he did not know what he had underfoot? Have you? Dam’me if I don’t think that he forgets where he is. Of course he can be no other than a prime seaman; but it’s lucky, all the same, he has me on board. I know by this time what he wants done without being told. Do you know that I have had no order given me since we left port? Do you know that he has never once opened his lips to me unless I spoke to him first? I? His chief officer; his shipmate for full six years, with whom he had no cross word — not once in all that time. Aye. Not a cross look even. True that when I do make him speak to me, there is his dear old self, the quick eye, the kind voice. Could hardly be other to his old Franklin. But what’s the good? Eyes, voice, everything’s miles away. And for all that I take good care never to address him when the poop isn’t clear. Yes! Only we two and nothing but the sea with us. You think it would be all right; the only chief mate he ever had — Mr. Franklin here and Mr. Franklin there — when anything went wrong the first word you would hear about the decks was ‘Franklin!’ — I am thirteen years older than he is — you would think it would be all right, wouldn’t you? Only we two on this poop on which we saw each other first — he a young master — told me that he thought I would suit him very well — we two, and thirty-one days out at sea, and it’s no good! It’s like talking to a man standing on shore. I can’t get him back. I can’t get at him. I feel sometimes as if I must shake him by the arm: “Wake up! Wake up! You are wanted, sir . . . !”

Young Powell recognized the expression of a true sentiment, a thing so rare in this world where there are so many mutes and so many excellent reasons even at sea for an articulate man not to give himself away, that he felt something like respect for this outburst. It was not loud. The grotesque squat shape, with the knob of the head as if rammed down between the square shoulders by a blow from a club, moved vaguely in a circumscribed space limited by the two harness-casks lashed to the front rail of the poop, without gestures, hands in the pockets of the jacket, elbows pressed closely to its side; and the voice without resonance, passed from anger to dismay and back again without a single louder word in the hurried delivery, interrupted only by slight gasps for air as if the speaker were being choked by the suppressed passion of his grief.

Mr. Powell, though moved to a certain extent, was by no means carried away. And just as he thought that it was all over, the other, fidgeting in the darkness, was heard again explosive, bewildered but not very loud in the silence of the ship and the great empty peace of the sea.

“They have done something to him! What is it? What can it be? Can’t you guess? Don’t you know?”

“Good heavens!” Young Powell was astounded on discovering that this was an appeal addressed to him. “How on earth can I know?”

“You do talk to that white-faced, black-eyed . . . I’ve seen you talking to her more than a dozen times.”

Young Powell, his sympathy suddenly chilled, remarked in a disdainful tone that Mrs. Anthony’s eyes were not black.

“I wish to God she had never set them on the captain, whatever colour they are,” retorted Franklin. “She and that old chap with the scraped jaws who sits over her and stares down at her dead-white face with his yellow eyes — confound them! Perhaps you will tell us that his eyes are not yellow?”

Powell, not interested in the colour of Mr. Smith’s eyes, made a vague gesture. Yellow or not yellow, it was all one to him.

The mate murmured to himself. “No. He can’t know. No! No more than a baby. It would take an older head.”

“I don’t even understand what you mean,” observed Mr. Powell coldly.

“And even the best head would be puzzled by such devil-work,” the mate continued, muttering. “Well, I have heard tell of women doing for a man in one way or another when they got him fairly ashore. But to bring their devilry to sea and fasten on such a man! . . . It’s something I can’t understand. But I can watch. Let them look out — I say!”

His short figure, unable to stoop, without flexibility, could not express dejection. He was very tired suddenly; he dragged his feet going off the poop. Before he left it with nearly an hour of his watch below sacrificed, he addressed himself once more to our young man who stood abreast of the mizzen rigging in an unreceptive mood expressed by silence and immobility. He did not regret, he said, having spoken openly on this very serious matter.

“I don’t know about its seriousness, sir,” was Mr. Powell’s frank answer. “But if you think you have been telling me something very new you are mistaken. You can’t keep that matter out of your speeches. It’s the sort of thing I’ve been hearing more or less ever since I came on board.”

Mr. Powell, speaking truthfully, did not mean to speak offensively. He had instincts of wisdom; he felt that this was a serious affair, for it had nothing to do with reason. He did not want to raise an enemy for himself in the mate. And Mr. Franklin did not take offence. To Mr. Powell’s truthful statement he answered with equal truth and simplicity that it was very likely, very likely. With a thing like that (next door to witchcraft almost) weighing on his mind, the wonder was that he could think of anything else. The poor man must have found in the restlessness of his thoughts the illusion of being engaged in an active contest with some power of evil; for his last words as he went lingeringly down the poop ladder expressed the quaint hope that he would get him, Powell, “on our side yet.”

Mr. Powell — just imagine a straightforward youngster assailed in this fashion on the high seas — answered merely by an embarrassed and uneasy laugh which reflected exactly the state of his innocent soul. The apoplectic mate, already half-way down, went up again three steps of the poop ladder. Why, yes. A proper young fellow, the mate expected, wouldn't stand by and see a man, a good sailor and his own skipper, in trouble without taking his part against a couple of shore people who — Mr. Powell interrupted him impatiently, asking what was the trouble?

“What is it you are hinting at?” he cried with an inexplicable irritation.

“I don't like to think of him all alone down there with these two,” Franklin whispered impressively. “Upon my word I don't. God only knows what may be going on there . . . Don't laugh . . . It was bad enough last voyage when Mrs. Brown had a cabin aft; but now it's worse. It frightens me. I can't sleep sometimes for thinking of him all alone there, shut off from us all.”

Mrs. Brown was the steward's wife. You must understand that shortly after his visit to the Fyne cottage (with all its consequences), Anthony had got an offer to go to the Western Islands, and bring home the cargo of some ship which, damaged in a collision or a stranding, took refuge in St. Michael, and was condemned there. Roderick Anthony had connections which would put such paying jobs in his way. So Flora de Barral had but a five months' voyage, a mere excursion, for her first trial of sea-life. And Anthony, dearly trying to be most attentive, had induced this Mrs. Brown, the wife of his faithful steward, to come along as maid to his bride. But for some reason or other this arrangement was not continued. And the mate, tormented by indefinite alarms and forebodings, regretted it. He regretted that Jane Brown was no longer on board — as a sort of representative of Captain Anthony's faithful servants, to watch quietly what went on in that part of the ship this fatal marriage had closed to their vigilance. That had been excellent. For she was a dependable woman.

Powell did not detect any particular excellence in what seemed a spying employment. But in his simplicity he said that he should have thought Mrs. Anthony would have been glad anyhow to have another woman on board. He was thinking of the white-faced girlish personality which it seemed to him ought to have been cared for. The innocent young man always looked upon the girl as immature; something of a child yet.

“She! glad! Why it was she who had her fired out. She didn't want anybody around the cabin. Mrs. Brown is certain of it. She told her husband so. You ask the steward and hear what he has to say about it. That's why I don't like it. A capable woman who knew her place. But no. Out she must go. For no fault, mind you. The captain was ashamed to send her away. But that wife of his — aye the precious pair of them have got hold of him. I can't speak to him for a minute on the poop without that thimble-rigging coon coming gliding up. I'll tell you what. I overheard once — God knows I didn't try to — only he forgot I was on the other side of the skylight with my sextant — I overheard him — you know how he sits hanging over her chair and talking away without properly opening his mouth — yes I caught the word right enough. He was alluding to the captain as “the jailer.” The jail . . . !”

Franklin broke off with a profane execration. A silence reigned for a long time and the slight, very gentle rolling of the ship slipping before the N.E. trade-wind seemed to be a soothing device for lulling to sleep the suspicions of men who trust themselves to the sea.

A deep sigh was heard followed by the mate's voice asking dismally if that was the way one would speak of a man to whom one wished well? No better proof of something wrong was needed. Therefore he hoped, as he vanished at last, that Mr. Powell would be on their side. And this time Mr. Powell did not answer this hope with an embarrassed laugh.

That young officer was more and more surprised at the nature of the incongruous revelations coming to him in the surroundings and in the atmosphere of the open sea. It is difficult for us to understand the extent, the completeness, the comprehensiveness of his inexperience, for us who didn't go to sea out of a small private school at the age of fourteen years and nine months. Leaning on his elbow in the mizzen rigging and so still that the helmsman over there at the other end of the poop might have (and he probably did) suspect him of being criminally asleep on duty, he tried to "get hold of that thing" by some side which would fit in with his simple notions of psychology. "What the deuce are they worrying about?" he asked himself in a dazed and contemptuous impatience. But all the same "jailer" was a funny name to give a man; unkind, unfriendly, nasty. He was sorry that Mr. Smith was guilty in that matter because, the truth must be told, he had been to a certain extent sensible of having been noticed in a quiet manner by the father of Mrs. Anthony. Youth appreciates that sort of recognition which is the subtlest form of flattery age can offer. Mr. Smith seized opportunities to approach him on deck. His remarks were sometimes weird and enigmatical.

He was doubtless an eccentric old gent. But from that to calling his son-in-law (whom he never approached on deck) nasty names behind his back was a long step.

And Mr. Powell marvelled . . . "

"While he was telling me all this," — Marlow changed his tone — "I marvelled even more. It was as if misfortune marked its victims on the forehead for the dislike of the crowd. I am not thinking here of numbers. Two men may behave like a crowd, three certainly will when their emotions are engaged. It was as if the forehead of Flora de Barral were marked. Was the girl born to be a victim; to be always disliked and crushed as if she were too fine for this world? Or too luckless — since that also is often counted as sin.

Yes, I marvelled more since I knew more of the girl than Mr. Powell — if only her true name; and more of Captain Anthony — if only the fact that he was the son of a delicate erotic poet of a markedly refined and autocratic temperament. Yes, I knew their joint stories which Mr. Powell did not know. The chapter in it he was opening to me, the sea-chapter, with such new personages as the sentimental and apoplectic chief-mate and the morose steward, however astounding to him in its detached condition was much more so to me as a member of a series, following the chapter outside the Eastern Hotel in which I myself had played my part. In view of her declarations and

my sage remarks it was very unexpected. She had meant well, and I had certainly meant well too. Captain Anthony — as far as I could gather from little Fyne — had meant well. As far as such lofty words may be applied to the obscure personages of this story we were all filled with the noblest sentiments and intentions. The sea was there to give them the shelter of its solitude free from the earth's petty suggestions. I could well marvel in myself, as to what had happened.

I hope that if he saw it, Mr. Powell forgave me the smile of which I was guilty at that moment. The light in the cabin of his little cutter was dim. And the smile was dim too. Dim and fleeting. The girl's life had presented itself to me as a tragi-comical adventure, the saddest thing on earth, slipping between frank laughter and unabashed tears. Yes, the saddest facts and the most common, and, being common perhaps the most worthy of our unreserved pity.

The purely human reality is capable of lyrism but not of abstraction. Nothing will serve for its understanding but the evidence of rational linking up of characters and facts. And beginning with Flora de Barral, in the light of my memories I was certain that she at least must have been passive; for that is of necessity the part of women, this waiting on fate which some of them, and not the most intelligent, cover up by the vain appearances of agitation. Flora de Barral was not exceptionally intelligent but she was thoroughly feminine. She would be passive (and that does not mean inanimate) in the circumstances, where the mere fact of being a woman was enough to give her an occult and supreme significance. And she would be enduring which is the essence of woman's visible, tangible power. Of that I was certain. Had she not endured already? Yet it is so true that the germ of destruction lies in wait for us mortals, even at the very source of our strength, that one may die of too much endurance as well as of too little of it.

Such was my train of thought. And I was mindful also of my first view of her — toying or perhaps communing in earnest with the possibilities of a precipice. But I did not ask Mr. Powell anxiously what had happened to Mrs. Anthony in the end. I let him go on in his own way feeling that no matter what strange facts he would have to disclose, I was certain to know much more of them than he ever did know or could possibly guess . . . “

Marlow paused for quite a long time. He seemed uncertain as though he had advanced something beyond my grasp. Purposely I made no sign. “You understand?” he asked.

“Perfectly,” I said. “You are the expert in the psychological wilderness. This is like one of those Red-skin stories where the noble savages carry off a girl and the honest backwoodsman with his incomparable knowledge follows the track and reads the signs of her fate in a footprint here, a broken twig there, a trinket dropped by the way. I have always liked such stories. Go on.”

Marlow smiled indulgently at my jesting. “It is not exactly a story for boys,” he said. “I go on then. The sign, as you call it, was not very plentiful but very much to the purpose, and when Mr. Powell heard (at a certain moment I felt bound to tell him)

when he heard that I had known Mrs. Anthony before her marriage, that, to a certain extent, I was her confidant . . . For you can't deny that to a certain extent . . . Well let us say that I had a look in . . . A young girl, you know, is something like a temple. You pass by and wonder what mysterious rites are going on in there, what prayers, what visions? The privileged men, the lover, the husband, who are given the key of the sanctuary do not always know how to use it. For myself, without claim, without merit, simply by chance I had been allowed to look through the half-opened door and I had seen the saddest possible desecration, the withered brightness of youth, a spirit neither made cringing nor yet dulled but as if bewildered in quivering hopelessness by gratuitous cruelty; self-confidence destroyed and, instead, a resigned recklessness, a mournful callousness (and all this simple, almost naïve) — before the material and moral difficulties of the situation. The passive anguish of the luckless!

I asked myself: wasn't that ill-luck exhausted yet? Ill-luck which is like the hate of invisible powers interpreted, made sensible and injurious by the actions of men?

Mr. Powell as you may well imagine had opened his eyes at my statement. But he was full of his recalled experiences on board the Ferndale, and the strangeness of being mixed up in what went on aboard, simply because his name was also the name of a shipping-master, kept him in a state of wonder which made other coincidences, however unlikely, not so very surprising after all.

This astonishing occurrence was so present to his mind that he always felt as though he were there under false pretences. And this feeling was so uncomfortable that it nerved him to break through the awe-inspiring aloofness of his captain. He wanted to make a clean breast of it. I imagine that his youth stood in good stead to Mr. Powell. Oh, yes. Youth is a power. Even Captain Anthony had to take some notice of it, as if it refreshed him to see something untouched, unscarred, unhardened by suffering. Or perhaps the very novelty of that face, on board a ship where he had seen the same faces for years, attracted his attention.

Whether one day he dropped a word to his new second officer or only looked at him I don't know; but Mr. Powell seized the opportunity whatever it was. The captain who had started and stopped in his everlasting rapid walk smoothed his brow very soon, heard him to the end and then laughed a little.

"Ah! That's the story. And you felt you must put me right as to this."

"Yes, sir."

"It doesn't matter how you came on board," said Anthony. And then showing that perhaps he was not so utterly absent from his ship as Franklin supposed: "That's all right. You seem to be getting on very well with everybody," he said in his curt hurried tone, as if talking hurt him, and his eyes already straying over the sea as usual.

"Yes, sir."

Powell tells me that looking then at the strong face to which that haggard expression was returning, he had the impulse, from some confused friendly feeling, to add: "I am very happy on board here, sir."

The quickly returning glance, its steadiness, abashed Mr. Powell and made him even step back a little. The captain looked as though he had forgotten the meaning of the word.

“You — what? Oh yes . . . You . . . of course . . . Happy. Why not?”

This was merely muttered; and next moment Anthony was off on his headlong tramp his eyes turned to the sea away from his ship.

A sailor indeed looks generally into the great distances, but in Captain Anthony’s case there was — as Powell expressed it — something particular, something purposeful like the avoidance of pain or temptation. It was very marked once one had become aware of it. Before, one felt only a pronounced strangeness. Not that the captain — Powell was careful to explain — didn’t see things as a ship-master should. The proof of it was that on that very occasion he desired him suddenly after a period of silent pacing, to have all the staysails sheets eased off, and he was going on with some other remarks on the subject of these staysails when Mrs. Anthony followed by her father emerged from the companion. She established herself in her chair to leeward of the skylight as usual. Thereupon the captain cut short whatever he was going to say, and in a little while went down below.

I asked Mr. Powell whether the captain and his wife never conversed on deck. He said no — or at any rate they never exchanged more than a couple of words. There was some constraint between them. For instance, on that very occasion, when Mrs. Anthony came out they did look at each other; the captain’s eyes indeed followed her till she sat down; but he did not speak to her; he did not approach her; and afterwards left the deck without turning his head her way after this first silent exchange of glances.

I asked Mr. Powell what did he do then, the captain being out of the way. “I went over and talked to Mrs. Anthony. I was thinking that it must be very dull for her. She seemed to be such a stranger to the ship.”

“The father was there of course?”

“Always,” said Powell. “He was always there sitting on the skylight, as if he were keeping watch over her. And I think,” he added, “that he was worrying her. Not that she showed it in any way. Mrs. Anthony was always very quiet and always ready to look one straight in the face.”

“You talked together a lot?” I pursued my inquiries. “She mostly let me talk to her,” confessed Mr. Powell. “I don’t know that she was very much interested — but still she let me. She never cut me short.”

All the sympathies of Mr. Powell were for Flora Anthony née de Barral. She was the only human being younger than himself on board that ship since the Ferndale carried no boys and was manned by a full crew of able seamen. Yes! their youth had created a sort of bond between them. Mr. Powell’s open countenance must have appeared to her distinctly pleasing amongst the mature, rough, crabbed or even inimical faces she saw around her. With the warm generosity of his age young Powell was on her side, as it were, even before he knew that there were sides to be taken on board that ship, and what this taking sides was about. There was a girl. A nice girl. He asked himself no

questions. Flora de Barral was not so much younger in years than himself; but for some reason, perhaps by contrast with the accepted idea of a captain's wife, he could not regard her otherwise but as an extremely youthful creature. At the same time, apart from her exalted position, she exercised over him the supremacy a woman's earlier maturity gives her over a young man of her own age. As a matter of fact we can see that, without ever having more than a half an hour's consecutive conversation together, and the distances duly preserved, these two were becoming friends — under the eye of the old man, I suppose.

How he first got in touch with his captain's wife Powell relates in this way. It was long before his memorable conversation with the mate and shortly after getting clear of the channel. It was gloomy weather; dead head wind, blowing quite half a gale; the Ferndale under reduced sail was stretching close-hauled across the track of the homeward bound ships, just moving through the water and no more, since there was no object in pressing her and the weather looked threatening. About ten o'clock at night he was alone on the poop, in charge, keeping well aft by the weather rail and staring to windward, when amongst the white, breaking seas, under the black sky, he made out the lights of a ship. He watched them for some time. She was running dead before the wind of course. She will pass jolly close — he said to himself; and then suddenly he felt a great mistrust of that approaching ship. She's heading straight for us — he thought. It was not his business to get out of the way. On the contrary. And his uneasiness grew by the recollection of the forty tons of dynamite in the body of the Ferndale; not the sort of cargo one thinks of with equanimity in connection with a threatened collision. He gazed at the two small lights in the dark immensity filled with the angry noise of the seas. They fascinated him till their plainness to his sight gave him a conviction that there was danger there. He knew in his mind what to do in the emergency, but very properly he felt that he must call the captain out at once.

He crossed the deck in one bound. By the immemorial custom and usage of the sea the captain's room is on the starboard side. You would just as soon expect your captain to have his nose at the back of his head as to have his state-room on the port side of the ship. Powell forgot all about the direction on that point given him by the chief. He flew over as I said, stamped with his foot and then putting his face to the cowl of the big ventilator shouted down there: "Please come on deck, sir," in a voice which was not trembling or scared but which we may call fairly expressive. There could not be a mistake as to the urgency of the call. But instead of the expected alert "All right!" and the sound of a rush down there, he heard only a faint exclamation — then silence.

Think of his astonishment! He remained there, his ear in the cowl of the ventilator, his eyes fastened on those menacing sidelights dancing on the gusts of wind which swept the angry darkness of the sea. It was as though he had waited an hour but it was something much less than a minute before he fairly bellowed into the wide tube "Captain Anthony!" An agitated "What is it?" was what he heard down there in Mrs. Anthony's voice, light rapid footsteps . . . Why didn't she try to wake him up! "I want

the captain," he shouted, then gave it up, making a dash at the companion where a blue light was kept, resolved to act for himself.

On the way he glanced at the helmsman whose face lighted up by the binnacle lamps was calm. He said rapidly to him: "Stand by to spin that helm up at the first word." The answer "Aye, aye, sir," was delivered in a steady voice. Then Mr. Powell after a shout for the watch on deck to "lay aft," ran to the ship's side and struck the blue light on the rail.

A sort of nasty little spitting of sparks was all that came. The light (perhaps affected by damp) had failed to ignite. The time of all these various acts must be counted in seconds. Powell confessed to me that at this failure he experienced a paralysis of thought, of voice, of limbs. The unexpectedness of this misfire positively overcame his faculties. It was the only thing for which his imagination was not prepared. It was knocked clean over. When it got up it was with the suggestion that he must do something at once or there would be a broadside smash accompanied by the explosion of dynamite, in which both ships would be blown up and every soul on board of them would vanish off the earth in an enormous flame and uproar.

He saw the catastrophe happening and at the same moment, before he could open his mouth or stir a limb to ward off the vision, a voice very near his ear, the measured voice of Captain Anthony said: "Wouldn't light — eh? Throw it down! Jump for the flare-up."

The spring of activity in Mr. Powell was released with great force. He jumped. The flare-up was kept inside the companion with a box of matches ready to hand. Almost before he knew he had moved he was diving under the companion slide. He got hold of the can in the dark and tried to strike a light. But he had to press the flare-holder to his breast with one arm, his fingers were damp and stiff, his hands trembled a little. One match broke. Another went out. In its flame he saw the colourless face of Mrs. Anthony a little below him, standing on the cabin stairs. Her eyes which were very close to his (he was in a crouching posture on the top step) seemed to burn darkly in the vanishing light. On deck the captain's voice was heard sudden and unexpectedly sardonic: "You had better look sharp, if you want to be in time."

"Let me have the box," said Mrs. Anthony in a hurried and familiar whisper which sounded amused as if they had been a couple of children up to some lark behind a wall. He was glad of the offer which seemed to him very natural, and without ceremony —

"Here you are. Catch hold."

Their hands touched in the dark and she took the box while he held the paraffin soaked torch in its iron holder. He thought of warning her: "Look out for yourself." But before he had the time to finish the sentence the flare blazed up violently between them and he saw her throw herself back with an arm across her face. "Hallo," he exclaimed; only he could not stop a moment to ask if she was hurt. He bolted out of the companion straight into his captain who took the flare from him and held it high above his head.

The fierce flame fluttered like a silk flag, throwing an angry swaying glare mingled with moving shadows over the poop, lighting up the concave surfaces of the sails,

gleaming on the wet paint of the white rails. And young Powell turned his eyes to windward with a catch in his breath.

The strange ship, a darker shape in the night, did not seem to be moving onwards but only to grow more distinct right abeam, staring at the Ferndale with one green and one red eye which swayed and tossed as if they belonged to the restless head of some invisible monster ambushed in the night amongst the waves. A moment, long like eternity, elapsed, and, suddenly, the monster which seemed to take to itself the shape of a mountain shut its green eye without as much as a preparatory wink.

Mr. Powell drew a free breath. "All right now," said Captain Anthony in a quiet undertone. He gave the blazing flare to Powell and walked aft to watch the passing of that menace of destruction coming blindly with its parti-coloured stare out of a blind night on the wings of a sweeping wind. Her very form could be distinguished now black and elongated amongst the hissing patches of foam bursting along her path.

As is always the case with a ship running before wind and sea she did not seem to an onlooker to move very fast; but to be progressing indolently in long leisurely bounds and pauses in the midst of the overtaking waves. It was only when actually passing the stern within easy hail of the Ferndale, that her headlong speed became apparent to the eye. With the red light shut off and soaring like an immense shadow on the crest of a wave she was lost to view in one great, forward swing, melting into the lightless space.

"Close shave," said Captain Anthony in an indifferent voice just raised enough to be heard in the wind. "A blind lot on board that ship. Put out the flare now."

Silently Mr. Powell inverted the holder, smothering the flame in the can, bringing about by the mere turn of his wrist the fall of darkness upon the poop. And at the same time vanished out of his mind's eye the vision of another flame enormous and fierce shooting violently from a white churned patch of the sea, lighting up the very clouds and carrying upwards in its volcanic rush flying spars, corpses, the fragments of two destroyed ships. It vanished and there was an immense relief. He told me he did not know how scared he had been, not generally but of that very thing his imagination had conjured, till it was all over. He measured it (for fear is a great tension) by the feeling of slack weariness which came over him all at once.

He walked to the companion and stooping low to put the flare in its usual place saw in the darkness the motionless pale oval of Mrs. Anthony's face. She whispered quietly:

"Is anything going to happen? What is it?"

"It's all over now," he whispered back.

He remained bent low, his head inside the cover staring at that white ghostly oval. He wondered she had not rushed out on deck. She had remained quietly there. This was pluck. Wonderful self-restraint. And it was not stupidity on her part. She knew there was imminent danger and probably had some notion of its nature.

"You stayed here waiting for what would come," he murmured admiringly.

"Wasn't that the best thing to do?" she asked.

He didn't know. Perhaps. He confessed he could not have done it. Not he. His flesh and blood could not have stood it. He would have felt he must see what was coming. Then he remembered that the flare might have scorched her face, and expressed his concern.

"A bit. Nothing to hurt. Smell the singed hair?"

There was a sort of gaiety in her tone. She might have been frightened but she certainly was not overcome and suffered from no reaction. This confirmed and augmented if possible Mr. Powell's good opinion of her as a "jolly girl," though it seemed to him positively monstrous to refer in such terms to one's captain's wife. "But she doesn't look it," he thought in extenuation and was going to say something more to her about the lighting of that flare when another voice was heard in the companion, saying some indistinct words. Its tone was contemptuous; it came from below, from the bottom of the stairs. It was a voice in the cabin. And the only other voice which could be heard in the main cabin at this time of the evening was the voice of Mrs. Anthony's father. The indistinct white oval sank from Mr. Powell's sight so swiftly as to take him by surprise. For a moment he hung at the opening of the companion and now that her slight form was no longer obstructing the narrow and winding staircase the voices came up louder but the words were still indistinct. The old gentleman was excited about something and Mrs. Anthony was "managing him" as Powell expressed it. They moved away from the bottom of the stairs and Powell went away from the companion. Yet he fancied he had heard the words "Lost to me" before he withdrew his head. They had been uttered by Mr. Smith.

Captain Anthony had not moved away from the taffrail. He remained in the very position he took up to watch the other ship go by rolling and swinging all shadowy in the uproar of the following seas. He stirred not; and Powell keeping near by did not dare speak to him, so enigmatical in its contemplation of the night did his figure appear to his young eyes: indistinct — and in its immobility staring into gloom, the prey of some incomprehensible grief, longing or regret.

Why is it that the stillness of a human being is often so impressive, so suggestive of evil — as if our proper fate were a ceaseless agitation? The stillness of Captain Anthony became almost intolerable to his second officer. Mr. Powell loitering about the skylight wanted his captain off the deck now. "Why doesn't he go below?" he asked himself impatiently. He ventured a cough.

Whether the effect of the cough or not Captain Anthony spoke. He did not move the least bit. With his back remaining turned to the whole length of the ship he asked Mr. Powell with some brusqueness if the chief mate had neglected to instruct him that the captain was to be found on the port side.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Powell approaching his back. "The mate told me to stamp on the port side when I wanted you; but I didn't remember at the moment."

"You should remember," the captain uttered with an effort. Then added mumbling "I don't want Mrs. Anthony frightened. Don't you see? . . ."

"She wasn't this time," Powell said innocently: "She lighted the flare-up for me, sir."

"This time," Captain Anthony exclaimed and turned round. "Mrs. Anthony lighted the flare? Mrs. Anthony! . . ." Powell explained that she was in the companion all the time.

"All the time," repeated the captain. It seemed queer to Powell that instead of going himself to see the captain should ask him:

"Is she there now?"

Powell said that she had gone below after the ship had passed clear of the Ferndale. Captain Anthony made a movement towards the companion himself, when Powell added the information. "Mr. Smith called to Mrs. Anthony from the saloon, sir. I believe they are talking there now."

He was surprised to see the captain give up the idea of going below after all.

He began to walk the poop instead regardless of the cold, of the damp wind and of the sprays. And yet he had nothing on but his sleeping suit and slippers. Powell placing himself on the break of the poop kept a look-out. When after some time he turned his head to steal a glance at his eccentric captain he could not see his active and shadowy figure swinging to and fro. The second mate of the Ferndale walked aft peering about and addressed the seaman who steered.

"Captain gone below?"

"Yes, sir," said the fellow who with a quid of tobacco bulging out his left cheek kept his eyes on the compass card. "This minute. He laughed."

"Laughed," repeated Powell incredulously. "Do you mean the captain did? You must be mistaken. What would he want to laugh for?"

"Don't know, sir."

The elderly sailor displayed a profound indifference towards human emotions. However, after a longish pause he conceded a few words more to the second officer's weakness. "Yes. He was walking the deck as usual when suddenly he laughed a little and made for the companion. Thought of something funny all at once."

Something funny! That Mr. Powell could not believe. He did not ask himself why, at the time. Funny thoughts come to men, though, in all sorts of situations; they come to all sorts of men. Nevertheless Mr. Powell was shocked to learn that Captain Anthony had laughed without visible cause on a certain night. The impression for some reason was disagreeable. And it was then, while finishing his watch, with the chilly gusts of wind sweeping at him out of the darkness where the short sea of the soundings growled spitefully all round the ship, that it occurred to his unsophisticated mind that perhaps things are not what they are confidently expected to be; that it was possible that Captain Anthony was not a happy man . . . In so far you will perceive he was to a certain extent prepared for the apoplectic and sensitive Franklin's lamentations about his captain. And though he treated them with a contempt which was in a great measure sincere, yet he admitted to me that deep down within him an inexplicable and uneasy suspicion that all was not well in that cabin, so unusually cut off from the rest of the ship, came into being and grew against his will.

Chapter 4 — Anthony and Flora

Marlow emerged out of the shadow of the book-case to get himself a cigar from a box which stood on a little table by my side. In the full light of the room I saw in his eyes that slightly mocking expression with which he habitually covers up his sympathetic impulses of mirth and pity before the unreasonable complications the idealism of mankind puts into the simple but poignant problem of conduct on this earth.

He selected and lit the cigar with affected care, then turned upon me, I had been looking at him silently.

“I suppose,” he said, the mockery of his eyes giving a pellucid quality to his tone, “that you think it’s high time I told you something definite. I mean something about that psychological cabin mystery of discomfort (for it’s obvious that it must be psychological) which affected so profoundly Mr. Franklin the chief mate, and had even disturbed the serene innocence of Mr. Powell, the second of the ship *Ferndale*, commanded by Roderick Anthony — the son of the poet, you know.”

“You are going to confess now that you have failed to find it out,” I said in pretended indignation.

“It would serve you right if I told you that I have. But I won’t. I haven’t failed. I own though that for a time, I was puzzled. However, I have now seen our Powell many times under the most favourable conditions — and besides I came upon a most unexpected source of information . . . But never mind that. The means don’t concern you except in so far as they belong to the story. I’ll admit that for some time the old-maiden-lady-like occupation of putting two and two together failed to procure a coherent theory. I am speaking now as an investigator — a man of deductions. With what we know of Roderick Anthony and Flora de Barral I could not deduct an ordinary marital quarrel beautifully matured in less than a year — could I? If you ask me what is an ordinary marital quarrel I will tell you, that it is a difference about nothing; I mean, these nothings which, as Mr. Powell told us when we first met him, shore people are so prone to start a row about, and nurse into hatred from an idle sense of wrong, from perverted ambition, for spectacular reasons too. There are on earth no actors too humble and obscure not to have a gallery; that gallery which envenoms the play by stealthy jeers, counsels of anger, amused comments or words of perfidious compassion. However, the Anthonys were free from all demoralizing influences. At sea, you know, there is no gallery. You hear no tormenting echoes of your own littleness there, where either a great elemental voice roars defiantly under the sky or else an elemental silence seems to be part of the infinite stillness of the universe.

Remembering Flora de Barral in the depths of moral misery, and Roderick Anthony carried away by a gust of tempestuous tenderness, I asked myself, Is it all forgotten already? What could they have found to estrange them from each other with this rapidity and this thoroughness so far from all temptations, in the peace of the sea and in an isolation so complete that if it had not been the jealous devotion of the

sentimental Franklin stimulating the attention of Powell, there would have been no record, no evidence of it at all.

I must confess at once that it was Flora de Barral whom I suspected. In this world as at present organized women are the suspected half of the population. There are good reasons for that. These reasons are so discoverable with a little reflection that it is not worth my while to set them out for you. I will only mention this: that the part falling to women's share being all "influence" has an air of occult and mysterious action, something not altogether trustworthy like all natural forces which, for us, work in the dark because of our imperfect comprehension.

If women were not a force of nature, blind in its strength and capricious in its power, they would not be mistrusted. As it is one can't help it. You will say that this force having been in the person of Flora de Barral captured by Anthony . . . Why yes. He had dealt with her masterfully. But man has captured electricity too. It lights him on his way, it warms his home, it will even cook his dinner for him — very much like a woman. But what sort of conquest would you call it? He knows nothing of it. He has got to be mighty careful what he is about with his captive. And the greater the demand he makes on it in the exultation of his pride the more likely it is to turn on him and burn him to a cinder . . . “

“A far-fetched enough parallel,” I observed coldly to Marlow. He had returned to the arm-chair in the shadow of the bookcase. “But accepting the meaning you have in your mind it reduces itself to the knowledge of how to use it. And if you mean that this ravenous Anthony — ”

“Ravenous is good,” interrupted Marlow. “He was a-hungering and a-thirsting for femininity to enter his life in a way no mere feminist could have the slightest conception of. I reckon that this accounts for much of Fyne's disgust with him. Good little Fyne. You have no idea what infernal mischief he had worked during his call at the hotel. But then who could have suspected Anthony of being a heroic creature. There are several kinds of heroism and one of them at least is idiotic. It is the one which wears the aspect of sublime delicacy. It is apparently the one of which the son of the delicate poet was capable.

He certainly resembled his father, who, by the way, wore out two women without any satisfaction to himself, because they did not come up to his supra-refined standard of the delicacy which is so perceptible in his verses. That's your poet. He demands too much from others. The inarticulate son had set up a standard for himself with that need for embodying in his conduct the dreams, the passion, the impulses the poet puts into arrangements of verses, which are dearer to him than his own self — and may make his own self appear sublime in the eyes of other people, and even in his own eyes.

Did Anthony wish to appear sublime in his own eyes? I should not like to make that charge; though indeed there are other, less noble, ambitions at which the world does not dare to smile. But I don't think so; I do not even think that there was in what he did a conscious and lofty confidence in himself, a particularly pronounced sense of power which leads men so often into impossible or equivocal situations. Looked at

abstractedly (the way in which truth is often seen in its real shape) his life had been a life of solitude and silence — and desire.

Chance had thrown that girl in his way; and if we may smile at his violent conquest of Flora de Barral we must admit also that this eager appropriation was truly the act of a man of solitude and desire; a man also, who, unless a complete imbecile, must have been a man of long and ardent reveries wherein the faculty of sincere passion matures slowly in the unexplored recesses of the heart. And I know also that a passion, dominating or tyrannical, invading the whole man and subjugating all his faculties to its own unique end, may conduct him whom it spurs and drives, into all sorts of adventures, to the brink of unfathomable dangers, to the limits of folly, and madness, and death.

To the man then of a silence made only more impressive by the inarticulate thunders and mutters of the great seas, an utter stranger to the clatter of tongues, there comes the muscular little Fyne, the most marked representative of that mankind whose voice is so strange to him, the husband of his sister, a personality standing out from the misty and remote multitude. He comes and throws at him more talk than he had ever heard boomed out in an hour, and certainly touching the deepest things Anthony had ever discovered in himself, and flings words like “unfair” whose very sound is abhorrent to him. Unfair! Undue advantage! He! Unfair to that girl? Cruel to her!

No scorn could stand against the impression of such charges advanced with heat and conviction. They shook him. They were yet vibrating in the air of that stuffy hotel-room, terrific, disturbing, impossible to get rid of, when the door opened and Flora de Barral entered.

He did not even notice that she was late. He was sitting on a sofa plunged in gloom. Was it true? Having himself always said exactly what he meant he imagined that people (unless they were liars, which of course his brother-in-law could not be) never said more than they meant. The deep chest voice of little Fyne was still in his ear. “He knows,” Anthony said to himself. He thought he had better go away and never see her again. But she stood there before him accusing and appealing. How could he abandon her? That was out of the question. She had no one. Or rather she had someone. That father. Anthony was willing to take him at her valuation. This father may have been the victim of the most atrocious injustice. But what could a man coming out of jail do? An old man too. And then — what sort of man? What would become of them both? Anthony shuddered slightly and the faint smile with which Flora had entered the room faded on her lips. She was used to his impetuous tenderness. She was no longer afraid of it. But she had never seen him look like this before, and she suspected at once some new cruelty of life. He got up with his usual ardour but as if sobered by a momentous resolve and said:

“No. I can’t let you out of my sight. I have seen you. You have told me your story. You are honest. You have never told me you loved me.”

She waited, saying to herself that he had never given her time, that he had never asked her! And that, in truth, she did not know!

I am inclined to believe that she did not. As abundance of experience is not precisely her lot in life, a woman is seldom an expert in matters of sentiment. It is the man who can and generally does “see himself” pretty well inside and out. Women’s self-possession is an outward thing; inwardly they flutter, perhaps because they are, or they feel themselves to be, engaged. All this speaking generally. In Flora de Barral’s particular case ever since Anthony had suddenly broken his way into her hopeless and cruel existence she lived like a person liberated from a condemned cell by a natural cataclysm, a tempest, an earthquake; not absolutely terrified, because nothing can be worse than the eve of execution, but stunned, bewildered — abandoning herself passively. She did not want to make a sound, to move a limb. She hadn’t the strength. What was the good? And deep down, almost unconsciously she was seduced by the feeling of being supported by this violence. A sensation she had never experienced before in her life.

She felt as if this whirlwind were calming down somehow! As if this feeling of support, which was tempting her to close her eyes deliciously and let herself be carried on and on into the unknown undefiled by vile experiences, were less certain, had wavered threateningly. She tried to read something in his face, in that energetic kindly face to which she had become accustomed so soon. But she was not yet capable of understanding its expression. Scared, discouraged on the threshold of adolescence, plunged in moral misery of the bitterest kind, she had not learned to read — not that sort of language.

If Anthony’s love had been as egoistic as love generally is, it would have been greater than the egoism of his vanity — or of his generosity, if you like — and all this could not have happened. He would not have hit upon that renunciation at which one does not know whether to grin or shudder. It is true too that then his love would not have fastened itself upon the unhappy daughter of de Barral. But it was a love born of that rare pity which is not akin to contempt because rooted in an overwhelmingly strong capacity for tenderness — the tenderness of the fiery kind — the tenderness of silent solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts of their kind. At the time I am forced to think that his vanity must have been enormous.

“What big eyes she has,” he said to himself amazed. No wonder. She was staring at him with all the might of her soul awakening slowly from a poisoned sleep, in which it could only quiver with pain but could neither expand nor move. He plunged into them breathless and tense, deep, deep, like a mad sailor taking a desperate dive from the masthead into the blue unfathomable sea so many men have execrated and loved at the same time. And his vanity was immense. It had been touched to the quick by that muscular little feminist, Fyne. “I! I! Take advantage of her helplessness. I! Unfair to that creature — that wisp of mist, that white shadow homeless in an ugly dirty world. I could blow her away with a breath,” he was saying to himself with horror. “Never!” All the supremely refined delicacy of tenderness, expressed in so many fine lines of verse by Carleon Anthony, grew to the size of a passion filling with inward sobs the big frame of the man who had never in his life read a single one of those famous sonnets

singing of the most highly civilized, chivalrous love, of those sonnets which . . . You know there's a volume of them. My edition has the portrait of the author at thirty, and when I showed it to Mr. Powell the other day he exclaimed: "Wonderful! One would think this the portrait of Captain Anthony himself if . . ." I wanted to know what that was. But Powell could not say. There was something — a difference. No doubt there was — in fineness perhaps. The father, fastidious, cerebral, morbidly shrinking from all contacts, could only sing in harmonious numbers of what the son felt with a dumb and reckless sincerity.

* * * * *

Possessed by most strong men's touching illusion as to the frailness of women and their spiritual fragility, it seemed to Anthony that he would be destroying, breaking something very precious inside that being. In fact nothing less than partly murdering her. This seems a very extreme effect to flow from Fyne's words. But Anthony, unaccustomed to the chatter of the firm earth, never stayed to ask himself what value these words could have in Fyne's mouth. And indeed the mere dark sound of them was utterly abhorrent to his native rectitude, sea-salted, hardened in the winds of wide horizons, open as the day.

He wished to blurt out his indignation but she regarded him with an expectant air which checked him. His visible discomfort made her uneasy. He could only repeat "Oh yes. You are perfectly honest. You might have, but I dare say you are right. At any rate you have never said anything to me which you didn't mean."

"Never," she whispered after a pause.

He seemed distracted, choking with an emotion she could not understand because it resembled embarrassment, a state of mind inconceivable in that man.

She wondered what it was she had said; remembering that in very truth she had hardly spoken to him except when giving him the bare outline of her story which he seemed to have hardly had the patience to hear, waving it perpetually aside with exclamations of horror and anger, with fiercely sombre mutters "Enough! Enough!" and with alarming starts from a forced stillness, as though he meant to rush out at once and take vengeance on somebody. She was saying to herself that he caught her words in the air, never letting her finish her thought. Honest. Honest. Yes certainly she had been that. Her letter to Mrs. Fyne had been prompted by honesty. But she reflected sadly that she had never known what to say to him. That perhaps she had nothing to say.

"But you'll find out that I can be honest too," he burst out in a menacing tone, she had learned to appreciate with an amused thrill.

She waited for what was coming. But he hung in the wind. He looked round the room with disgust as if he could see traces on the walls of all the casual tenants that had ever passed through it. People had quarrelled in that room; they had been ill in it, there had been misery in that room, wickedness, crime perhaps — death most likely. This was not a fit place. He snatched up his hat. He had made up his mind. The ship

— the ship he had known ever since she came off the stocks, his home — her shelter — the uncontaminated, honest ship, was the place.

“Let us go on board. We’ll talk there,” he said. “And you will have to listen to me. For whatever happens, no matter what they say, I cannot let you go.”

You can’t say that (misgivings or no misgivings) she could have done anything else but go on board. It was the appointed business of that morning. During the drive he was silent. Anthony was the last man to condemn conventionally any human being, to scorn and despise even deserved misfortune. He was ready to take old de Barral — the convict — on his daughter’s valuation without the slightest reserve. But love like his, though it may drive one into risky folly by the proud consciousness of its own strength, has a sagacity of its own. And now, as if lifted up into a higher and serene region by its purpose of renunciation, it gave him leisure to reflect for the first time in these last few days. He said to himself: “I don’t know that man. She does not know him either. She was barely sixteen when they locked him up. She was a child. What will he say? What will he do? No, he concluded, I cannot leave her behind with that man who would come into the world as if out of a grave.

They went on board in silence, and it was after showing her round and when they had returned to the saloon that he assailed her in his fiery, masterful fashion. At first she did not understand. Then when she understood that he was giving her her liberty she went stiff all over, her hand resting on the edge of the table, her face set like a carving of white marble. It was all over. It was as that abominable governess had said. She was insignificant, contemptible. Nobody could love her. Humiliation clung to her like a cold shroud — never to be shaken off, unwarmed by this madness of generosity.

“Yes. Here. Your home. I can’t give it to you and go away, but it is big enough for us two. You need not be afraid. If you say so I shall not even look at you. Remember that grey head of which you have been thinking night and day. Where is it going to rest? Where else if not here, where nothing evil can touch it. Don’t you understand that I won’t let you buy shelter from me at the cost of your very soul. I won’t. You are too much part of me. I have found myself since I came upon you and I would rather sell my own soul to the devil than let you go out of my keeping. But I must have the right.”

He went away brusquely to shut the door leading on deck and came back the whole length of the cabin repeating:

“I must have the legal right. Are you ashamed of letting people think you are my wife?”

He opened his arms as if to clasp her to his breast but mastered the impulse and shook his clenched hands at her, repeating: “I must have the right if only for your father’s sake. I must have the right. Where would you take him? To that infernal cardboard box-maker. I don’t know what keeps me from hunting him up in his virtuous home and bashing his head in. I can’t bear the thought. Listen to me, Flora! Do you hear what I am saying to you? You are not so proud that you can’t understand that I as a man have my pride too?”

He saw a tear glide down her white cheek from under each lowered eyelid. Then, abruptly, she walked out of the cabin. He stood for a moment, concentrated, reckoning his own strength, interrogating his heart, before he followed her hastily. Already she had reached the wharf.

At the sound of his pursuing footsteps her strength failed her. Where could she escape from this? From this new perfidy of life taking upon itself the form of magnanimity. His very voice was changed. The sustaining whirlwind had let her down, to stumble on again, weakened by the fresh stab, bereft of moral support which is wanted in life more than all the charities of material help. She had never had it. Never. Not from the Fynes. But where to go? Oh yes, this dock — a placid sheet of water close at hand. But there was that old man with whom she had walked hand in hand on the parade by the sea. She seemed to see him coming to meet her, pitiful, a little greyer, with an appealing look and an extended, tremulous arm. It was for her now to take the hand of that wronged man more helpless than a child. But where could she lead him? Where? And what was she to say to him? What words of cheer, of courage and of hope? There were none. Heaven and earth were mute, unconcerned at their meeting. But this other man was coming up behind her. He was very close now. His fiery person seemed to radiate heat, a tingling vibration into the atmosphere. She was exhausted, careless, afraid to stumble, ready to fall. She fancied she could hear his breathing. A wave of languid warmth overtook her, she seemed to lose touch with the ground under her feet; and when she felt him slip his hand under her arm she made no attempt to disengage herself from that grasp which closed upon her limb, insinuating and firm.

He conducted her through the dangers of the quayside. Her sight was dim. A moving truck was like a mountain gliding by. Men passed by as if in a mist; and the buildings, the sheds, the unexpected open spaces, the ships, had strange, distorted, dangerous shapes. She said to herself that it was good not to be bothered with what all these things meant in the scheme of creation (if indeed anything had a meaning), or were just piled-up matter without any sense. She felt how she had always been unrelated to this world. She was hanging on to it merely by that one arm grasped firmly just above the elbow. It was a captivity. So be it. Till they got out into the street and saw the hansom waiting outside the gates Anthony spoke only once, beginning brusquely but in a much gentler tone than she had ever heard from his lips.

“Of course I ought to have known that you could not care for a man like me, a stranger. Silence gives consent. Yes? Eh? I don’t want any of that sort of consent. And unless some day you find you can speak . . . No! No! I shall never ask you. For all the sign I will give you you may go to your grave with sealed lips. But what I have said you must do!”

He bent his head over her with tender care. At the same time she felt her arm pressed and shaken inconspicuously, but in an undeniable manner. “You must do it.” A little shake that no passer-by could notice; and this was going on in a deserted part of the dock. “It must be done. You are listening to me — eh? or would you go again to my sister?”

His ironic tone, perhaps from want of use, had an awful grating ferocity.

"Would you go to her?" he pursued in the same strange voice. "Your best friend! And say nicely — I am sorry. Would you? No! You couldn't. There are things that even you, poor dear lost girl, couldn't stand. Eh? Die rather. That's it. Of course. Or can you be thinking of taking your father to that infernal cousin's house. No! Don't speak. I can't bear to think of it. I would follow you there and smash the door!"

The catch in his voice astonished her by its resemblance to a sob. It frightened her too. The thought that came to her head was: "He mustn't." He was putting her into the hansom. "Oh! He mustn't, he mustn't." She was still more frightened by the discovery that he was shaking all over. Bewildered, shrinking into the far off corner, avoiding his eyes, she yet saw the quivering of his mouth and made a wild attempt at a smile, which broke the rigidity of her lips and set her teeth chattering suddenly.

"I am not coming with you," he was saying. "I'll tell the man . . . I can't. Better not. What is it? Are you cold? Come! What is it? Only to go to a confounded stuffy room, a hole of an office. Not a quarter of an hour. I'll come for you — in ten days. Don't think of it too much. Think of no man, woman or child of all that silly crowd cumbering the ground. Don't think of me either. Think of yourself. Ha! Nothing will be able to touch you then — at last. Say nothing. Don't move. I'll have everything arranged; and as long as you don't hate the sight of me — and you don't — there's nothing to be frightened about. One of their silly offices with a couple of ink-slingers of no consequence; poor, scribbling devils."

The hansom drove away with Flora de Barral inside, without movement, without thought, only too glad to rest, to be alone and still moving away without effort, in solitude and silence.

Anthony roamed the streets for hours without being able to remember in the evening where he had been — in the manner of a happy and exulting lover. But nobody could have thought so from his face, which bore no signs of blissful anticipation. Exulting indeed he was but it was a special sort of exultation which seemed to take him by the throat like an enemy.

Anthony's last words to Flora referred to the registry office where they were married ten days later. During that time Anthony saw no one or anything, though he went about restlessly, here and there, amongst men and things. This special state is peculiar to common lovers, who are known to have no eyes for anything except for the contemplation, actual or inward, of one human form which for them contains the soul of the whole world in all its beauty, perfection, variety and infinity. It must be extremely pleasant. But felicity was denied to Roderick Anthony's contemplation. He was not a common sort of lover; and he was punished for it as if Nature (which it is said abhors a vacuum) were so very conventional as to abhor every sort of exceptional conduct. Roderick Anthony had begun already to suffer. That is why perhaps he was so industrious in going about amongst his fellowmen who would have been surprised and humiliated, had they known how little solidity and even existence they had in his eyes. But they could not suspect anything so queer. They saw nothing extraordinary

in him during that fortnight. The proof of this is that they were willing to transact business with him. Obviously they were; since it is then that the offer of chartering his ship for the special purpose of proceeding to the Western Islands was put in his way by a firm of shipbrokers who had no doubt of his sanity.

He probably looked sane enough for all the practical purposes of commercial life. But I am not so certain that he really was quite sane at that time.

However, he jumped at the offer. Providence itself was offering him this opportunity to accustom the girl to sea-life by a comparatively short trip. This was the time when everything that happened, everything he heard, casual words, unrelated phrases, seemed a provocation or an encouragement, confirmed him in his resolution. And indeed to be busy with material affairs is the best preservative against reflection, fears, doubts — all these things which stand in the way of achievement. I suppose a fellow proposing to cut his throat would experience a sort of relief while occupied in stropping his razor carefully.

And Anthony was extremely careful in preparing for himself and for the luckless Flora, an impossible existence. He went about it with no more tremors than if he had been stuffed with rags or made of iron instead of flesh and blood. An existence, mind you, which, on shore, in the thick of mankind, of varied interests, of distractions, of infinite opportunities to preserve your distance from each other, is hardly conceivable; but on board ship, at sea, *en tête-à-tête* for days and weeks and months together, could mean nothing but mental torture, an exquisite absurdity of torment. He was a simple soul. His hopelessly masculine ingenuousness is displayed in a touching way by his care to procure some woman to attend on Flora. The condition of guaranteed perfect respectability gave him moments of anxious thought. When he remembered suddenly his steward's wife he must have exclaimed *eureka* with particular exultation. One does not like to call Anthony an ass. But really to put any woman within scenting distance of such a secret and suppose that she would not track it out!

No woman, however simple, could be as ingenuous as that. I don't know how Flora de Barral qualified him in her thoughts when he told her of having done this amongst other things intended to make her comfortable. I should think that, for all her simplicity, she must have been appalled. He stood before her on the appointed day outwardly calmer than she had ever seen him before. And this very calmness, that scrupulous attitude which he felt bound in honour to assume then and for ever, unless she would condescend to make a sign at some future time, added to the heaviness of her heart innocent of the most pardonable guile.

The night before she had slept better than she had done for the past ten nights. Both youth and weariness will assert themselves in the end against the tyranny of nerve-racking stress. She had slept but she woke up with her eyes full of tears. There were no traces of them when she met him in the shabby little parlour downstairs. She had swallowed them up. She was not going to let him see. She felt bound in honour to accept the situation for ever and ever unless . . . Ah, unless . . . She dissembled all

her sentiments but it was not duplicity on her part. All she wanted was to get at the truth; to see what would come of it.

She beat him at his own honourable game and the thoroughness of her serenity disconcerted Anthony a bit. It was he who stammered when it came to talking. The suppressed fierceness of his character carried him on after the first word or two masterfully enough. But it was as if they both had taken a bite of the same bitter fruit. He was thinking with mournful regret not unmixed with surprise: "That fellow Fyne has been telling me the truth. She does not care for me a bit." It humiliated him and also increased his compassion for the girl who in this darkness of life, buffeted and despairing, had fallen into the grip of his stronger will, abandoning herself to his arms as on a night of shipwreck. Flora on her side with partial insight (for women are never blind with the complete masculine blindness) looked on him with some pity; and she felt pity for herself too. It was a rejection, a casting out; nothing new to her. But she who supposed all her sensibility dead by this time, discovered in herself a resentment of this ultimate betrayal. She had no resignation for this one. With a sort of mental sullenness she said to herself: "Well, I am here. I am here without any nonsense. It is not my fault that I am a mere worthless object of pity."

And these things which she could tell herself with a clear conscience served her better than the passionate obstinacy of purpose could serve Roderick Anthony. She was much more sure of herself than he was. Such are the advantages of mere rectitude over the most exalted generosity.

And so they went out to get married, the people of the house where she lodged having no suspicion of anything of the sort. They were only excited at a "gentleman friend" (a very fine man too) calling on Miss Smith for the first time since she had come to live in the house. When she returned, for she did come back alone, there were allusions made to that outing. She had to take her meals with these rather vulgar people. The woman of the house, a scraggy, genteel person, tried even to provoke confidences. Flora's white face with the deep blue eyes did not strike their hearts as it did the heart of Captain Anthony, as the very face of the suffering world. Her pained reserve had no power to awe them into decency.

Well, she returned alone — as in fact might have been expected. After leaving the Registry Office Flora de Barral and Roderick Anthony had gone for a walk in a park. It must have been an East-End park but I am not sure. Anyway that's what they did. It was a sunny day. He said to her: "Everything I have in the world belongs to you. I have seen to that without troubling my brother-in-law. They have no call to interfere."

She walked with her hand resting lightly on his arm. He had offered it to her on coming out of the Registry Office, and she had accepted it silently. Her head drooped, she seemed to be turning matters over in her mind. She said, alluding to the Fynes: "They have been very good to me." At that he exclaimed:

"They have never understood you. Well, not properly. My sister is not a bad woman, but . . ."

Flora didn't protest; asking herself whether he imagined that he himself understood her so much better. Anthony dismissing his family out of his thoughts went on: "Yes. Everything is yours. I have kept nothing back. As to the piece of paper we have just got from that miserable quill-driver if it wasn't for the law, I wouldn't mind if you tore it up here, now, on this spot. But don't you do it. Unless you should some day feel that — "

He choked, unexpectedly. She, reflective, hesitated a moment then making up her mind bravely.

"Neither am I keeping anything back from you."

She had said it! But he in his blind generosity assumed that she was alluding to her deplorable history and hastened to mutter:

"Of course! Of course! Say no more. I have been lying awake thinking of it all no end of times."

He made a movement with his other arm as if restraining himself from shaking an indignant fist at the universe; and she never even attempted to look at him. His voice sounded strangely, incredibly lifeless in comparison with these tempestuous accents that in the broad fields, in the dark garden had seemed to shake the very earth under her weary and hopeless feet.

She regretted them. Hearing the sigh which escaped her Anthony instead of shaking his fist at the universe began to pat her hand resting on his arm and then desisted, suddenly, as though he had burnt himself. Then after a silence:

"You will have to go by yourself to-morrow. I . . . No, I think I mustn't come. Better not. What you two will have to say to each other — "

She interrupted him quickly:

"Father is an innocent man. He was cruelly wronged."

"Yes. That's why," Anthony insisted earnestly. "And you are the only human being that can make it up to him. You alone must reconcile him with the world if anything can. But of course you shall. You'll have to find words. Oh you'll know. And then the sight of you, alone, would soothe — "

"He's the gentlest of men," she interrupted again.

Anthony shook his head. "It would take no end of generosity, no end of gentleness to forgive such a dead set. For my part I would have liked better to have been killed and done with at once. It could not have been worse for you — and I suppose it was of you that he was thinking most while those infernal lawyers were badgering him in court. Of you. And now I think of it perhaps the sight of you may bring it all back to him. All these years, all these years — and you his child left alone in the world. I would have gone crazy. For even if he had done wrong — "

"But he hasn't," insisted Flora de Barral with a quite unexpected fierceness. "You mustn't even suppose it. Haven't you read the accounts of the trial?"

"I am not supposing anything," Anthony defended himself. He just remembered hearing of the trial. He assured her that he was away from England, the second voyage

of the Ferndale. He was crossing the Pacific from Australia at the time and didn't see any papers for weeks and weeks. He interrupted himself to suggest:

"You had better tell him at once that you are happy."

He had stammered a little, and Flora de Barral uttered a deliberate and concise "Yes."

A short silence ensued. She withdrew her hand from his arm. They stopped. Anthony looked as if a totally unexpected catastrophe had happened.

"Ah," he said. "You mind . . ."

"No! I think I had better," she murmured.

"I dare say. I dare say. Bring him along straight on board to-morrow. Stop nowhere."

She had a movement of vague gratitude, a momentary feeling of peace which she referred to the man before her. She looked up at Anthony. His face was sombre. He was miles away and muttered as if to himself:

"Where could he want to stop though?"

"There's not a single being on earth that I would want to look at his dear face now, to whom I would willingly take him," she said extending her hand frankly and with a slight break in her voice, "but you — Roderick."

He took that hand, felt it very small and delicate in his broad palm.

"That's right. That's right," he said with a conscious and hasty heartiness and, as if suddenly ashamed of the sound of his voice, turned half round and absolutely walked away from the motionless girl. He even resisted the temptation to look back till it was too late. The gravel path lay empty to the very gate of the park. She was gone — vanished. He had an impression that he had missed some sort of chance. He felt sad. That excited sense of his own conduct which had kept him up for the last ten days buoyed him no more. He had succeeded!

He strolled on aimlessly a prey to gentle melancholy. He walked and walked. There were but few people about in this breathing space of a poor neighbourhood. Under certain conditions of life there is precious little time left for mere breathing. But still a few here and there were indulging in that luxury; yet few as they were Captain Anthony, though the least exclusive of men, resented their presence. Solitude had been his best friend. He wanted some place where he could sit down and be alone. And in his need his thoughts turned to the sea which had given him so much of that congenial solitude. There, if always with his ship (but that was an integral part of him) he could always be as solitary as he chose. Yes. Get out to sea!

The night of the town with its strings of lights, rigid, and crossed like a net of flames, thrown over the sombre immensity of walls, closed round him, with its artificial brilliance overhung by an emphatic blackness, its unnatural animation of a restless, overdriven humanity. His thoughts which somehow were inclined to pity every passing figure, every single person glimpsed under a street lamp, fixed themselves at last upon a figure which certainly could not have been seen under the lamps on that particular night. A figure unknown to him. A figure shut up within high unscaleable walls of

stone or bricks till next morning . . . The figure of Flora de Barral's father. De Barral the financier — the convict.

There is something in that word with its suggestions of guilt and retribution which arrests the thought. We feel ourselves in the presence of the power of organized society — a thing mysterious in itself and still more mysterious in its effect. Whether guilty or innocent, it was as if old de Barral had been down to the Nether Regions. Impossible to imagine what he would bring out from there to the light of this world of uncondemned men. What would he think? What would he have to say? And what was one to say to him?

Anthony, a little awed, as one is by a range of feelings stretching beyond one's grasp, comforted himself by the thought that probably the old fellow would have little to say. He wouldn't want to talk about it. No man would. It must have been a real hell to him.

And then Anthony, at the end of the day in which he had gone through a marriage ceremony with Flora de Barral, ceased to think of Flora's father except, as in some sort, the captive of his triumph. He turned to the mental contemplation of the white, delicate and appealing face with great blue eyes which he had seen weep and wonder and look profoundly at him, sometimes with incredulity, sometimes with doubt and pain, but always irresistible in the power to find their way right into his breast, to stir there a deep response which was something more than love — he said to himself, — as men understand it. More? Or was it only something other? Yes. It was something other. More or less. Something as incredible as the fulfilment of an amazing and startling dream in which he could take the world in his arms — all the suffering world — not to possess its pathetic fairness but to console and cherish its sorrow.

Anthony walked slowly to the ship and that night slept without dreams.

Chapter 5 — the Great De Barral

Renovated certainly the saloon of the Ferndale was to receive the "strange woman." The mellowness of its old-fashioned, tarnished decoration was gone. And Anthony looking round saw the glitter, the gleams, the colour of new things, untried, unused, very bright — too bright. The workmen had gone only last night; and the last piece of work they did was the hanging of the heavy curtains which looped midway the length of the saloon — divided it in two if released, cutting off the after end with its companion-way leading direct on the poop, from the forepart with its outlet on the deck; making a privacy within a privacy, as though Captain Anthony could not place obstacles enough between his new happiness and the men who shared his life at sea. He inspected that arrangement with an approving eye then made a particular visitation of the whole, ending by opening a door which led into a large state-room made of two knocked into one. It was very well furnished and had, instead of the usual bedplace of such cabins, an elaborate swinging cot of the latest pattern. Anthony tilted it a little

by way of trial. "The old man will be very comfortable in here," he said to himself, and stepped back into the saloon closing the door gently. Then another thought occurred to him obvious under the circumstances but strangely enough presenting itself for the first time. "Jove! Won't he get a shock," thought Roderick Anthony.

He went hastily on deck. "Mr. Franklin, Mr. Franklin." The mate was not very far. "Oh! Here you are. Miss . . . Mrs. Anthony'll be coming on board presently. Just give me a call when you see the cab."

Then, without noticing the gloominess of the mate's countenance he went in again. Not a friendly word, not a professional remark, or a small joke, not as much as a simple and inane "fine day." Nothing. Just turned about and went in.

We know that, when the moment came, he thought better of it and decided to meet Flora's father in that privacy of the main cabin which he had been so careful to arrange. Why Anthony appeared to shrink from the contact, he who was sufficiently self-confident not only to face but to absolutely create a situation almost insane in its audacious generosity, is difficult to explain. Perhaps when he came on the poop for a glance he found that man so different outwardly from what he expected that he decided to meet him for the first time out of everybody's sight. Possibly the general secrecy of his relation to the girl might have influenced him. Truly he may well have been dismayed. That man's coming brought him face to face with the necessity to speak and act a lie; to appear what he was not and what he could never be, unless, unless —

In short, we'll say if you like that for various reasons, all having to do with the delicate rectitude of his nature, Roderick Anthony (a man of whom his chief mate used to say: he doesn't know what fear is) was frightened. There is a Nemesis which overtakes generosity too, like all the other imprudences of men who dare to be lawless and proud . . . "

"Why do you say this?" I inquired, for Marlow had stopped abruptly and kept silent in the shadow of the bookcase.

"I say this because that man whom chance had thrown in Flora's way was both: lawless and proud. Whether he knew anything about it or not it does not matter. Very likely not. One may fling a glove in the face of nature and in the face of one's own moral endurance quite innocently, with a simplicity which wears the aspect of perfectly Satanic conceit. However, as I have said it does not matter. It's a transgression all the same and has got to be paid for in the usual way. But never mind that. I paused because, like Anthony, I find a difficulty, a sort of dread in coming to grips with old de Barral.

You remember I had a glimpse of him once. He was not an imposing personality: tall, thin, straight, stiff, faded, moving with short steps and with a gliding motion, speaking in an even low voice. When the sea was rough he wasn't much seen on deck — at least not walking. He caught hold of things then and dragged himself along as far as the after skylight where he would sit for hours. Our, then young, friend offered once to assist him and this service was the first beginning of a sort of friendship. He

clung hard to one — Powell says, with no figurative intention. Powell was always on the lookout to assist, and to assist mainly Mrs. Anthony, because he clung so jolly hard to her that Powell was afraid of her being dragged down notwithstanding that she very soon became very sure-footed in all sorts of weather. And Powell was the only one ready to assist at hand because Anthony (by that time) seemed to be afraid to come near them; the unforgiving Franklin always looked wrathfully the other way; the boatswain, if up there, acted likewise but sheepishly; and any hands that happened to be on the poop (a feeling spreads mysteriously all over a ship) shunned him as though he had been the devil.

We know how he arrived on board. For my part I know so little of prisons that I haven't the faintest notion how one leaves them. It seems as abominable an operation as the other, the shutting up with its mental suggestions of bang, snap, crash and the empty silence outside — where an instant before you were — you were — and now no longer are. Perfectly devilish. And the release! I don't know which is worse. How do they do it? Pull the string, door flies open, man flies through: Out you go! Adios! And in the space where a second before you were not, in the silent space there is a figure going away, limping. Why limping? I don't know. That's how I see it. One has a notion of a maiming, crippling process; of the individual coming back damaged in some subtle way. I admit it is a fantastic hallucination, but I can't help it. Of course I know that the proceedings of the best machine-made humanity are employed with judicious care and so on. I am absurd, no doubt, but still . . . Oh yes it's idiotic. When I pass one of these places . . . did you notice that there is something infernal about the aspect of every individual stone or brick of them, something malicious as if matter were enjoying its revenge of the contemptuous spirit of man. Did you notice? You didn't? Eh? Well I am perhaps a little mad on that point. When I pass one of these places I must avert my eyes. I couldn't have gone to meet de Barral. I should have shrunk from the ordeal. You'll notice that it looks as if Anthony (a brave man indubitably) had shirked it too. Little Fyne's flight of fancy picturing three people in the fatal four wheeler — you remember? — went wide of the truth. There were only two people in the four wheeler. Flora did not shrink. Women can stand anything. The dear creatures have no imagination when it comes to solid facts of life. In sentimental regions — I won't say. It's another thing altogether. There they shrink from or rush to embrace ghosts of their own creation just the same as any fool-man would.

No. I suppose the girl Flora went on that errand reasonably. And then, why! This was the moment for which she had lived. It was her only point of contact with existence. Oh yes. She had been assisted by the Fynes. And kindly. Certainly. Kindly. But that's not enough. There is a kind way of assisting our fellow-creatures which is enough to break their hearts while it saves their outer envelope. How cold, how infernally cold she must have felt — unless when she was made to burn with indignation or shame. Man, we know, cannot live by bread alone but hang me if I don't believe that some women could live by love alone. If there be a flame in human beings fed by varied ingredients

earthly and spiritual which tinge it in different hues, then I seem to see the colour of theirs. It is azure . . . What the devil are you laughing at . . . “

Marlow jumped up and strode out of the shadow as if lifted by indignation but there was the flicker of a smile on his lips. “You say I don’t know women. Maybe. It’s just as well not to come too close to the shrine. But I have a clear notion of woman. In all of them, termagant, flirt, crank, washerwoman, blue-stocking, outcast and even in the ordinary fool of the ordinary commerce there is something left, if only a spark. And when there is a spark there can always be a flame . . . “

He went back into the shadow and sat down again.

“I don’t mean to say that Flora de Barral was one of the sort that could live by love alone. In fact she had managed to live without. But still, in the distrust of herself and of others she looked for love, any kind of love, as women will. And that confounded jail was the only spot where she could see it — for she had no reason to distrust her father.

She was there in good time. I see her gazing across the road at these walls which are, properly speaking, awful. You do indeed seem to feel along the very lines and angles of the unholy bulk, the fall of time, drop by drop, hour by hour, leaf by leaf, with a gentle and implacable slowness. And a voiceless melancholy comes over one, invading, overpowering like a dream, penetrating and mortal like poison.

When de Barral came out she experienced a sort of shock to see that he was exactly as she remembered him. Perhaps a little smaller. Otherwise unchanged. You come out in the same clothes, you know. I can’t tell whether he was looking for her. No doubt he was. Whether he recognized her? Very likely. She crossed the road and at once there was reproduced at a distance of years, as if by some mocking witchcraft, the sight so familiar on the Parade at Brighton of the financier de Barral walking with his only daughter. One comes out of prison in the same clothes one wore on the day of condemnation, no matter how long one has been put away there. Oh, they last! They last! But there is something which is preserved by prison life even better than one’s discarded clothing. It is the force, the vividness of one’s sentiments. A monastery will do that too; but in the unholy claustration of a jail you are thrown back wholly upon yourself — for God and Faith are not there. The people outside disperse their affections, you hoard yours, you nurse them into intensity. What they let slip, what they forget in the movement and changes of free life, you hold on to, amplify, exaggerate into a rank growth of memories. They can look with a smile at the troubles and pains of the past; but you can’t. Old pains keep on gnawing at your heart, old desires, old deceptions, old dreams, assailing you in the dead stillness of your present where nothing moves except the irrecoverable minutes of your life.

De Barral was out and, for a time speechless, being led away almost before he had taken possession of the free world, by his daughter. Flora controlled herself well. They walked along quickly for some distance. The cab had been left round the corner — round several corners for all I know. He was flustered, out of breath, when she helped him in and followed herself. Inside that rolling box, turning towards that recovered

presence with her heart too full for words she felt the desire of tears she had managed to keep down abandon her suddenly, her half-mournful, half-triumphant exultation subside, every fibre of her body, relaxed in tenderness, go stiff in the close look she took at his face. He was different. There was something. Yes, there was something between them, something hard and impalpable, the ghost of these high walls.

How old he was, how unlike!

She shook off this impression, amazed and frightened by it of course. And remorseful too. Naturally. She threw her arms round his neck. He returned that hug awkwardly, as if not in perfect control of his arms, with a fumbling and uncertain pressure. She hid her face on his breast. It was as though she were pressing it against a stone. They released each other and presently the cab was rolling along at a jog-trot to the docks with those two people as far apart as they could get from each other, in opposite corners.

After a silence given up to mutual examination he uttered his first coherent sentence outside the walls of the prison.

“What has done for me was envy. Envy. There was a lot of them just bursting with it every time they looked my way. I was doing too well. So they went to the Public Prosecutor — ”

She said hastily “Yes! Yes! I know,” and he glared as if resentful that the child had turned into a young woman without waiting for him to come out. “What do you know about it?” he asked. “You were too young.” His speech was soft. The old voice, the old voice! It gave her a thrill. She recognized its pointless gentleness always the same no matter what he had to say. And she remembered that he never had much to say when he came down to see her. It was she who chattered, chattered, on their walks, while stiff and with a rigidly-carried head, he dropped a gentle word now and then.

Moved by these recollections waking up within her, she explained to him that within the last year she had read and studied the report of the trial.

“I went through the files of several papers, papa.”

He looked at her suspiciously. The reports were probably very incomplete. No doubt the reporters had garbled his evidence. They were determined to give him no chance either in court or before the public opinion. It was a conspiracy . . . “My counsel was a fool too,” he added. “Did you notice? A perfect fool.”

She laid her hand on his arm soothingly. “Is it worth while talking about that awful time? It is so far away now.” She shuddered slightly at the thought of all the horrible years which had passed over her young head; never guessing that for him the time was but yesterday. He folded his arms on his breast, leaned back in his corner and bowed his head. But in a little while he made her jump by asking suddenly:

“Who has got hold of the Lone Valley Railway? That’s what they were after mainly. Somebody has got it. Parfitts and Co. grabbed it — eh? Or was it that fellow Warner . . . “

“I — I don’t know,” she said quite scared by the twitching of his lips.

“Don’t know!” he exclaimed softly. Hadn’t her cousin told her? Oh yes. She had left them — of course. Why did she? It was his first question about herself but she did not answer it. She did not want to talk of these horrors. They were impossible to describe. She perceived though that he had not expected an answer, because she heard him muttering to himself that: “There was half a million’s worth of work done and material accumulated there.”

“You mustn’t think of these things, papa,” she said firmly. And he asked her with that invariable gentleness, in which she seemed now to detect some rather ugly shades, what else had he to think about? Another year or two, if they had only left him alone, he and everybody else would have been all right, rolling in money; and she, his daughter, could have married anybody — anybody. A lord.

All this was to him like yesterday, a long yesterday, a yesterday gone over innumerable times, analysed, meditated upon for years. It had a vividness and force for that old man of which his daughter who had not been shut out of the world could have no idea. She was to him the only living figure out of that past, and it was perhaps in perfect good faith that he added, coldly, inexpressive and thin-lipped: “I lived only for you, I may say. I suppose you understand that. There were only you and me.”

Moved by this declaration, wondering that it did not warm her heart more, she murmured a few endearing words while the uppermost thought in her mind was that she must tell him now of the situation. She had expected to be questioned anxiously about herself — and while she desired it she shrank from the answers she would have to make. But her father seemed strangely, unnaturally incurious. It looked as if there would be no questions. Still this was an opening. This seemed to be the time for her to begin. And she began. She began by saying that she had always felt like that. There were two of them, to live for each other. And if he only knew what she had gone through!

Ensnconced in his corner, with his arms folded, he stared out of the cab window at the street. How little he was changed after all. It was the unmovable expression, the faded stare she used to see on the esplanade whenever walking by his side hand in hand she raised her eyes to his face — while she chattered, chattered. It was the same stiff, silent figure which at a word from her would turn rigidly into a shop and buy her anything it occurred to her that she would like to have. Flora de Barral’s voice faltered. He bent on her that well-remembered glance in which she had never read anything as a child, except the consciousness of her existence. And that was enough for a child who had never known demonstrative affection. But she had lived a life so starved of all feeling that this was no longer enough for her. What was the good of telling him the story of all these miseries now past and gone, of all those bewildering difficulties and humiliations? What she must tell him was difficult enough to say. She approached it by remarking cheerfully:

“You haven’t even asked me where I am taking you.” He started like a somnambulist awakened suddenly, and there was now some meaning in his stare; a sort of alarmed

speculation. He opened his mouth slowly. Flora struck in with forced gaiety. "You would never, guess."

He waited, still more startled and suspicious. "Guess! Why don't you tell me?"

He uncrossed his arms and leaned forward towards her. She got hold of one of his hands. "You must know first . . ." She paused, made an effort: "I am married, papa."

For a moment they kept perfectly still in that cab rolling on at a steady jog-trot through a narrow city street full of bustle. Whatever she expected she did not expect to feel his hand snatched away from her grasp as if from a burn or a contamination. De Barral fresh from the stagnant torment of the prison (where nothing happens) had not expected that sort of news. It seemed to stick in his throat. In strangled low tones he cried out, "You — married? You, Flora! When? Married! What for? Who to? Married!"

His eyes which were blue like hers, only faded, without depth, seemed to start out of their orbits. He did really look as if he were choking. He even put his hand to his collar . . . "

* * * * *

"You know," continued Marlow out of the shadow of the bookcase and nearly invisible in the depths of the arm-chair, "the only time I saw him he had given me the impression of absolute rigidity, as though he had swallowed a poker. But it seems that he could collapse. I can hardly picture this to myself. I understand that he did collapse to a certain extent in his corner of the cab. The unexpected had crumpled him up. She regarded him perplexed, pitying, a little disillusioned, and nodded at him gravely: Yes. Married. What she did not like was to see him smile in a manner far from encouraging to the devotion of a daughter. There was something unintentionally savage in it. Old de Barral could not quite command his muscles, as yet. But he had recovered command of his gentle voice.

"You were just saying that in this wide world there we were, only you and I, to stick to each other."

She was dimly aware of the scathing intention lurking in these soft low tones, in these words which appealed to her poignantly. She defended herself. Never, never for a single moment had she ceased to think of him. Neither did he cease to think of her, he said, with as much sinister emphasis as he was capable of.

"But, papa," she cried, "I haven't been shut up like you." She didn't mind speaking of it because he was innocent. He hadn't been understood. It was a misfortune of the most cruel kind but no more disgraceful than an illness, a maiming accident or some other visitation of blind fate. "I wish I had been too. But I was alone out in the world, the horrid world, that very world which had used you so badly."

"And you couldn't go about in it without finding somebody to fall in love with?" he said. A jealous rage affected his brain like the fumes of wine, rising from some secret depths of his being so long deprived of all emotions. The hollows at the corners of his lips became more pronounced in the puffy roundness of his cheeks. Images, visions, obsess with particular force, men withdrawn from the sights and sounds of active life.

“And I did nothing but think of you!” he exclaimed under his breath, contemptuously. “Think of you! You haunted me, I tell you.”

Flora said to herself that there was a being who loved her. “Then we have been haunting each other,” she declared with a pang of remorse. For indeed he had haunted her nearly out of the world, into a final and irremediable desertion. “Some day I shall tell you . . . No. I don’t think I can ever tell you. There was a time when I was mad. But what’s the good? It’s all over now. We shall forget all this. There shall be nothing to remind us.”

De Barral moved his shoulders.

“I should think you were mad to tie yourself to . . . How long is it since you are married?”

She answered “Not long” that being the only answer she dared to make. Everything was so different from what she imagined it would be. He wanted to know why she had said nothing of it in any of her letters; in her last letter. She said:

“It was after.”

“So recently!” he wondered. “Couldn’t you wait at least till I came out? You could have told me; asked me; consulted me! Let me see — ”

She shook her head negatively. And he was appalled. He thought to himself: Who can he be? Some miserable, silly youth without a penny. Or perhaps some scoundrel? Without making any expressive movement he wrung his loosely-clasped hands till the joints cracked. He looked at her. She was pretty. Some low scoundrel who will cast her off. Some plausible vagabond . . . “You couldn’t wait — eh?”

Again she made a slight negative sign.

“Why not? What was the hurry?” She cast down her eyes. “It had to be. Yes. It was sudden, but it had to be.”

He leaned towards her, his mouth open, his eyes wild with virtuous anger, but meeting the absolute candour of her raised glance threw himself back into his corner again.

“So tremendously in love with each other — was that it? Couldn’t let a father have his daughter all to himself even for a day after — after such a separation. And you know I never had anyone, I had no friends. What did I want with those people one meets in the City. The best of them are ready to cut your throat. Yes! Business men, gentlemen, any sort of men and women — out of spite, or to get something. Oh yes, they can talk fair enough if they think there’s something to be got out of you . . . “His voice was a mere breath yet every word came to Flora as distinctly as if charged with all the moving power of passion . . . “My girl, I looked at them making up to me and I would say to myself: What do I care for all that! I am a business man. I am the great Mr. de Barral (yes, yes, some of them twisted their mouths at it, but I was the great Mr. de Barral) and I have my little girl. I wanted nobody and I have never had anybody.”

A true emotion had unsealed his lips but the words that came out of them were no louder than the murmur of a light wind. It died away.

"That's just it," said Flora de Barral under her breath. Without removing his eyes from her he took off his hat. It was a tall hat. The hat of the trial. The hat of the thumb-nail sketches in the illustrated papers. One comes out in the same clothes, but seclusion counts! It is well known that lurid visions haunt secluded men, monks, hermits — then why not prisoners? De Barral the convict took off the silk hat of the financier de Barral and deposited it on the front seat of the cab. Then he blew out his cheeks. He was red in the face.

"And then what happens?" he began again in his contained voice. "Here I am, overthrown, broken by envy, malice and all uncharitableness. I come out — and what do I find? I find that my girl Flora has gone and married some man or other, perhaps a fool, how do I know; or perhaps — anyway not good enough."

"Stop, papa."

"A silly love affair as likely as not," he continued monotonously, his thin lips writhing between the ill-omened sunk corners. "And a very suspicious thing it is too, on the part of a loving daughter."

She tried to interrupt him but he went on till she actually clapped her hand on his mouth. He rolled his eyes a bit but when she took her hand away he remained silent.

"Wait. I must tell you . . . And first of all, papa, understand this, for everything's in that: he is the most generous man in the world. He is . . ."

De Barral very still in his corner uttered with an effort "You are in love with him."

"Papa! He came to me. I was thinking of you. I had no eyes for anybody. I could no longer bear to think of you. It was then that he came. Only then. At that time when — when I was going to give up."

She gazed into his faded blue eyes as if yearning to be understood, to be given encouragement, peace — a word of sympathy. He declared without animation "I would like to break his neck."

She had the mental exclamation of the overburdened.

"Oh my God!" and watched him with frightened eyes. But he did not appear insane or in any other way formidable. This comforted her. The silence lasted for some little time. Then suddenly he asked:

"What's your name then?"

For a moment in the profound trouble of the task before her she did not understand what the question meant. Then, her face faintly flushing, she whispered: "Anthony."

Her father, a red spot on each cheek, leaned his head back wearily in the corner of the cab.

"Anthony. What is he? Where did he spring from?"

"Papa, it was in the country, on a road —"

He groaned, "On a road," and closed his eyes.

"It's too long to explain to you now. We shall have lots of time. There are things I could not tell you now. But some day. Some day. For now nothing can part us. Nothing. We are safe as long as we live — nothing can ever come between us."

“You are infatuated with the fellow,” he remarked, without opening his eyes. And she said: “I believe in him,” in a low voice. “You and I must believe in him.”

“Who the devil is he?”

“He’s the brother of the lady — you know Mrs. Fyne, she knew mother — who was so kind to me. I was staying in the country, in a cottage, with Mr. and Mrs. Fyne. It was there that we met. He came on a visit. He noticed me. I — well — we are married now.”

She was thankful that his eyes were shut. It made it easier to talk of the future she had arranged, which now was an unalterable thing. She did not enter on the path of confidences. That was impossible. She felt he would not understand her. She felt also that he suffered. Now and then a great anxiety gripped her heart with a mysterious sense of guilt — as though she had betrayed him into the hands of an enemy. With his eyes shut he had an air of weary and pious meditation. She was a little afraid of it. Next moment a great pity for him filled her heart. And in the background there was remorse. His face twitched now and then just perceptibly. He managed to keep his eyelids down till he heard that the ‘husband’ was a sailor and that he, the father, was being taken straight on board ship ready to sail away from this abominable world of treacheries, and scorns and envies and lies, away, away over the blue sea, the sure, the inaccessible, the uncontaminated and spacious refuge for wounded souls.

Something like that. Not the very words perhaps but such was the general sense of her overwhelming argument — the argument of refuge.

I don’t think she gave a thought to material conditions. But as part of that argument set forth breathlessly, as if she were afraid that if she stopped for a moment she could never go on again, she mentioned that generosity of a stormy type, which had come to her from the sea, had caught her up on the brink of unmentionable failure, had whirled her away in its first ardent gust and could be trusted now, implicitly trusted, to carry them both, side by side, into absolute safety.

She believed it, she affirmed it. He understood thoroughly at last, and at once the interior of that cab, of an aspect so pacific in the eyes of the people on the pavements, became the scene of a great agitation. The generosity of Roderick Anthony — the son of the poet — affected the ex-financier de Barral in a manner which must have brought home to Flora de Barral the extreme arduousness of the business of being a woman. Being a woman is a terribly difficult trade since it consists principally of dealings with men. This man — the man inside the cab — cast oft his stiff placidity and behaved like an animal. I don’t mean it in an offensive sense. What he did was to give way to an instinctive panic. Like some wild creature scared by the first touch of a net falling on its back, old de Barral began to struggle, lank and angular, against the empty air — as much of it as there was in the cab — with staring eyes and gasping mouth from which his daughter shrank as far as she could in the confined space.

“Stop the cab. Stop him I tell you. Let me get out!” were the strangled exclamations she heard. Why? What for? To do what? He would hear nothing. She cried to him

“Papa! Papa! What do you want to do?” And all she got from him was: “Stop. I must get out. I want to think. I must get out to think.”

It was a mercy that he didn't attempt to open the door at once. He only stuck his head and shoulders out of the window crying to the cabman. She saw the consequences, the cab stopping, a crowd collecting around a raving old gentleman . . . In this terrible business of being a woman so full of fine shades, of delicate perplexities (and very small rewards) you can never know what rough work you may have to do, at any moment. Without hesitation Flora seized her father round the body and pulled back — being astonished at the ease with which she managed to make him drop into his seat again. She kept him there resolutely with one hand pressed against his breast, and leaning across him, she, in her turn put her head and shoulders out of the window. By then the cab had drawn up to the curbstone and was stopped. “No! I've changed my mind. Go on please where you were told first. To the docks.”

She wondered at the steadiness of her own voice. She heard a grunt from the driver and the cab began to roll again. Only then she sank into her place keeping a watchful eye on her companion. He was hardly anything more by this time. Except for her childhood's impressions he was just — a man. Almost a stranger. How was one to deal with him? And there was the other too. Also almost a stranger. The trade of being a woman was very difficult. Too difficult. Flora closed her eyes saying to herself: “If I think too much about it I shall go mad.” And then opening them she asked her father if the prospect of living always with his daughter and being taken care of by her affection away from the world, which had no honour to give to his grey hairs, was such an awful prospect.

“Tell me, is it so bad as that?”

She put that question sadly, without bitterness. The famous — or notorious — de Barral had lost his rigidity now. He was bent. Nothing more deplorably futile than a bent poker. He said nothing. She added gently, suppressing an uneasy remorseful sigh:

“And it might have been worse. You might have found no one, no one in all this town, no one in all the world, not even me! Poor papa!”

She made a conscience-stricken movement towards him thinking: “Oh! I am horrible, I am horrible.” And old de Barral, scared, tired, bewildered by the extraordinary shocks of his liberation, swayed over and actually leaned his head on her shoulder, as if sorrowing over his regained freedom.

The movement by itself was touching. Flora supporting him lightly imagined that he was crying; and at the thought that had she smashed in a quarry that shoulder, together with some other of her bones, this grey and pitiful head would have had nowhere to rest, she too gave way to tears. They flowed quietly, easing her overstrained nerves. Suddenly he pushed her away from him so that her head struck the side of the cab, pushing himself away too from her as if something had stung him.

All the warmth went out of her emotion. The very last tears turned cold on her cheek. But their work was done. She had found courage, resolution, as women do, in a good cry. With his hand covering the upper part of his face whether to conceal his

eyes or to shut out an unbearable sight, he was stiffening up in his corner to his usual poker-like consistency. She regarded him in silence. His thin obstinate lips moved. He uttered the name of the cousin — the man, you remember, who did not approve of the Fynes, and whom rightly or wrongly little Fyne suspected of interested motives, in view of de Barral having possibly put away some plunder, somewhere before the smash.

I may just as well tell you at once that I don't know anything more of him. But de Barral was of the opinion, speaking in his low voice from under his hand, that this relation would have been only too glad to have secured his guidance.

"Of course I could not come forward in my own name, or person. But the advice of a man of my experience is as good as a fortune to anybody wishing to venture into finance. The same sort of thing can be done again."

He shuffled his feet a little, let fall his hand; and turning carefully toward his daughter his puffy round cheeks, his round chin resting on his collar, he bent on her the faded, resentful gaze of his pale eyes, which were wet.

"The start is really only a matter of judicious advertising. There's no difficulty. And here you go and . . ."

He turned his face away. "After all I am still de Barral, the de Barral. Didn't you remember that?"

"Papa," said Flora; "listen. It's you who must remember that there is no longer a de Barral . . ." He looked at her sideways anxiously. "There is Mr. Smith, whom no harm, no trouble, no wicked lies of evil people can ever touch."

"Mr. Smith," he breathed out slowly. "Where does he belong to? There's not even a Miss Smith."

"There is your Flora."

"My Flora! You went and . . . I can't bear to think of it. It's horrible."

"Yes. It was horrible enough at times," she said with feeling, because somehow, obscurely, what this man said appealed to her as if it were her own thought clothed in an enigmatic emotion. "I think with shame sometimes how I . . . No not yet. I shall not tell you. At least not now."

The cab turned into the gateway of the dock. Flora handed the tall hat to her father. "Here, papa. And please be good. I suppose you love me. If you don't, then I wonder who —"

He put the hat on, and stiffened hard in his corner, kept a sidelong glance on his girl. "Try to be nice for my sake. Think of the years I have been waiting for you. I do indeed want support — and peace. A little peace."

She clasped his arm suddenly with both hands pressing with all her might as if to crush the resistance she felt in him. "I could not have peace if I did not have you with me. I won't let you go. Not after all I went through. I won't." The nervous force of her grip frightened him a little. She laughed suddenly. "It's absurd. It's as if I were asking you for a sacrifice. What am I afraid of? Where could you go? I mean now, to-day, to-night? You can't tell me. Have you thought of it? Well I have been thinking of it

for the last year. Longer. I nearly went mad trying to find out. I believe I was mad for a time or else I should never have thought . . . “

* * * * *

“This was as near as she came to a confession,” remarked Marlow in a changed tone. “The confession I mean of that walk to the top of the quarry which she reproached herself with so bitterly. And he made of it what his fancy suggested. It could not possibly be a just notion. The cab stopped alongside the ship and they got out in the manner described by the sensitive Franklin. I don’t know if they suspected each other’s sanity at the end of that drive. But that is possible. We all seem a little mad to each other; an excellent arrangement for the bulk of humanity which finds in it an easy motive of forgiveness. Flora crossed the quarter-deck with a rapidity born of apprehension. It had grown unbearable. She wanted this business over. She was thankful on looking back to see he was following her. “If he bolts away,” she thought, “then I shall know that I am of no account indeed! That no one loves me, that words and actions and protestations and everything in the world is false — and I shall jump into the dock. That at least won’t lie.”

Well I don’t know. If it had come to that she would have been most likely fished out, what with her natural want of luck and the good many people on the quay and on board. And just where the Ferndale was moored there hung on a wall (I know the berth) a coil of line, a pole, and a life-buoy kept there on purpose to save people who tumble into the dock. It’s not so easy to get away from life’s betrayals as she thought. However it did not come to that. He followed her with his quick gliding walk. Mr. Smith! The liberated convict de Barral passed off the solid earth for the last time, vanished for ever, and there was Mr. Smith added to that world of waters which harbours so many queer fishes. An old gentleman in a silk hat, darting wary glances. He followed, because mere existence has its claims which are obeyed mechanically. I have no doubt he presented a respectable figure. Father-in-law. Nothing more respectable. But he carried in his heart the confused pain of dismay and affection, of involuntary repulsion and pity. Very much like his daughter. Only in addition he felt a furious jealousy of the man he was going to see.

A residue of egoism remains in every affection — even paternal. And this man in the seclusion of his prison had thought himself into such a sense of ownership of that single human being he had to think about, as may well be inconceivable to us who have not had to serve a long (and wickedly unjust) sentence of penal servitude. She was positively the only thing, the one point where his thoughts found a resting-place, for years. She was the only outlet for his imagination. He had not much of that faculty to be sure, but there was in it the force of concentration. He felt outraged, and perhaps it was an absurdity on his part, but I venture to suggest rather in degree than in kind. I have a notion that no usual, normal father is pleased at parting with his daughter. No. Not even when he rationally appreciates “Jane being taken off his hands” or perhaps is able to exult at an excellent match. At bottom, quite deep down, down in the dark (in some cases only by digging), there is to be found a certain repugnance . . . With

mothers of course it is different. Women are more loyal, not to each other, but to their common femininity which they behold triumphant with a secret and proud satisfaction.

The circumstances of that match added to Mr. Smith's indignation. And if he followed his daughter into that ship's cabin it was as if into a house of disgrace and only because he was still bewildered by the suddenness of the thing. His will, so long lying fallow, was overborne by her determination and by a vague fear of that regained liberty.

You will be glad to hear that Anthony, though he did shirk the welcome on the quay, behaved admirably, with the simplicity of a man who has no small meannesses and makes no mean reservations. His eyes did not flinch and his tongue did not falter. He was, I have it on the best authority, admirable in his earnestness, in his sincerity and also in his restraint. He was perfect. Nevertheless the vital force of his unknown individuality addressing him so familiarly was enough to fluster Mr. Smith. Flora saw her father trembling in all his exiguous length, though he held himself stiffer than ever if that was possible. He muttered a little and at last managed to utter, not loud of course but very distinctly: "I am here under protest," the corners of his mouth sunk disparagingly, his eyes stony. "I am here under protest. I have been locked up by a conspiracy. I — "

He raised his hands to his forehead — his silk hat was on the table rim upwards; he had put it there with a despairing gesture as he came in — he raised his hands to his forehead. "It seems to me unfair. I — " He broke off again. Anthony looked at Flora who stood by the side of her father.

"Well, sir, you will soon get used to me. Surely you and she must have had enough of shore-people and their confounded half-and-half ways to last you both for a life-time. A particularly merciful lot they are too. You ask Flora. I am alluding to my own sister, her best friend, and not a bad woman either as they go."

The captain of the Ferndale checked himself. "Lucky thing I was there to step in. I want you to make yourself at home, and before long — "

The faded stare of the Great de Barral silenced Anthony by its inexpressive fixity. He signalled with his eyes to Flora towards the door of the state-room fitted specially to receive Mr. Smith, the free man. She seized the free man's hat off the table and took him caressingly under the arm. "Yes! This is home, come and see your room, papa!"

Anthony himself threw open the door and Flora took care to shut it carefully behind herself and her father. "See," she began but desisted because it was clear that he would look at none of the contrivances for his comfort. She herself had hardly seen them before. He was looking only at the new carpet and she waited till he should raise his eyes.

He didn't do that but spoke in his usual voice. "So this is your husband, that . . . And I locked up!"

"Papa, what's the good of harping on that," she remonstrated no louder. "He is kind."

“And you went and . . . married him so that he should be kind to me. Is that it? How did you know that I wanted anybody to be kind to me?”

“How strange you are!” she said thoughtfully.

“It’s hard for a man who has gone through what I have gone through to feel like other people. Has that occurred to you? . . . “ He looked up at last . . . “Mrs. Anthony, I can’t bear the sight of the fellow.” She met his eyes without flinching and he added, “You want to go to him now.” His mild automatic manner seemed the effect of tremendous self-restraint — and yet she remembered him always like that. She felt cold all over.

“Why, of course, I must go to him,” she said with a slight start.

He gnashed his teeth at her and she went out.

Anthony had not moved from the spot. One of his hands was resting on the table. She went up to him, stopped, then deliberately moved still closer. “Thank you, Roderick.”

“You needn’t thank me,” he murmured. “It’s I who . . . “

“No, perhaps I needn’t. You do what you like. But you are doing it well.”

He sighed then hardly above a whisper because they were near the state-room door, “Upset, eh?”

She made no sign, no sound of any kind. The thorough falseness of the position weighed on them both. But he was the braver of the two. “I dare say. At first. Did you think of telling him you were happy?”

“He never asked me,” she smiled faintly at him. She was disappointed by his quietness. “I did not say more than I was absolutely obliged to say — of myself.” She was beginning to be irritated with this man a little. “I told him I had been very lucky,” she said suddenly despondent, missing Anthony’s masterful manner, that something arbitrary and tender which, after the first scare, she had accustomed herself to look forward to with pleasurable apprehension. He was contemplating her rather blankly. She had not taken off her outdoor things, hat, gloves. She was like a caller. And she had a movement suggesting the end of a not very satisfactory business call. “Perhaps it would be just as well if we went ashore. Time yet.”

He gave her a glimpse of his unconstrained self in the low vehement “You dare!” which sprang to his lips and out of them with a most menacing inflexion.

“You dare . . . What’s the matter now?”

These last words were shot out not at her but at some target behind her back. Looking over her shoulder she saw the bald head with black bunches of hair of the congested and devoted Franklin (he had his cap in his hand) gazing sentimentally from the saloon doorway with his lobster eyes. He was heard from the distance in a tone of injured innocence reporting that the berthing master was alongside and that he wanted to move the ship into the basin before the crew came on board.

His captain growled “Well, let him,” and waved away the ulcerated and pathetic soul behind these prominent eyes which lingered on the offensive woman while the mate backed out slowly. Anthony turned to Flora.

“You could not have meant it. You are as straight as they make them.”

“I am trying to be.”

“Then don’t joke in that way. Think of what would become of — me.”

“Oh yes. I forgot. No, I didn’t mean it. It wasn’t a joke. It was forgetfulness. You wouldn’t have been wronged. I couldn’t have gone. I — I am too tired.”

He saw she was swaying where she stood and restrained himself violently from taking her into his arms, his frame trembling with fear as though he had been tempted to an act of unparalleled treachery. He stepped aside and lowering his eyes pointed to the door of the stern-cabin. It was only after she passed by him that he looked up and thus he did not see the angry glance she gave him before she moved on. He looked after her. She tottered slightly just before reaching the door and flung it to behind her nervously.

Anthony — he had felt this crash as if the door had been slammed inside his very breast — stood for a moment without moving and then shouted for Mrs. Brown. This was the steward’s wife, his lucky inspiration to make Flora comfortable. “Mrs. Brown! Mrs. Brown!” At last she appeared from somewhere. “Mrs. Anthony has come on board. Just gone into the cabin. Hadn’t you better see if you can be of any assistance?”

“Yes, sir.”

And again he was alone with the situation he had created in the hardihood and inexperience of his heart. He thought he had better go on deck. In fact he ought to have been there before. At any rate it would be the usual thing for him to be on deck. But a sound of muttering and of faint thuds somewhere near by arrested his attention. They proceeded from Mr. Smith’s room, he perceived. It was very extraordinary. “He’s talking to himself,” he thought. “He seems to be thumping the bulkhead with his fists — or his head.”

Anthony’s eyes grew big with wonder while he listened to these noises. He became so attentive that he did not notice Mrs. Brown till she actually stopped before him for a moment to say:

“Mrs. Anthony doesn’t want any assistance, sir.”

* * * * *

This was you understand the voyage before Mr. Powell — young Powell then — joined the Ferndale; chance having arranged that he should get his start in life in that particular ship of all the ships then in the port of London. The most unrestful ship that ever sailed out of any port on earth. I am not alluding to her sea-going qualities. Mr. Powell tells me she was as steady as a church. I mean unrestful in the sense, for instance in which this planet of ours is unrestful — a matter of an uneasy atmosphere disturbed by passions, jealousies, loves, hates and the troubles of transcendental good intentions, which, though ethically valuable, I have no doubt cause often more unhappiness than the plots of the most evil tendency. For those who refuse to believe in chance he, I mean Mr. Powell, must have been obviously predestined to add his native ingenuousness to the sum of all the others carried by the honest ship Ferndale. He was too ingenuous. Everybody on board was, exception being made of Mr. Smith who, however, was simple enough in his way, with that terrible simplicity of the fixed idea, for which there is also another name men pronounce with dread and aversion. His fixed idea was to save

his girl from the man who had possessed himself of her (I use these words on purpose because the image they suggest was clearly in Mr. Smith's mind), possessed himself unfairly of her while he, the father, was locked up.

"I won't rest till I have got you away from that man," he would murmur to her after long periods of contemplation. We know from Powell how he used to sit on the skylight near the long deck-chair on which Flora was reclining, gazing into her face from above with an air of guardianship and investigation at the same time.

It is almost impossible to say if he ever had considered the event rationally. The avatar of de Barral into Mr. Smith had not been effected without a shock — that much one must recognize. It may be that it drove all practical considerations out of his mind, making room for awful and precise visions which nothing could dislodge afterwards.

And it might have been the tenacity, the unintelligent tenacity, of the man who had persisted in throwing millions of other people's thrift into the Lone Valley Railway, the Labrador Docks, the Spotted Leopard Copper Mine, and other grotesque speculations exposed during the famous de Barral trial, amongst murmurs of astonishment mingled with bursts of laughter. For it is in the Courts of Law that Comedy finds its last refuge in our deadly serious world. As to tears and lamentations, these were not heard in the august precincts of comedy, because they were indulged in privately in several thousand homes, where, with a fine dramatic effect, hunger had taken the place of Thrift.

But there was one at least who did not laugh in court. That person was the accused. The notorious de Barral did not laugh because he was indignant. He was impervious to words, to facts, to inferences. It would have been impossible to make him see his guilt or his folly — either by evidence or argument — if anybody had tried to argue.

Neither did his daughter Flora try to argue with him. The cruelty of her position was so great, its complications so thorny, if I may express myself so, that a passive attitude was yet her best refuge — as it had been before her of so many women.

For that sort of inertia in woman is always enigmatic and therefore menacing. It makes one pause. A woman may be a fool, a sleepy fool, an agitated fool, a too awfully noxious fool, and she may even be simply stupid. But she is never dense. She's never made of wood through and through as some men are. There is in woman always, somewhere, a spring. Whatever men don't know about women (and it may be a lot or it may be very little) men and even fathers do know that much. And that is why so many men are afraid of them.

Mr. Smith I believe was afraid of his daughter's quietness though of course he interpreted it in his own way.

He would, as Mr. Powell depicts, sit on the skylight and bend over the reclining girl, wondering what there was behind the lost gaze under the darkened eyelids in the still eyes. He would look and look and then he would say, whisper rather, it didn't take much for his voice to drop to a mere breath — he would declare, transferring his faded stare to the horizon, that he would never rest till he had "got her away from that man."

"You don't know what you are saying, papa."

She would try not to show her weariness, the nervous strain of these two men's antagonism around her person which was the cause of her languid attitudes. For as a matter of fact the sea agreed with her.

As likely as not Anthony would be walking on the other side of the deck. The strain was making him restless. He couldn't sit still anywhere. He had tried shutting himself up in his cabin; but that was no good. He would jump up to rush on deck and tramp, tramp up and down that poop till he felt ready to drop, without being able to wear down the agitation of his soul, generous indeed, but weighted by its envelope of blood and muscle and bone; handicapped by the brain creating precise images and everlastingly speculating, speculating — looking out for signs, watching for symptoms.

And Mr. Smith with a slight backward jerk of his small head at the footsteps on the other side of the skylight would insist in his awful, hopelessly gentle voice that he knew very well what he was saying. Hadn't she given herself to that man while he was locked up.

"Helpless, in jail, with no one to think of, nothing to look forward to, but my daughter. And then when they let me out at last I find her gone — for it amounts to this. Sold. Because you've sold yourself; you know you have."

With his round unmoved face, a lot of fine white hair waving in the wind-eddies of the spanker, his glance levelled over the sea he seemed to be addressing the universe across her reclining form. She would protest sometimes.

"I wish you would not talk like this, papa. You are only tormenting me, and tormenting yourself."

"Yes, I am tormented enough," he admitted meaningly. But it was not talking about it that tormented him. It was thinking of it. And to sit and look at it was worse for him than it possibly could have been for her to go and give herself up, bad as that must have been.

"For of course you suffered. Don't tell me you didn't? You must have."

She had renounced very soon all attempts at protests. It was useless. It might have made things worse; and she did not want to quarrel with her father, the only human being that really cared for her, absolutely, evidently, completely — to the end. There was in him no pity, no generosity, nothing whatever of these fine things — it was for her, for her very own self such as it was, that this human being cared. This certitude would have made her put up with worse torments. For, of course, she too was being tormented. She felt also helpless, as if the whole enterprise had been too much for her. This is the sort of conviction which makes for quietude. She was becoming a fatalist.

What must have been rather appalling were the necessities of daily life, the inter-course of current trifles. That naturally had to go on. They wished good morning to each other, they sat down together to meals — and I believe there would be a game of cards now and then in the evening, especially at first. What frightened her most was the duplicity of her father, at least what looked like duplicity, when she remembered his persistent, insistent whispers on deck. However her father was a taciturn person as far back as she could remember him best — on the Parade. It was she who chattered,

never troubling herself to discover whether he was pleased or displeased. And now she couldn't fathom his thoughts. Neither did she chatter to him. Anthony with a forced friendly smile as if frozen to his lips seemed only too thankful at not being made to speak. Mr. Smith sometimes forgot himself while studying his hand so long that Flora had to recall him to himself by a murmured "Papa — your lead." Then he apologized by a faint as if inward ejaculation "Beg your pardon, Captain." Naturally she addressed Anthony as Roderick and he addressed her as Flora. This was all the acting that was necessary to judge from the wincing twitch of the old man's mouth at every uttered "Flora." On hearing the rare "Rodericks" he had sometimes a scornful grimace as faint and faded and colourless as his whole stiff personality.

He would be the first to retire. He was not infirm. With him too the life on board ship seemed to agree; but from a sense of duty, of affection, or to placate his hidden fury, his daughter always accompanied him to his state-room "to make him comfortable." She lighted his lamp, helped him into his dressing-gown or got him a book from a bookcase fitted in there — but this last rarely, because Mr. Smith used to declare "I am no reader" with something like pride in his low tones. Very often after kissing her good-night on the forehead he would treat her to some such fretful remark: "It's like being in jail — 'pon my word. I suppose that man is out there waiting for you. Head jailer! Ough!"

She would smile vaguely; murmur a conciliatory "How absurd." But once, out of patience, she said quite sharply "Leave off. It hurts me. One would think you hate me."

"It isn't you I hate," he went on monotonously breathing at her. "No, it isn't you. But if I saw that you loved that man I think I could hate you too."

That word struck straight at her heart. "You wouldn't be the first then," she muttered bitterly. But he was busy with his fixed idea and uttered an awfully equable "But you don't! Unfortunate girl!"

She looked at him steadily for a time then said "Good-night, papa."

As a matter of fact Anthony very seldom waited for her alone at the table with the scattered cards, glasses, water-jug, bottles and soon. He took no more opportunities to be alone with her than was absolutely necessary for the edification of Mrs. Brown. Excellent, faithful woman; the wife of his still more excellent and faithful steward. And Flora wished all these excellent people, devoted to Anthony, she wished them all further; and especially the nice, pleasant-spoken Mrs. Brown with her beady, mobile eyes and her "Yes certainly, ma'am," which seemed to her to have a mocking sound. And so this short trip — to the Western Islands only — came to an end. It was so short that when young Powell joined the Ferndale by a memorable stroke of chance, no more than seven months had elapsed since the — let us say the liberation of the convict de Barral and his avatar into Mr. Smith.

* * * * *

For the time the ship was loading in London Anthony took a cottage near a little country station in Essex, to house Mr. Smith and Mr. Smith's daughter. It was altogether his idea. How far it was necessary for Mr. Smith to seek rural retreat I don't

know. Perhaps to some extent it was a judicious arrangement. There were some obligations incumbent on the liberated de Barral (in connection with reporting himself to the police I imagine) which Mr. Smith was not anxious to perform. De Barral had to vanish; the theory was that de Barral had vanished, and it had to be upheld. Poor Flora liked the country, even if the spot had nothing more to recommend it than its retired character.

Now and then Captain Anthony ran down; but as the station was a real wayside one, with no early morning trains up, he could never stay for more than the afternoon. It appeared that he must sleep in town so as to be early on board his ship. The weather was magnificent and whenever the captain of the Ferndale was seen on a brilliant afternoon coming down the road Mr. Smith would seize his stick and toddle off for a solitary walk. But whether he would get tired or because it gave him some satisfaction to see "that man" go away — or for some cunning reason of his own, he was always back before the hour of Anthony's departure. On approaching the cottage he would see generally "that man" lying on the grass in the orchard at some distance from his daughter seated in a chair brought out of the cottage's living room. Invariably Mr. Smith made straight for them and as invariably had the feeling that his approach was not disturbing a very intimate conversation. He sat with them, through a silent hour or so, and then it would be time for Anthony to go. Mr. Smith, perhaps from discretion, would casually vanish a minute or so before, and then watch through the diamond panes of an upstairs room "that man" take a lingering look outside the gate at the invisible Flora, lift his hat, like a caller, and go off down the road. Then only Mr. Smith would join his daughter again.

These were the bad moments for her. Not always, of course, but frequently. It was nothing extraordinary to hear Mr. Smith begin gently with some observation like this:

"That man is getting tired of you."

He would never pronounce Anthony's name. It was always "that man."

Generally she would remain mute with wide open eyes gazing at nothing between the gnarled fruit trees. Once, however, she got up and walked into the cottage. Mr. Smith followed her carrying the chair. He banged it down resolutely and in that smooth inexpressive tone so many ears used to bend eagerly to catch when it came from the Great de Barral he said:

"Let's get away."

She had the strength of mind not to spin round. On the contrary she went on to a shabby bit of a mirror on the wall. In the greenish glass her own face looked far off like the livid face of a drowned corpse at the bottom of a pool. She laughed faintly.

"I tell you that man's getting — "

"Papa," she interrupted him. "I have no illusions as to myself. It has happened to me before but — "

Her voice failing her suddenly her father struck in with quite an unwonted animation. "Let's make a rush for it, then."

Having mastered both her fright and her bitterness, she turned round, sat down and allowed her astonishment to be seen. Mr. Smith sat down too, his knees together and bent at right angles, his thin legs parallel to each other and his hands resting on the arms of the wooden arm-chair. His hair had grown long, his head was set stiffly, there was something fatuously venerable in his aspect.

“You can’t care for him. Don’t tell me. I understand your motive. And I have called you an unfortunate girl. You are that as much as if you had gone on the streets. Yes. Don’t interrupt me, Flora. I was everlastingly being interrupted at the trial and I can’t stand it any more. I won’t be interrupted by my own child. And when I think that it is on the very day before they let me out that you . . .”

He had wormed this fact out of her by that time because Flora had got tired of evading the question. He had been very much struck and distressed. Was that the trust she had in him? Was that a proof of confidence and love? The very day before! Never given him even half a chance. It was as at the trial. They never gave him a chance. They would not give him time. And there was his own daughter acting exactly as his bitterest enemies had done. Not giving him time!

The monotony of that subdued voice nearly lulled her dismay to sleep. She listened to the unavoidable things he was saying.

“But what induced that man to marry you? Of course he’s a gentleman. One can see that. And that makes it worse. Gentlemen don’t understand anything about city affairs — finance. Why! — the people who started the cry after me were a firm of gentlemen. The counsel, the judge — all gentlemen — quite out of it! No notion of . . . And then he’s a sailor too. Just a skipper — ”

“My grandfather was nothing else,” she interrupted. And he made an angular gesture of impatience.

“Yes. But what does a silly sailor know of business? Nothing. No conception. He can have no idea of what it means to be the daughter of Mr. de Barral — even after his enemies had smashed him. What on earth induced him — ”

She made a movement because the level voice was getting on her nerves. And he paused, but only to go on again in the same tone with the remark:

“Of course you are pretty. And that’s why you are lost — like many other poor girls. Unfortunate is the word for you.”

She said: “It may be. Perhaps it is the right word; but listen, papa. I mean to be honest.”

He began to exhale more speeches.

“Just the sort of man to get tired and then leave you and go off with his beastly ship. And anyway you can never be happy with him. Look at his face. I want to save you. You see I was not perhaps a very good husband to your poor mother. She would have done better to have left me long before she died. I have been thinking it all over. I won’t have you unhappy.”

He ran his eyes over her with an attention which was surprisingly noticeable. Then said, “H’m! Yes. Let’s clear out before it is too late. Quietly, you and I.”

She said as if inspired and with that calmness which despair often gives: "There is no money to go away with, papa."

He rose up straightening himself as though he were a hinged figure. She said decisively:

"And of course you wouldn't think of deserting me, papa?"

"Of course not," sounded his subdued tone. And he left her, gliding away with his walk which Mr. Powell described to me as being as level and wary as his voice. He walked as if he were carrying a glass full of water on his head.

Flora naturally said nothing to Anthony of that edifying conversation. His generosity might have taken alarm at it and she did not want to be left behind to manage her father alone. And moreover she was too honest. She would be honest at whatever cost. She would not be the first to speak. Never. And the thought came into her head: "I am indeed an unfortunate creature!"

It was by the merest coincidence that Anthony coming for the afternoon two days later had a talk with Mr. Smith in the orchard. Flora for some reason or other had left them for a moment; and Anthony took that opportunity to be frank with Mr. Smith. He said: "It seems to me, sir, that you think Flora has not done very well for herself. Well, as to that I can't say anything. All I want you to know is that I have tried to do the right thing." And then he explained that he had willed everything he was possessed of to her. "She didn't tell you, I suppose?"

Mr. Smith shook his head slightly. And Anthony, trying to be friendly, was just saying that he proposed to keep the ship away from home for at least two years. "I think, sir, that from every point of view it would be best," when Flora came back and the conversation, cut short in that direction, languished and died. Later in the evening, after Anthony had been gone for hours, on the point of separating for the night, Mr. Smith remarked suddenly to his daughter after a long period of brooding:

"A will is nothing. One tears it up. One makes another." Then after reflecting for a minute he added unemotionally:

"One tells lies about it."

Flora, patient, steeled against every hurt and every disgust to the point of wondering at herself, said: "You push your dislike of — of — Roderick too far, papa. You have no regard for me. You hurt me."

He, as ever inexpressive to the point of terrifying her sometimes by the contrast of his placidity and his words, turned away from her a pair of faded eyes.

"I wonder how far your dislike goes," he began. "His very name sticks in your throat. I've noticed it. It hurts me. What do you think of that? You might remember that you are not the only person that's hurt by your folly, by your hastiness, by your recklessness." He brought back his eyes to her face. "And the very day before they were going to let me out." His feeble voice failed him altogether, the narrow compressed lips only trembling for a time before he added with that extraordinary equanimity of tone, "I call it sinful."

Flora made no answer. She judged it simpler, kinder and certainly safer to let him talk himself out. This, Mr. Smith, being naturally taciturn, never took very long to do. And we must not imagine that this sort of thing went on all the time. She had a few good days in that cottage. The absence of Anthony was a relief and his visits were pleasurable. She was quieter. He was quieter too. She was almost sorry when the time to join the ship arrived. It was a moment of anguish, of excitement; they arrived at the dock in the evening and Flora after "making her father comfortable" according to established usage lingered in the state-room long enough to notice that he was surprised. She caught his pale eyes observing her quite stonily. Then she went out after a cheery good-night.

Contrary to her hopes she found Anthony yet in the saloon. Sitting in his arm-chair at the head of the table he was picking up some business papers which he put hastily in his breast pocket and got up. He asked her if her day, travelling up to town and then doing some shopping, had tired her. She shook her head. Then he wanted to know in a half-jocular way how she felt about going away, and for a long voyage this time.

"Does it matter how I feel?" she asked in a tone that cast a gloom over his face. He answered with repressed violence which she did not expect:

"No, it does not matter, because I cannot go without you. I've told you . . . You know it. You don't think I could."

"I assure you I haven't the slightest wish to evade my obligations," she said steadily. "Even if I could. Even if I dared, even if I had to die for it!"

He looked thunderstruck. They stood facing each other at the end of the saloon. Anthony stuttered. "Oh no. You won't die. You don't mean it. You have taken kindly to the sea."

She laughed, but she felt angry.

"No, I don't mean it. I tell you I don't mean to evade my obligations. I shall live on . . . feeling a little crushed, nevertheless."

"Crushed!" he repeated. "What's crushing you?"

"Your magnanimity," she said sharply. But her voice was softened after a time. "Yet I don't know. There is a perfection in it — do you understand me, Roderick? — which makes it almost possible to bear."

He sighed, looked away, and remarked that it was time to put out the lamp in the saloon. The permission was only till ten o'clock.

"But you needn't mind that so much in your cabin. Just see that the curtains of the ports are drawn close and that's all. The steward might have forgotten to do it. He lighted your reading lamp in there before he went ashore for a last evening with his wife. I don't know if it was wise to get rid of Mrs. Brown. You will have to look after yourself, Flora."

He was quite anxious; but Flora as a matter of fact congratulated herself on the absence of Mrs. Brown. No sooner had she closed the door of her state-room than she murmured fervently, "Yes! Thank goodness, she is gone." There would be no gentle knock, followed by her appearance with her equivocal stare and the intolerable: "Can

I do anything for you, ma'am?" which poor Flora had learned to fear and hate more than any voice or any words on board that ship — her only refuge from the world which had no use for her, for her imperfections and for her troubles.

* * * * *

Mrs. Brown had been very much vexed at her dismissal. The Browns were a childless couple and the arrangement had suited them perfectly. Their resentment was very bitter. Mrs. Brown had to remain ashore alone with her rage, but the steward was nursing his on board. Poor Flora had no greater enemy, the aggrieved mate had no greater sympathizer. And Mrs. Brown, with a woman's quick power of observation and inference (the putting of two and two together) had come to a certain conclusion which she had imparted to her husband before leaving the ship. The morose steward permitted himself once to make an allusion to it in Powell's hearing. It was in the officers' mess-room at the end of a meal while he lingered after putting a fruit pie on the table. He and the chief mate started a dialogue about the alarming change in the captain, the sallow steward looking down with a sinister frown, Franklin rolling upwards his eyes, sentimental in a red face. Young Powell had heard a lot of that sort of thing by that time. It was growing monotonous; it had always sounded to him a little absurd. He struck in impatiently with the remark that such lamentations over a man merely because he had taken a wife seemed to him like lunacy.

Franklin muttered, "Depends on what the wife is up to." The steward leaning against the bulkhead near the door glowered at Powell, that newcomer, that ignoramus, that stranger without right or privileges. He snarled:

"Wife! Call her a wife, do you?"

"What the devil do you mean by this?" exclaimed young Powell.

"I know what I know. My old woman has not been six months on board for nothing. You had better ask her when we get back."

And meeting sullenly the withering stare of Mr. Powell the steward retreated backwards.

Our young friend turned at once upon the mate. "And you let that confounded bottle-washer talk like this before you, Mr. Franklin. Well, I am astonished."

"Oh, it isn't what you think. It isn't what you think." Mr. Franklin looked more apoplectic than ever. "If it comes to that I could astonish you. But it's no use. I myself can hardly . . . You couldn't understand. I hope you won't try to make mischief. There was a time, young fellow, when I would have dared any man — any man, you hear? — to make mischief between me and Captain Anthony. But not now. Not now. There's a change! Not in me though . . ."

Young Powell rejected with indignation any suggestion of making mischief. "Who do you take me for?" he cried. "Only you had better tell that steward to be careful what he says before me or I'll spoil his good looks for him for a month and will leave him to explain the why of it to the captain the best way he can."

This speech established Powell as a champion of Mrs. Anthony. Nothing more bearing on the question was ever said before him. He did not care for the steward's black

looks; Franklin, never conversational even at the best of times and avoiding now the only topic near his heart, addressed him only on matters of duty. And for that, too, Powell cared very little. The woes of the apoplectic mate had begun to bore him long before. Yet he felt lonely a bit at times. Therefore the little intercourse with Mrs. Anthony either in one dog-watch or the other was something to be looked forward to. The captain did not mind it. That was evident from his manner. One night he inquired (they were then alone on the poop) what they had been talking about that evening? Powell had to confess that it was about the ship. Mrs. Anthony had been asking him questions.

"Takes interest — eh?" jerked out the captain moving rapidly up and down the weather side of the poop.

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Anthony seems to get hold wonderfully of what one's telling her."

"Sailor's granddaughter. One of the old school. Old sea-dog of the best kind, I believe," ejaculated the captain, swinging past his motionless second officer and leaving the words behind him like a trail of sparks succeeded by a perfect conversational darkness, because, for the next two hours till he left the deck, he didn't open his lips again.

On another occasion . . . we mustn't forget that the ship had crossed the line and was adding up south latitude every day by then . . . on another occasion, about seven in the evening, Powell on duty, heard his name uttered softly in the companion. The captain was on the stairs, thin-faced, his eyes sunk, on his arm a Shetland wool wrap.

"Mr. Powell — here."

"Yes, sir."

"Give this to Mrs. Anthony. Evenings are getting chilly."

And the haggard face sank out of sight. Mrs. Anthony was surprised on seeing the shawl.

"The captain wants you to put this on," explained young Powell, and as she raised herself in her seat he dropped it on her shoulders. She wrapped herself up closely.

"Where was the captain?" she asked.

"He was in the companion. Called me on purpose," said Powell, and then retreated discreetly, because she looked as though she didn't want to talk any more that evening. Mr. Smith — the old gentleman — was as usual sitting on the skylight near her head, brooding over the long chair but by no means inimical, as far as his unreadable face went, to those conversations of the two youngest people on board. In fact they seemed to give him some pleasure. Now and then he would raise his faded china eyes to the animated face of Mr. Powell thoughtfully. When the young sailor was by, the old man became less rigid, and when his daughter, on rare occasions, smiled at some artless tale of Mr. Powell, the inexpressive face of Mr. Smith reflected dimly that flash of evanescent mirth. For Mr. Powell had come now to entertain his captain's wife with anecdotes from the not very distant past when he was a boy, on board various ships, — funny things do happen on board ship. Flora was quite surprised at times to find herself amused. She was even heard to laugh twice in the course of a month. It was

not a loud sound but it was startling enough at the after-end of the Ferndale where low tones or silence were the rule. The second time this happened the captain himself must have been startled somewhere down below; because he emerged from the depths of his unobtrusive existence and began his tramping on the opposite side of the poop.

Almost immediately he called his young second officer over to him. This was not done in displeasure. The glance he fastened on Mr. Powell conveyed a sort of approving wonder. He engaged him in desultory conversation as if for the only purpose of keeping a man who could provoke such a sound, near his person. Mr. Powell felt himself liked. He felt it. Liked by that haggard, restless man who threw at him disconnected phrases to which his answers were, "Yes, sir," "No, sir," "Oh, certainly," "I suppose so, sir," — and might have been clearly anything else for all the other cared.

It was then, Mr. Powell told me, that he discovered in himself an already old-established liking for Captain Anthony. He also felt sorry for him without being able to discover the origins of that sympathy of which he had become so suddenly aware.

Meantime Mr. Smith, bending forward stiffly as though he had a hinged back, was speaking to his daughter.

She was a child no longer. He wanted to know if she believed in — in hell. In eternal punishment?

His peculiar voice, as if filtered through cotton-wool was inaudible on the other side of the deck. Poor Flora, taken very much unawares, made an inarticulate murmur, shook her head vaguely, and glanced in the direction of the pacing Anthony who was not looking her way. It was no use glancing in that direction. Of young Powell, leaning against the mizzen-mast and facing his captain she could only see the shoulder and part of a blue serge back.

And the unworried, unaccented voice of her father went on tormenting her.

"You see, you must understand. When I came out of jail it was with joy. That is, my soul was fairly torn in two — but anyway to see you happy — I had made up my mind to that. Once I could be sure that you were happy then of course I would have had no reason to care for life — strictly speaking — which is all right for an old man; though naturally . . . no reason to wish for death either. But this sort of life! What sense, what meaning, what value has it either for you or for me? It's just sitting down to look at the death, that's coming, coming. What else is it? I don't know how you can put up with that. I don't think you can stand it for long. Some day you will jump overboard."

Captain Anthony had stopped for a moment staring ahead from the break of the poop, and poor Flora sent at his back a look of despairing appeal which would have moved a heart of stone. But as though she had done nothing he did not stir in the least. She got out of the long chair and went towards the companion. Her father followed carrying a few small objects, a handbag, her handkerchief, a book. They went down together.

It was only then that Captain Anthony turned, looked at the place they had vacated and resumed his tramping, but not his desultory conversation with his second officer.

His nervous exasperation had grown so much that now very often he used to lose control of his voice. If he did not watch himself it would suddenly die in his throat. He had to make sure before he ventured on the simplest saying, an order, a remark on the wind, a simple good-morning. That's why his utterance was abrupt, his answers to people startlingly brusque and often not forthcoming at all.

It happens to the most resolute of men to find himself at grips not only with unknown forces, but with a well-known force the real might of which he had not understood. Anthony had discovered that he was not the proud master but the chafing captive of his generosity. It rose in front of him like a wall which his respect for himself forbade him to scale. He said to himself: "Yes, I was a fool — but she has trusted me!" Trusted! A terrible word to any man somewhat exceptional in a world in which success has never been found in renunciation and good faith. And it must also be said, in order not to make Anthony more stupidly sublime than he was, that the behaviour of Flora kept him at a distance. The girl was afraid to add to the exasperation of her father. It was her unhappy lot to be made more wretched by the only affection which she could not suspect. She could not be angry with it, however, and out of deference for that exaggerated sentiment she hardly dared to look otherwise than by stealth at the man whose masterful compassion had carried her off. And quite unable to understand the extent of Anthony's delicacy, she said to herself that "he didn't care." He probably was beginning at bottom to detest her — like the governess, like the maiden lady, like the German woman, like Mrs. Fyne, like Mr. Fyne — only he was extraordinary, he was generous. At the same time she had moments of irritation. He was violent, headstrong — perhaps stupid. Well, he had had his way.

A man who has had his way is seldom happy, for generally he finds that the way does not lead very far on this earth of desires which can never be fully satisfied. Anthony had entered with extreme precipitation the enchanted gardens of Armida saying to himself "At last!" As to Armida, herself, he was not going to offer her any violence. But now he had discovered that all the enchantment was in Armida herself, in Armida's smiles. This Armida did not smile. She existed, unapproachable, behind the blank wall of his renunciation. His force, fit for action, experienced the impatience, the indignation, almost the despair of his vitality arrested, bound, stilled, progressively worn down, frittered away by Time; by that force blind and insensible, which seems inert and yet uses one's life up by its imperceptible action, dropping minute after minute on one's living heart like drops of water wearing down a stone.

He upbraided himself. What else could he have expected? He had rushed in like a ruffian; he had dragged the poor defenceless thing by the hair of her head, as it were, on board that ship. It was really atrocious. Nothing assured him that his person could be attractive to this or any other woman. And his proceedings were enough in themselves to make anyone odious. He must have been bereft of his senses. She must fatally detest and fear him. Nothing could make up for such brutality. And yet somehow he resented this very attitude which seemed to him completely justifiable. Surely he was not too monstrous (morally) to be looked at frankly sometimes. But no! She wouldn't. Well,

perhaps, some day . . . Only he was not going ever to attempt to beg for forgiveness. With the repulsion she felt for his person she would certainly misunderstand the most guarded words, the most careful advances. Never! Never!

It would occur to Anthony at the end of such meditations that death was not an unfriendly visitor after all. No wonder then that even young Powell, his faculties having been put on the alert, began to think that there was something unusual about the man who had given him his chance in life. Yes, decidedly, his captain was "strange." There was something wrong somewhere, he said to himself, never guessing that his young and candid eyes were in the presence of a passion profound, tyrannical and mortal, discovering its own existence, astounded at feeling itself helpless and dismayed at finding itself incurable.

Powell had never before felt this mysterious uneasiness so strongly as on that evening when it had been his good fortune to make Mrs. Anthony laugh a little by his artless prattle. Standing out of the way, he had watched his captain walk the weather-side of the poop, he took full cognizance of his liking for that inexplicably strange man and saw him swerve towards the companion and go down below with sympathetic if utterly uncomprehending eyes.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Smith came up alone and manifested a desire for a little conversation. He, too, if not so mysterious as the captain, was not very comprehensible to Mr. Powell's uninformed candour. He often favoured thus the second officer. His talk alluded somewhat enigmatically and often without visible connection to Mr. Powell's friendliness towards himself and his daughter. "For I am well aware that we have no friends on board this ship, my dear young man," he would add, "except yourself. Flora feels that too."

And Mr. Powell, flattered and embarrassed, could but emit a vague murmur of protest. For the statement was true in a sense, though the fact was in itself insignificant. The feelings of the ship's company could not possibly matter to the captain's wife and to Mr. Smith — her father. Why the latter should so often allude to it was what surprised our Mr. Powell. This was by no means the first occasion. More like the twentieth rather. And in his weak voice, with his monotonous intonation, leaning over the rail and looking at the water the other continued this conversation, or rather his remarks, remarks of such a monstrous nature that Mr. Powell had no option but to accept them for gruesome jesting.

"For instance," said Mr. Smith, "that mate, Franklin, I believe he would just as soon see us both overboard as not."

"It's not so bad as that," laughed Mr. Powell, feeling uncomfortable, because his mind did not accommodate itself easily to exaggeration of statement. "He isn't a bad chap really," he added, very conscious of Mr. Franklin's offensive manner of which instances were not far to seek. "He's such a fool as to be jealous. He has been with the captain for years. It's not for me to say, perhaps, but I think the captain has spoiled all that gang of old servants. They are like a lot of pet old dogs. Wouldn't let anybody

come near him if they could help it. I've never seen anything like it. And the second mate, I believe, was like that too."

"Well, he isn't here, luckily. There would have been one more enemy," said Mr. Smith. "There's enough of them without him. And you being here instead of him makes it much more pleasant for my daughter and myself. One feels there may be a friend in need. For really, for a woman all alone on board ship amongst a lot of unfriendly men . . ."

"But Mrs Anthony is not alone," exclaimed Powell. "There's you, and there's the . . ."

Mr. Smith interrupted him.

"Nobody's immortal. And there are times when one feels ashamed to live. Such an evening as this for instance."

It was a lovely evening; the colours of a splendid sunset had died out and the breath of a warm breeze seemed to have smoothed out the sea. Away to the south the sheet lightning was like the flashing of an enormous lantern hidden under the horizon. In order to change the conversation Mr. Powell said:

"Anyway no one can charge you with being a Jonah, Mr. Smith. We have had a magnificent quick passage so far. The captain ought to be pleased. And I suppose you are not sorry either."

This diversion was not successful. Mr. Smith emitted a sort of bitter chuckle and said: "Jonah! That's the fellow that was thrown overboard by some sailors. It seems to me it's very easy at sea to get rid of a person one does not like. The sea does not give up its dead as the earth does."

"You forget the whale, sir," said young Powell.

Mr. Smith gave a start. "Eh? What whale? Oh! Jonah. I wasn't thinking of Jonah. I was thinking of this passage which seems so quick to you. But only think what it is to me? It isn't a life, going about the sea like this. And, for instance, if one were to fall ill, there isn't a doctor to find out what's the matter with one. It's worrying. It makes me anxious at times."

"Is Mrs. Anthony not feeling well?" asked Powell. But Mr. Smith's remark was not meant for Mrs. Anthony. She was well. He himself was well. It was the captain's health that did not seem quite satisfactory. Had Mr. Powell noticed his appearance?

Mr. Powell didn't know enough of the captain to judge. He couldn't tell. But he observed thoughtfully that Mr. Franklin had been saying the same thing. And Franklin had known the captain for years. The mate was quite worried about it.

This intelligence startled Mr. Smith considerably. "Does he think he is in danger of dying?" he exclaimed with an animation quite extraordinary for him, which horrified Mr. Powell.

"Heavens! Die! No! Don't you alarm yourself, sir. I've never heard a word about danger from Mr. Franklin."

"Well, well," sighed Mr. Smith and left the poop for the saloon rather abruptly.

As a matter of fact Mr. Franklin had been on deck for some considerable time. He had come to relieve young Powell; but seeing him engaged in talk with the "enemy" —

with one of the “enemies” at least — had kept at a distance, which, the poop of the Ferndale being aver seventy feet long, he had no difficulty in doing. Mr. Powell saw him at the head of the ladder leaning on his elbow, melancholy and silent. “Oh! Here you are, sir.”

“Here I am. Here I’ve been ever since six o’clock. Didn’t want to interrupt the pleasant conversation. If you like to put in half of your watch below jawing with a dear friend, that’s not my affair. Funny taste though.”

“He isn’t a bad chap,” said the impartial Powell.

The mate snorted angrily, tapping the deck with his foot; then: “Isn’t he? Well, give him my love when you come together again for another nice long yarn.”

“I say, Mr. Franklin, I wonder the captain don’t take offence at your manners.”

“The captain. I wish to goodness he would start a row with me. Then I should know at least I am somebody on board. I’d welcome it, Mr. Powell. I’d rejoice. And dam’ me I would talk back too till I roused him. He’s a shadow of himself. He walks about his ship like a ghost. He’s fading away right before our eyes. But of course you don’t see. You don’t care a hang. Why should you?”

Mr. Powell did not wait for more. He went down on the main deck. Without taking the mate’s jeremiads seriously he put them beside the words of Mr. Smith. He had grown already attached to Captain Anthony. There was something not only attractive but compelling in the man. Only it is very difficult for youth to believe in the menace of death. Not in the fact itself, but in its proximity to a breathing, moving, talking, superior human being, showing no sign of disease. And Mr. Powell thought that this talk was all nonsense. But his curiosity was awakened. There was something, and at any time some circumstance might occur . . . No, he would never find out . . . There was nothing to find out, most likely. Mr. Powell went to his room where he tried to read a book he had already read a good many times. Presently a bell rang for the officers’ supper.

Chapter 6 — . . . A Moonless Night, Thick With Stars Above, Very Dark on the Water

In the mess-room Powell found Mr. Franklin hacking at a piece of cold salt beef with a table knife. The mate, fiery in the face and rolling his eyes over that task, explained that the carver belonging to the mess-room could not be found. The steward, present also, complained savagely of the cook. The fellow got things into his galley and then lost them. Mr. Franklin tried to pacify him with mournful firmness.

“There, there! That will do. We who have been all these years together in the ship have other things to think about than quarrelling among ourselves.”

Mr. Powell thought with exasperation: “Here he goes again,” for this utterance had nothing cryptic for him. The steward having withdrawn morosely, he was not surprised

to hear the mate strike the usual note. That morning the mizzen topsail tie had carried away (probably a defective link) and something like forty feet of chain and wire-rope, mixed up with a few heavy iron blocks, had crashed down from aloft on the poop with a terrifying racket.

“Did you notice the captain then, Mr. Powell. Did you notice?”

Powell confessed frankly that he was too scared himself when all that lot of gear came down on deck to notice anything.

“The gin-block missed his head by an inch,” went on the mate impressively. “I wasn’t three feet from him. And what did he do? Did he shout, or jump, or even look aloft to see if the yard wasn’t coming down too about our ears in a dozen pieces? It’s a marvel it didn’t. No, he just stopped short — no wonder; he must have felt the wind of that iron gin-block on his face — looked down at it, there, lying close to his foot — and went on again. I believe he didn’t even blink. It isn’t natural. The man is stupefied.”

He sighed ridiculously and Mr. Powell had suppressed a grin, when the mate added as if he couldn’t contain himself:

“He will be taking to drink next. Mark my words. That’s the next thing.”

Mr. Powell was disgusted.

“You are so fond of the captain and yet you don’t seem to care what you say about him. I haven’t been with him for seven years, but I know he isn’t the sort of man that takes to drink. And then — why the devil should he?”

“Why the devil, you ask. Devil — eh? Well, no man is safe from the devil — and that’s answer enough for you,” wheezed Mr. Franklin not unkindly. “There was a time, a long time ago, when I nearly took to drink myself. What do you say to that?”

Mr. Powell expressed a polite incredulity. The thick, congested mate seemed on the point of bursting with despondency. “That was bad example though. I was young and fell into dangerous company, made a fool of myself — yes, as true as you see me sitting here. Drank to forget. Thought it a great dodge.”

Powell looked at the grotesque Franklin with awakened interest and with that half-amused sympathy with which we receive unprovoked confidences from men with whom we have no sort of affinity. And at the same time he began to look upon him more seriously. Experience has its prestige. And the mate continued:

“If it hadn’t been for the old lady, I would have gone to the devil. I remembered her in time. Nothing like having an old lady to look after to steady a chap and make him face things. But as bad luck would have it, Captain Anthony has no mother living, not a blessed soul belonging to him as far as I know. Oh, aye, I fancy he said once something to me of a sister. But she’s married. She don’t need him. Yes. In the old days he used to talk to me as if we had been brothers,” exaggerated the mate sentimentally. “‘Franklin,’ — he would say — ‘this ship is my nearest relation and she isn’t likely to turn against me. And I suppose you are the man I’ve known the longest in the world.’ That’s how he used to speak to me. Can I turn my back on him? He has turned his back on his ship; that’s what it has come to. He has no one now but his old Franklin.”

But what's a fellow to do to put things back as they were and should be. Should be — I say!"

His starting eyes had a terrible fixity. Mr. Powell's irresistible thought, "he resembles a boiled lobster in distress," was followed by annoyance. "Good Lord," he said, "you don't mean to hint that Captain Anthony has fallen into bad company. What is it you want to save him from?"

"I do mean it," affirmed the mate, and the very absurdity of the statement made it impressive — because it seemed so absolutely audacious. "Well, you have a cheek," said young Powell, feeling mentally helpless. "I have a notion the captain would half kill you if he were to know how you carry on."

"And welcome," uttered the fervently devoted Franklin. "I am willing, if he would only clear the ship afterwards of that . . . You are but a youngster and you may go and tell him what you like. Let him knock the stuffing out of his old Franklin first and think it over afterwards. Anything to pull him together. But of course you wouldn't. You are all right. Only you don't know that things are sometimes different from what they look. There are friendships that are no friendships, and marriages that are no marriages. Phoo! Likely to be right — wasn't it? Never a hint to me. I go off on leave and when I come back, there it is — all over, settled! Not a word beforehand. No warning. If only: 'What do you think of it, Franklin?' — or anything of the sort. And that's a man who hardly ever did anything without asking my advice. Why! He couldn't take over a new coat from the tailor without . . . first thing, directly the fellow came on board with some new clothes, whether in London or in China, it would be: 'Pass the word along there for Mr. Franklin. Mr. Franklin wanted in the cabin.' In I would go. 'Just look at my back, Franklin. Fits all right, doesn't it?' And I would say: 'First rate, sir,' or whatever was the truth of it. That or anything else. Always the truth of it. Always. And well he knew it; and that's why he dared not speak right out. Talking about workmen, alterations, cabins . . . Phoo! . . . instead of a straightforward — 'Wish me joy, Mr. Franklin!' Yes, that was the way to let me know. God only knows what they are — perhaps she isn't his daughter any more than she is . . . She doesn't resemble that old fellow. Not a bit. Not a bit. It's very awful. You may well open your mouth, young man. But for goodness' sake, you who are mixed up with that lot, keep your eyes and ears open too in case — in case of . . . I don't know what. Anything. One wonders what can happen here at sea! Nothing. Yet when a man is called a jailer behind his back."

Mr. Franklin hid his face in his hands for a moment and Powell shut his mouth, which indeed had been open. He slipped out of the mess-room noiselessly. "The mate's crazy," he thought. It was his firm conviction. Nevertheless, that evening, he felt his inner tranquillity disturbed at last by the force and obstinacy of this craze. He couldn't dismiss it with the contempt it deserved. Had the word "jailer" really been pronounced? A strange word for the mate to even imagine he had heard. A senseless, unlikely word. But this word being the only clear and definite statement in these grotesque and dismal ravings was comparatively restful to his mind. Powell's mind rested on it still when he

came up at eight o'clock to take charge of the deck. It was a moonless night, thick with stars above, very dark on the water. A steady air from the west kept the sails asleep. Franklin mustered both watches in low tones as if for a funeral, then approaching Powell:

"The course is east-south-east," said the chief mate distinctly.

"East-south-east, sir."

"Everything's set, Mr. Powell."

"All right, sir."

The other lingered, his sentimental eyes gleamed silvery in the shadowy face. "A quiet night before us. I don't know that there are any special orders. A settled, quiet night. I dare say you won't see the captain. Once upon a time this was the watch he used to come up and start a chat with either of us then on deck. But now he sits in that infernal stern-cabin and mopes. Jailer — eh?"

Mr. Powell walked away from the mate and when at some distance said, "Damn!" quite heartily. It was a confounded nuisance. It had ceased to be funny; that hostile word "jailer" had given the situation an air of reality.

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Franklin's grotesque mortal envelope had disappeared from the poop to seek its needful repose, if only the worried soul would let it rest a while. Mr. Powell, half sorry for the thick little man, wondered whether it would let him. For himself, he recognized that the charm of a quiet watch on deck when one may let one's thoughts roam in space and time had been spoiled without remedy. What shocked him most was the implied aspersion of complicity on Mrs. Anthony. It angered him. In his own words to me, he felt very "enthusiastic" about Mrs. Anthony. "Enthusiastic" is good; especially as he couldn't exactly explain to me what he meant by it. But he felt enthusiastic, he says. That silly Franklin must have been dreaming. That was it. He had dreamed it all. Ass. Yet the injurious word stuck in Powell's mind with its associated ideas of prisoner, of escape. He became very uncomfortable. And just then (it might have been half an hour or more since he had relieved Franklin) just then Mr. Smith came up on the poop alone, like a gliding shadow and leaned over the rail by his side. Young Powell was affected disagreeably by his presence. He made a movement to go away but the other began to talk — and Powell remained where he was as if retained by a mysterious compulsion. The conversation started by Mr. Smith had nothing peculiar. He began to talk of mail-boats in general and in the end seemed anxious to discover what were the services from Port Elizabeth to London. Mr. Powell did not know for certain but imagined that there must be communication with England at least twice a month. "Are you thinking of leaving us, sir; of going home by steam? Perhaps with Mrs. Anthony," he asked anxiously.

"No! No! How can I?" Mr. Smith got quite agitated, for him, which did not amount to much. He was just asking for the sake of something to talk about. No idea at all of going home. One could not always do what one wanted and that's why there were

moments when one felt ashamed to live. This did not mean that one did not want to live. Oh no!

He spoke with careless slowness, pausing frequently and in such a low voice that Powell had to strain his hearing to catch the phrases dropped overboard as it were. And indeed they seemed not worth the effort. It was like the aimless talk of a man pursuing a secret train of thought far removed from the idle words we so often utter only to keep in touch with our fellow beings. An hour passed. It seemed as though Mr. Smith could not make up his mind to go below. He repeated himself. Again he spoke of lives which one was ashamed of. It was necessary to put up with such lives as long as there was no way out, no possible issue. He even alluded once more to mail-boat services on the East coast of Africa and young Powell had to tell him once more that he knew nothing about them.

“Every fortnight, I thought you said,” insisted Mr. Smith. He stirred, seemed to detach himself from the rail with difficulty. His long, slender figure straightened into stiffness, as if hostile to the enveloping soft peace of air and sea and sky, emitted into the night a weak murmur which Mr. Powell fancied was the word, “Abominable” repeated three times, but which passed into the faintly louder declaration: “The moment has come — to go to bed,” followed by a just audible sigh.

“I sleep very well,” added Mr. Smith in his restrained tone. “But it is the moment one opens one’s eyes that is horrible at sea. These days! Oh, these days! I wonder how anybody can . . .”

“I like the life,” observed Mr. Powell.

“Oh, you. You have only yourself to think of. You have made your bed. Well, it’s very pleasant to feel that you are friendly to us. My daughter has taken quite a liking to you, Mr. Powell.”

He murmured, “Good-night” and glided away rigidly. Young Powell asked himself with some distaste what was the meaning of these utterances. His mind had been worried at last into that questioning attitude by no other person than the grotesque Franklin. Suspicion was not natural to him. And he took good care to carefully separate in his thoughts Mrs. Anthony from this man of enigmatic words — her father. Presently he observed that the sheen of the two deck dead-lights of Mr. Smith’s room had gone out. The old gentleman had been surprisingly quick in getting into bed. Shortly afterwards the lamp in the foremost skylight of the saloon was turned out; and this was the sign that the steward had taken in the tray and had retired for the night.

Young Powell had settled down to the regular officer-of-the-watch tramp in the dense shadow of the world decorated with stars high above his head, and on earth only a few gleams of light about the ship. The lamp in the after skylight was kept burning through the night. There were also the dead-lights of the stern-cabins glimmering dully in the deck far aft, catching his eye when he turned to walk that way. The brasses of the wheel glittered too, with the dimly lit figure of the man detached, as if phosphorescent, against the black and spangled background of the horizon.

Young Powell, in the silence of the ship, reinforced by the great silent stillness of the world, said to himself that there was something mysterious in such beings as the absurd Franklin, and even in such beings as himself. It was a strange and almost improper thought to occur to the officer of the watch of a ship on the high seas on no matter how quiet a night. Why on earth was he bothering his head? Why couldn't he dismiss all these people from his mind? It was as if the mate had infected him with his own diseased devotion. He would not have believed it possible that he should be so foolish. But he was — clearly. He was foolish in a way totally unforeseen by himself. Pushing this self-analysis further, he reflected that the springs of his conduct were just as obscure.

“I may be catching myself any time doing things of which I have no conception,” he thought. And as he was passing near the mizzen-mast he perceived a coil of rope left lying on the deck by the oversight of the sweepers. By an impulse which had nothing mysterious in it, he stooped as he went by with the intention of picking it up and hanging it up on its proper pin. This movement brought his head down to the level of the glazed end of the after skylight — the lighted skylight of the most private part of the saloon, consecrated to the exclusiveness of Captain Anthony's married life; the part, let me remind you, cut off from the rest of that forbidden space by a pair of heavy curtains. I mention these curtains because at this point Mr. Powell himself recalled the existence of that unusual arrangement to my mind.

He recalled them with simple-minded compunction at that distance of time. He said: “You understand that directly I stooped to pick up that coil of running gear — the spanker foot-outhaul, it was — I perceived that I could see right into that part of the saloon the curtains were meant to make particularly private. Do you understand me?” he insisted.

I told him that I understood; and he proceeded to call my attention to the wonderful linking up of small facts, with something of awe left yet, after all these years, at the precise workmanship of chance, fate, providence, call it what you will! “For, observe, Marlow,” he said, making at me very round eyes which contrasted funnily with the austere touch of grey on his temples, “observe, my dear fellow, that everything depended on the men who cleared up the poop in the evening leaving that coil of rope on the deck, and on the topsail-tie carrying away in a most incomprehensible and surprising manner earlier in the day, and the end of the chain whipping round the coaming and shivering to bits the coloured glass-pane at the end of the skylight. It had the arms of the city of Liverpool on it; I don't know why unless because the *Ferndale* was registered in Liverpool. It was very thick plate glass. Anyhow, the upper part got smashed, and directly we had attended to things aloft Mr. Franklin had set the carpenter to patch up the damage with some pieces of plain glass. I don't know where they got them; I think the people who fitted up new bookcases in the captain's room had left some spare panes. Chips was there the whole afternoon on his knees, messing with putty and red-lead. It wasn't a neat job when it was done, not by any means, but it would serve to keep the weather out and let the light in. Clear glass.

And of course I was not thinking of it. I just stooped to pick up that rope and found my head within three inches of that clear glass, and — dash it all! I found myself out. Not half an hour before I was saying to myself that it was impossible to tell what was in people's heads or at the back of their talk, or what they were likely to be up to. And here I found myself up to as low a trick as you can well think of. For, after I had stooped, there I remained prying, spying, anyway looking, where I had no business to look. Not consciously at first, may be. He who has eyes, you know, nothing can stop him from seeing things as long as there are things to see in front of him. What I saw at first was the end of the table and the tray clamped on to it, a patent tray for sea use, fitted with holders for a couple of decanters, water-jug and glasses. The glitter of these things caught my eye first; but what I saw next was the captain down there, alone as far as I could see; and I could see pretty well the whole of that part up to the cottage piano, dark against the satin-wood panelling of the bulkhead. And I remained looking. I did. And I don't know that I was ashamed of myself either, then. It was the fault of that Franklin, always talking of the man, making free with him to that extent that really he seemed to have become our property, his and mine, in a way. It's funny, but one had that feeling about Captain Anthony. To watch him was not so much worse than listening to Franklin talking him over. Well, it's no use making excuses for what's inexcusable. I watched; but I dare say you know that there could have been nothing inimical in this low behaviour of mine. On the contrary. I'll tell you now what he was doing. He was helping himself out of a decanter. I saw every movement, and I said to myself mockingly as though jeering at Franklin in my thoughts, 'Hallo! Here's the captain taking to drink at last.' He poured a little brandy or whatever it was into a long glass, filled it with water, drank about a fourth of it and stood the glass back into the holder. Every sign of a bad drinking bout, I was saying to myself, feeling quite amused at the notions of that Franklin. He seemed to me an enormous ass, with his jealousy and his fears. At that rate a month would not have been enough for anybody to get drunk. The captain sat down in one of the swivel arm-chairs fixed around the table; I had him right under me and as he turned the chair slightly, I was looking, I may say, down his back. He took another little sip and then reached for a book which was lying on the table. I had not noticed it before. Altogether the proceedings of a desperate drunkard — weren't they? He opened the book and held it before his face. If this was the way he took to drink, then I needn't worry. He was in no danger from that, and as to any other, I assure you no human being could have looked safer than he did down there. I felt the greatest contempt for Franklin just then, while I looked at Captain Anthony sitting there with a glass of weak brandy-and-water at his elbow and reading in the cabin of his ship, on a quiet night — the quietest, perhaps the finest, of a prosperous passage. And if you wonder why I didn't leave off my ugly spying I will tell you how it was. Captain Anthony was a great reader just about that time; and I, too, I have a great liking for books. To this day I can't come near a book but I must know what it is about. It was a thickish volume he had there, small close print, double columns — I can see it now. What I wanted to make out was the title at the top of

the page. I have very good eyes but he wasn't holding it conveniently — I mean for me up there. Well, it was a history of some kind, that much I read and then suddenly he bangs the book face down on the table, jumps up as if something had bitten him and walks away aft.

"Funny thing shame is. I had been behaving badly and aware of it in a way, but I didn't feel really ashamed till the fright of being found out in my honourable occupation drove me from it. I slunk away to the forward end of the poop and lounged about there, my face and ears burning and glad it was a dark night, expecting every moment to hear the captain's footsteps behind me. For I made sure he was coming on deck. Presently I thought I had rather meet him face to face and I walked slowly aft prepared to see him emerge from the companion before I got that far. I even thought of his having detected me by some means. But it was impossible, unless he had eyes in the top of his head. I had never had a view of his face down there. It was impossible; I was safe; and I felt very mean, yet, explain it as you may, I seemed not to care. And the captain not appearing on deck, I had the impulse to go on being mean. I wanted another peep. I really don't know what was the beastly influence except that Mr. Franklin's talk was enough to demoralize any man by raising a sort of unhealthy curiosity which did away in my case with all the restraints of common decency.

"I did not mean to run the risk of being caught squatting in a suspicious attitude by the captain. There was also the helmsman to consider. So what I did — I am surprised at my low cunning — was to sit down naturally on the skylight-seat and then by bending forward I found that, as I expected, I could look down through the upper part of the end-pane. The worst that could happen to me then, if I remained too long in that position, was to be suspected by the seaman aft at the wheel of having gone to sleep there. For the rest my ears would give me sufficient warning of any movements in the companion.

"But in that way my angle of view was changed. The field too was smaller. The end of the table, the tray and the swivel-chair I had right under my eyes. The captain had not come back yet. The piano I could not see now; but on the other hand I had a very oblique downward view of the curtains drawn across the cabin and cutting off the forward part of it just about the level of the skylight-end and only an inch or so from the end of the table. They were heavy stuff, travelling on a thick brass rod with some contrivance to keep the rings from sliding to and fro when the ship rolled. But just then the ship was as still almost as a model shut up in a glass case while the curtains, joined closely, and, perhaps on purpose, made a little too long moved no more than a solid wall."

* * * * *

Marlow got up to get another cigar. The night was getting on to what I may call its deepest hour, the hour most favourable to evil purposes of men's hate, despair or greed — to whatever can whisper into their ears the unlawful counsels of protest against things that are; the hour of ill-omened silence and chill and stagnation, the hour when the criminal plies his trade and the victim of sleeplessness reaches the lowest

depth of dreadful discouragement; the hour before the first sight of dawn. I know it, because while Marlow was crossing the room I looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. He however never looked that way though it is possible that he, too, was aware of the passage of time. He sat down heavily.

“Our friend Powell,” he began again, “was very anxious that I should understand the topography of that cabin. I was interested more by its moral atmosphere, that tension of falsehood, of desperate acting, which tainted the pure sea-atmosphere into which the magnanimous Anthony had carried off his conquest and — well — his self-conquest too, trying to act at the same time like a beast of prey, a pure spirit and the “most generous of men.” Too big an order clearly because he was nothing of a monster but just a common mortal, a little more self-willed and self-confident than most, may be, both in his roughness and in his delicacy.

As to the delicacy of Mr. Powell’s proceedings I’ll say nothing. He found a sort of depraved excitement in watching an unconscious man — and such an attractive and mysterious man as Captain Anthony at that. He wanted another peep at him. He surmised that the captain must come back soon because of the glass two-thirds full and also of the book put down so brusquely. God knows what sudden pang had made Anthony jump up so. I am convinced he used reading as an opiate against the pain of his magnanimity which like all abnormal growths was gnawing at his healthy substance with cruel persistence. Perhaps he had rushed into his cabin simply to groan freely in absolute and delicate secrecy. At any rate he tarried there. And young Powell would have grown weary and compunctious at last if it had not become manifest to him that he had not been alone in the highly incorrect occupation of watching the movements of Captain Anthony.

Powell explained to me that no sound did or perhaps could reach him from the saloon. The first sign — and we must remember that he was using his eyes for all they were worth — was an unaccountable movement of the curtain. It was wavy and very slight; just perceptible in fact to the sharpened faculties of a secret watcher; for it can’t be denied that our wits are much more alert when engaged in wrong-doing (in which one mustn’t be found out) than in a righteous occupation.

He became suspicious, with no one and nothing definite in his mind. He was suspicious of the curtain itself and observed it. It looked very innocent. Then just as he was ready to put it down to a trick of imagination he saw trembling movements where the two curtains joined. Yes! Somebody else besides himself had been watching Captain Anthony. He owns artlessly that this roused his indignation. It was really too much of a good thing. In this state of intense antagonism he was startled to observe tips of fingers fumbling with the dark stuff. Then they grasped the edge of the further curtain and hung on there, just fingers and knuckles and nothing else. It made an abominable sight. He was looking at it with unaccountable repulsion when a hand came into view; a short, puffy, old, freckled hand projecting into the lamplight, followed by a white wrist, an arm in a grey coat-sleeve, up to the elbow, beyond the elbow, extended tremblingly towards the tray. Its appearance was weird and nauseous, fantastic and silly.

But instead of grabbing the bottle as Powell expected, this hand, tremulous with senile eagerness, swerved to the glass, rested on its edge for a moment (or so it looked from above) and went back with a jerk. The gripping fingers of the other hand vanished at the same time, and young Powell staring at the motionless curtains could indulge for a moment the notion that he had been dreaming.

But that notion did not last long. Powell, after repressing his first impulse to spring for the companion and hammer at the captain's door, took steps to have himself relieved by the boatswain. He was in a state of distraction as to his feelings and yet lucid as to his mind. He remained on the skylight so as to keep his eye on the tray.

Still the captain did not appear in the saloon. "If he had," said Mr. Powell, "I knew what to do. I would have put my elbow through the pane instantly — crash."

I asked him why?

"It was the quickest dodge for getting him away from that tray," he explained. "My throat was so dry that I didn't know if I could shout loud enough. And this was not a case for shouting, either."

The boatswain, sleepy and disgusted, arriving on the poop, found the second officer doubled up over the end of the skylight in a pose which might have been that of severe pain. And his voice was so changed that the man, though naturally vexed at being turned out, made no comment on the plea of sudden indisposition which young Powell put forward.

The rapidity with which the sick man got off the poop must have astonished the boatswain. But Powell, at the moment he opened the door leading into the saloon from the quarter-deck, had managed to control his agitation. He entered swiftly but without noise and found himself in the dark part of the saloon, the strong sheen of the lamp on the other side of the curtains visible only above the rod on which they ran. The door of Mr. Smith's cabin was in that dark part. He passed by it assuring himself by a quick side glance that it was imperfectly closed. "Yes," he said to me. "The old man must have been watching through the crack. Of that I am certain; but it was not for me that he was watching and listening. Horrible! Surely he must have been startled to hear and see somebody he did not expect. He could not possibly guess why I was coming in, but I suppose he must have been concerned." Concerned indeed! He must have been thunderstruck, appalled.

Powell's only distinct aim was to remove the suspected tumbler. He had no other plan, no other intention, no other thought. Do away with it in some manner. Snatch it up and run out with it.

You know that complete mastery of one fixed idea, not a reasonable but an emotional mastery, a sort of concentrated exaltation. Under its empire men rush blindly through fire and water and opposing violence, and nothing can stop them — unless, sometimes, a grain of sand. For his blind purpose (and clearly the thought of Mrs. Anthony was at the bottom of it) Mr. Powell had plenty of time. What checked him at the crucial moment was the familiar, harmless aspect of common things, the steady light, the open book on the table, the solitude, the peace, the home-like effect of the place. He

held the glass in his hand; all he had to do was to vanish back beyond the curtains, flee with it noiselessly into the night on deck, fling it unseen overboard. A minute or less. And then all that would have happened would have been the wonder at the utter disappearance of a glass tumbler, a ridiculous riddle in pantry-affairs beyond the wit of anyone on board to solve. The grain of sand against which Powell stumbled in his headlong career was a moment of incredulity as to the truth of his own conviction because it had failed to affect the safe aspect of familiar things. He doubted his eyes too. He must have dreamt it all! "I am dreaming now," he said to himself. And very likely for a few seconds he must have looked like a man in a trance or profoundly asleep on his feet, and with a glass of brandy-and-water in his hand.

What woke him up and, at the same time, fixed his feet immovably to the spot, was a voice asking him what he was doing there in tones of thunder. Or so it sounded to his ears. Anthony, opening the door of his stern-cabin had naturally exclaimed. What else could you expect? And the exclamation must have been fairly loud if you consider the nature of the sight which met his eye. There, before him, stood his second officer, a seemingly decent, well-bred young man, who, being on duty, had left the deck and had sneaked into the saloon, apparently for the inexpressibly mean purpose of drinking up what was left of his captain's brandy-and-water. There he was, caught absolutely with the glass in his hand.

But the very monstrosity of appearances silenced Anthony after the first exclamation; and young Powell felt himself pierced through and through by the overshadowed glance of his captain. Anthony advanced quietly. The first impulse of Mr. Powell, when discovered, had been to dash the glass on the deck. He was in a sort of panic. But deep down within him his wits were working, and the idea that if he did that he could prove nothing and that the story he had to tell was completely incredible, restrained him. The captain came forward slowly. With his eyes now close to his, Powell, spell-bound, numb all over, managed to lift one finger to the deck above mumbling the explanatory words, "Boatswain on the poop."

The captain moved his head slightly as much as to say, "That's all right" — and this was all. Powell had no voice, no strength. The air was unbreathable, thick, sticky, odious, like hot jelly in which all movements became difficult. He raised the glass a little with immense difficulty and moved his trammelled lips sufficiently to form the words:

"Doctored."

Anthony glanced at it for an instant, only for an instant, and again fastened his eyes on the face of his second mate. Powell added a fervent "I believe" and put the glass down on the tray. The captain's glance followed the movement and returned sternly to his face. The young man pointed a finger once more upwards and squeezed out of his iron-bound throat six consecutive words of further explanation. "Through the skylight. The white pane."

The captain raised his eyebrows very much at this, while young Powell, ashamed but desperate, nodded insistently several times. He meant to say that: Yes. Yes. He

had done that thing. He had been spying . . . The captain's gaze became thoughtful. And, now the confession was over, the iron-bound feeling of Powell's throat passed away giving place to a general anxiety which from his breast seemed to extend to all the limbs and organs of his body. His legs trembled a little, his vision was confused, his mind became blankly expectant. But he was alert enough. At a movement of Anthony he screamed in a strangled whisper.

"Don't, sir! Don't touch it."

The captain pushed aside Powell's extended arm, took up the glass and raised it slowly against the lamplight. The liquid, of very pale amber colour, was clear, and by a glance the captain seemed to call Powell's attention to the fact. Powell tried to pronounce the word, "dissolved" but he only thought of it with great energy which however failed to move his lips. Only when Anthony had put down the glass and turned to him he recovered such a complete command of his voice that he could keep it down to a hurried, forcible whisper — a whisper that shook him.

"Doctored! I swear it! I have seen. Doctored! I have seen."

Not a feature of the captain's face moved. His was a calm to take one's breath away. It did so to young Powell. Then for the first time Anthony made himself heard to the point.

"You did! . . . Who was it?"

And Powell gasped freely at last. "A hand," he whispered fearfully, "a hand and the arm — only the arm — like that."

He advanced his own, slow, stealthy, tremulous in faithful reproduction, the tips of two fingers and the thumb pressed together and hovering above the glass for an instant — then the swift jerk back, after the deed.

"Like that," he repeated growing excited. "From behind this." He grasped the curtain and glaring at the silent Anthony flung it back disclosing the forepart of the saloon. There was on one to be seen.

Powell had not expected to see anybody. "But," he said to me, "I knew very well there was an ear listening and an eye glued to the crack of a cabin door. Awful thought. And that door was in that part of the saloon remaining in the shadow of the other half of the curtain. I pointed at it and I suppose that old man inside saw me pointing. The captain had a wonderful self-command. You couldn't have guessed anything from his face. Well, it was perhaps more thoughtful than usual. And indeed this was something to think about. But I couldn't think steadily. My brain would give a sort of jerk and then go dead again. I had lost all notion of time, and I might have been looking at the captain for days and months for all I knew before I heard him whisper to me fiercely: "Not a word!" This jerked me out of that trance I was in and I said "No! No! I didn't mean even you."

"I wanted to explain my conduct, my intentions, but I read in his eyes that he understood me and I was only too glad to leave off. And there we were looking at each other, dumb, brought up short by the question "What next?"

“I thought Captain Anthony was a man of iron till I saw him suddenly fling his head to the right and to the left fiercely, like a wild animal at bay not knowing which way to break out . . . “

* * * * *

“Truly,” commented Marlow, “brought to bay was not a bad comparison; a better one than Mr. Powell was aware of. At that moment the appearance of Flora could not but bring the tension to the breaking point. She came out in all innocence but not without vague dread. Anthony’s exclamation on first seeing Powell had reached her in her cabin, where, it seems, she was brushing her hair. She had heard the very words. “What are you doing here?” And the unwonted loudness of the voice — his voice — breaking the habitual stillness of that hour would have startled a person having much less reason to be constantly apprehensive, than the captive of Anthony’s masterful generosity. She had no means to guess to whom the question was addressed and it echoed in her heart, as Anthony’s voice always did. Followed complete silence. She waited, anxious, expectant, till she could stand the strain no longer, and with the weary mental appeal of the overburdened. “My God! What is it now?” she opened the door of her room and looked into the saloon. Her first glance fell on Powell. For a moment, seeing only the second officer with Anthony, she felt relieved and made as if to draw back; but her sharpened perception detected something suspicious in their attitudes, and she came forward slowly.

“I was the first to see Mrs. Anthony,” related Powell, “because I was facing aft. The captain, noticing my eyes, looked quickly over his shoulder and at once put his finger to his lips to caution me. As if I were likely to let out anything before her! Mrs. Anthony had on a dressing-gown of some grey stuff with red facings and a thick red cord round her waist. Her hair was down. She looked a child; a pale-faced child with big blue eyes and a red mouth a little open showing a glimmer of white teeth. The light fell strongly on her as she came up to the end of the table. A strange child though; she hardly affected one like a child, I remember. Do you know,” exclaimed Mr. Powell, who clearly must have been, like many seamen, an industrious reader, “do you know what she looked like to me with those big eyes and something appealing in her whole expression. She looked like a forsaken elf. Captain Anthony had moved towards her to keep her away from my end of the table, where the tray was. I had never seen them so near to each other before, and it made a great contrast. It was wonderful, for, with his beard cut to a point, his swarthy, sunburnt complexion, thin nose and his lean head there was something African, something Moorish in Captain Anthony. His neck was bare; he had taken off his coat and collar and had drawn on his sleeping jacket in the time that he had been absent from the saloon. I seem to see him now. Mrs. Anthony too. She looked from him to me — I suppose I looked guilty or frightened — and from me to him, trying to guess what there was between us two. Then she burst out with a “What has happened?” which seemed addressed to me. I mumbled “Nothing! Nothing, ma’am,” which she very likely did not hear.

“You must not think that all this had lasted a long time. She had taken fright at our behaviour and turned to the captain pitifully. “What is it you are concealing from me?” A straight question — eh? I don’t know what answer the captain would have made. Before he could even raise his eyes to her she cried out “Ah! Here’s papa” in a sharp tone of relief, but directly afterwards she looked to me as if she were holding her breath with apprehension. I was so interested in her that, how shall I say it, her exclamation made no connection in my brain at first. I also noticed that she had sidled up a little nearer to Captain Anthony, before it occurred to me to turn my head. I can tell you my neck stiffened in the twisted position from the shock of actually seeing that old man! He had dared! I suppose you think I ought to have looked upon him as mad. But I couldn’t. It would have been certainly easier. But I could not. You should have seen him. First of all he was completely dressed with his very cap still on his head just as when he left me on deck two hours before, saying in his soft voice: “The moment has come to go to bed” — while he meant to go and do that thing and hide in his dark cabin, and watch the stuff do its work. A cold shudder ran down my back. He had his hands in the pockets of his jacket, his arms were pressed close to his thin, upright body, and he shuffled across the cabin with his short steps. There was a red patch on each of his old soft cheeks as if somebody had been pinching them. He drooped his head a little, and looked with a sort of underhand expectation at the captain and Mrs. Anthony standing close together at the other end of the saloon. The calculating horrible impudence of it! His daughter was there; and I am certain he had seen the captain putting his finger on his lips to warn me. And then he had coolly come out! He passed my imagination, I assure you. After that one shiver his presence killed every faculty in me — wonder, horror, indignation. I felt nothing in particular just as if he were still the old gentleman who used to talk to me familiarly every day on deck. Would you believe it?”

“Mr. Powell challenged my powers of wonder at this internal phenomenon,” went on Marlow after a slight pause. “But even if they had not been fully engaged, together with all my powers of attention in following the facts of the case, I would not have been astonished by his statements about himself. Taking into consideration his youth they were by no means incredible; or, at any rate, they were the least incredible part of the whole. They were also the least interesting part. The interest was elsewhere, and there of course all he could do was to look at the surface. The inwardness of what was passing before his eyes was hidden from him, who had looked on, more impenetrably than from me who at a distance of years was listening to his words. What presently happened at this crisis in Flora de Barral’s fate was beyond his power of comment, seemed in a sense natural. And his own presence on the scene was so strangely motivated that it was left for me to marvel alone at this young man, a completely chance-comer, having brought it about on that night.

Each situation created either by folly or wisdom has its psychological moment. The behaviour of young Powell with its mixture of boyish impulses combined with instinctive prudence, had not created it — I can’t say that — but had discovered it

to the very people involved. What would have happened if he had made a noise about his discovery? But he didn't. His head was full of Mrs. Anthony and he behaved with a discretion beyond his years. Some nice children often do; and surely it is not from reflection. They have their own inspirations. Young Powell's inspiration consisted in being "enthusiastic" about Mrs. Anthony. 'Enthusiastic' is really good. And he was amongst them like a child, sensitive, impressionable, plastic — but unable to find for himself any sort of comment.

I don't know how much mine may be worth; but I believe that just then the tension of the false situation was at its highest. Of all the forms offered to us by life it is the one demanding a couple to realize it fully, which is the most imperative. Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the — the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred. And the punishment of it is an invasion of complexity, a tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings, the deepest form of suffering from which indeed something significant may come at last, which may be criminal or heroic, may be madness or wisdom — or even a straight if despairing decision.

Powell on taking his eyes off the old gentleman noticed Captain Anthony, swarthy as an African, by the side of Flora whiter than the lilies, take his handkerchief out and wipe off his forehead the sweat of anguish — like a man who is overcome. "And no wonder," commented Mr. Powell here. Then the captain said, "Hadn't you better go back to your room." This was to Mrs. Anthony. He tried to smile at her. "Why do you look startled? This night is like any other night."

"Which," Powell again commented to me earnestly, "was a lie . . . No wonder he sweated." You see from this the value of Powell's comments. Mrs. Anthony then said: "Why are you sending me away?"

"Why! That you should go to sleep. That you should rest." And Captain Anthony frowned. Then sharply, "You stay here, Mr. Powell. I shall want you presently."

As a matter of fact Powell had not moved. Flora did not mind his presence. He himself had the feeling of being of no account to those three people. He was looking at Mrs. Anthony as unabashed as the proverbial cat looking at a king. Mrs. Anthony glanced at him. She did not move, gripped by an inexplicable premonition. She had arrived at the very limit of her endurance as the object of Anthony's magnanimity; she was the prey of an intuitive dread of she did not know what mysterious influence; she felt herself being pushed back into that solitude, that moral loneliness, which had made all her life intolerable. And then, in that close communion established again with Anthony, she felt — as on that night in the garden — the force of his personal fascination. The passive quietness with which she looked at him gave her the appearance of a person bewitched — or, say, mesmerically put to sleep — beyond any notion of her surroundings.

After telling Mr. Powell not to go away the captain remained silent. Suddenly Mrs. Anthony pushed back her loose hair with a decisive gesture of her arms and moved still

nearer to him. "Here's papa up yet," she said, but she did not look towards Mr. Smith. "Why is it? And you? I can't go on like this, Roderick — between you two. Don't."

Anthony interrupted her as if something had untied his tongue.

"Oh yes. Here's your father. And . . . Why not. Perhaps it is just as well you came out. Between us two? Is that it? I won't pretend I don't understand. I am not blind. But I can't fight any longer for what I haven't got. I don't know what you imagine has happened. Something has though. Only you needn't be afraid. No shadow can touch you — because I give up. I can't say we had much talk about it, your father and I, but, the long and the short of it is, that I must learn to live without you — which I have told you was impossible. I was speaking the truth. But I have done fighting, or waiting, or hoping. Yes. You shall go."

At this point Mr. Powell who (he confessed to me) was listening with uncomprehending awe, heard behind his back a triumphant chuckling sound. It gave him the shudders, he said, to mention it now; but at the time, except for another chill down the spine, it had not the power to destroy his absorption in the scene before his eyes, and before his ears too, because just then Captain Anthony raised his voice grimly. Perhaps he too had heard the chuckle of the old man.

"Your father has found an argument which makes me pause, if it does not convince me. No! I can't answer it. I — I don't want to answer it. I simply surrender. He shall have his way with you — and with me. Only," he added in a gloomy lowered tone which struck Mr. Powell as if a pedal had been put down, "only it shall take a little time. I have never lied to you. Never. I renounce not only my chance but my life. In a few days, directly we get into port, the very moment we do, I, who have said I could never let you go, I shall let you go."

To the innocent beholder Anthony seemed at this point to become physically exhausted. My view is that the utter falseness of his, I may say, aspirations, the vanity of grasping the empty air, had come to him with an overwhelming force, leaving him disarmed before the other's mad and sinister sincerity. As he had said himself he could not fight for what he did not possess; he could not face such a thing as this for the sake of his mere magnanimity. The normal alone can overcome the abnormal. He could not even reproach that man over there. "I own myself beaten," he said in a firmer tone. "You are free. I let you off since I must."

Powell, the onlooker, affirms that at these incomprehensible words Mrs. Anthony stiffened into the very image of astonishment, with a frightened stare and frozen lips. But next minute a cry came out from her heart, not very loud but of a quality which made not only Captain Anthony (he was not looking at her), not only him but also the more distant (and equally unprepared) young man, catch their breath: "But I don't want to be let off," she cried.

She was so still that one asked oneself whether the cry had come from her. The restless shuffle behind Powell's back stopped short, the intermittent shadowy chuckling ceased too. Young Powell, glancing round, saw Mr. Smith raise his head with his faded eyes very still, puckered at the corners, like a man perceiving something coming at him

from a great distance. And Mrs. Anthony's voice reached Powell's ears, entreating and indignant.

"You can't cast me off like this, Roderick. I won't go away from you. I won't — "

Powell turned about and discovered then that what Mr. Smith was puckering his eyes at, was the sight of his daughter clinging round Captain Anthony's neck — a sight not in itself improper, but which had the power to move young Powell with a bashfully profound emotion. It was different from his emotion while spying at the revelations of the skylight, but in this case too he felt the discomfort, if not the guilt, of an unseen beholder. Experience was being piled up on his young shoulders. Mrs. Anthony's hair hung back in a dark mass like the hair of a drowned woman. She looked as if she would let go and sink to the floor if the captain were to withhold his sustaining arm. But the captain obviously had no such intention. Standing firm and still he gazed with sombre eyes at Mr. Smith. For a time the low convulsive sobbing of Mr. Smith's daughter was the only sound to trouble the silence. The strength of Anthony's clasp pressing Flora to his breast could not be doubted even at that distance, and suddenly, awakening to his opportunity, he began to partly support her, partly carry her in the direction of her cabin. His head was bent over her solicitously, then recollecting himself, with a glance full of unwonted fire, his voice ringing in a note unknown to Mr. Powell, he cried to him, "Don't you go on deck yet. I want you to stay down here till I come back. There are some instructions I want to give you."

And before the young man could answer, Anthony had disappeared in the stern-cabin, burdened and exulting.

"Instructions," commented Mr. Powell. "That was all right. Very likely; but they would be such instructions as, I thought to myself, no ship's officer perhaps had ever been given before. It made me feel a little sick to think what they would be dealing with, probably. But there! Everything that happens on board ship on the high seas has got to be dealt with somehow. There are no special people to fly to for assistance. And there I was with that old man left in my charge. When he noticed me looking at him he started to shuffle again athwart the saloon. He kept his hands rammed in his pockets, he was as stiff-backed as ever, only his head hung down. After a bit he says in his gentle soft tone: "Did you see it?"

There were in Powell's head no special words to fit the horror of his feelings. So he said — he had to say something, "Good God! What were you thinking of, Mr. Smith, to try to . . ." And then he left off. He dared not utter the awful word poison. Mr. Smith stopped his prow.

"Think! What do you know of thinking. I don't think. There is something in my head that thinks. The thoughts in men, it's like being drunk with liquor or — You can't stop them. A man who thinks will think anything. No! But have you seen it. Have you?"

"I tell you I have! I am certain!" said Powell forcibly. "I was looking at you all the time. You've done something to the drink in that glass."

Then Powell lost his breath somehow. Mr. Smith looked at him curiously, with mistrust.

“My good young man, I don’t know what you are talking about. I ask you — have you seen? Who would have believed it? with her arms round his neck. When! Oh! Ha! Ha! You did see! Didn’t you? It wasn’t a delusion — was it? Her arms round . . . But I have never wholly trusted her.”

“Then I flew out at him, said Mr. Powell. I told him he was jolly lucky to have fallen upon Captain Anthony. A man in a million. He started again shuffling to and fro. “You too,” he said mournfully, keeping his eyes down. “Eh? Wonderful man? But have you a notion who I am? Listen! I have been the Great Mr. de Barral. So they printed it in the papers while they were getting up a conspiracy. And I have been doing time. And now I am brought low.” His voice died down to a mere breath. “Brought low.”

He took his hands out of his pocket, dragged the cap down on his head and stuck them back into his pockets, exactly as if preparing himself to go out into a great wind. “But not so low as to put up with this disgrace, to see her, fast in this fellow’s clutches, without doing something. She wouldn’t listen to me. Frightened? Silly? I had to think of some way to get her out of this. Did you think she cared for him? No! Would anybody have thought so? No! She pretended it was for my sake. She couldn’t understand that if I hadn’t been an old man I would have flown at his throat months ago. As it was I was tempted every time he looked at her. My girl. Ough! Any man but this. And all the time the wicked little fool was lying to me. It was their plot, their conspiracy! These conspiracies are the devil. She has been leading me on, till she has fairly put my head under the heel of that jailer, of that scoundrel, of her husband . . . Treachery! Bringing me low. Lower than herself. In the dirt. That’s what it means. Doesn’t it? Under his heel!”

He paused in his restless shuffle and again, seizing his cap with both hands, dragged it furiously right down on his ears. Powell had lost himself in listening to these broken ravings, in looking at that old feverish face when, suddenly, quick as lightning, Mr. Smith spun round, snatched up the captain’s glass and with a stifled, hurried exclamation, “Here’s luck,” tossed the liquor down his throat.

“I know now the meaning of the word ‘Consternation,’” went on Mr. Powell. “That was exactly my state of mind. I thought to myself directly: There’s nothing in that drink. I have been dreaming, I have made the awfulest mistake! . . .”

Mr. Smith put the glass down. He stood before Powell unharmed, quieted down, in a listening attitude, his head inclined on one side, chewing his thin lips. Suddenly he blinked queerly, grabbed Powell’s shoulder and collapsed, subsiding all at once as though he had gone soft all over, as a piece of silk stuff collapses. Powell seized his arm instinctively and checked his fall; but as soon as Mr. Smith was fairly on the floor he jerked himself free and backed away. Almost as quick he rushed forward again and tried to lift up the body. But directly he raised his shoulders he knew that the man was dead! Dead!

He lowered him down gently. He stood over him without fear or any other feeling, almost indifferent, far away, as it were. And then he made another start and, if he had not kept Mrs. Anthony always in his mind, he would have let out a yell for help. He staggered to her cabin-door, and, as it was, his call for "Captain Anthony" burst out of him much too loud; but he made a great effort of self-control. "I am waiting for my orders, sir," he said outside that door distinctly, in a steady tone.

It was very still in there; still as death. Then he heard a shuffle of feet and the captain's voice "All right. Coming." He leaned his back against the bulkhead as you see a drunken man sometimes propped up against a wall, half doubled up. In that attitude the captain found him, when he came out, pulling the door to after him quickly. At once Anthony let his eyes run all over the cabin. Powell, without a word, clutched his forearm, led him round the end of the table and began to justify himself. "I couldn't stop him," he whispered shakily. "He was too quick for me. He drank it up and fell down." But the captain was not listening. He was looking down at Mr. Smith, thinking perhaps that it was a mere chance his own body was not lying there. They did not want to speak. They made signs to each other with their eyes. The captain grasped Powell's shoulder as if in a vice and glanced at Mrs. Anthony's cabin door, and it was enough. He knew that the young man understood him. Rather! Silence! Silence for ever about this. Their very glances became stealthy. Powell looked from the body to the door of the dead man's state-room. The captain nodded and let him go; and then Powell crept over, hooked the door open and crept back with fearful glances towards Mrs. Anthony's cabin. They stooped over the corpse. Captain Anthony lifted up the shoulders.

Mr. Powell shuddered. "I'll never forget that interminable journey across the saloon, step by step, holding our breath. For part of the way the drawn half of the curtain concealed us from view had Mrs. Anthony opened her door; but I didn't draw a free breath till after we laid the body down on the swinging cot. The reflection of the saloon light left most of the cabin in the shadow. Mr. Smith's rigid, extended body looked shadowy too, shadowy and alive. You know he always carried himself as stiff as a poker. We stood by the cot as though waiting for him to make us a sign that he wanted to be left alone. The captain threw his arm over my shoulder and said in my very ear: "The steward'll find him in the morning."

"I made no answer. It was for him to say. It was perhaps the best way. It's no use talking about my thoughts. They were not concerned with myself, nor yet with that old man who terrified me more now than when he was alive. Him whom I pitied was the captain. He whispered. "I am certain of you, Mr. Powell. You had better go on deck now. As to me . . ." and I saw him raise his hands to his head as if distracted. But his last words before we stole out that cabin stick to my mind with the very tone of his mutter — to himself, not to me:

"No! No! I am not going to stumble now over that corpse."

* * *

"This is what our Mr. Powell had to tell me," said Marlow, changing his tone. I was glad to learn that Flora de Barral had been saved from that sinister shadow at least falling upon her path.

We sat silent then, my mind running on the end of de Barral, on the irresistible pressure of imaginary griefs, crushing conscience, scruples, prudence, under their ever-expanding volume; on the sombre and venomous irony in the obsession which had mastered that old man.

"Well," I said.

"The steward found him," Mr. Powell roused himself. "He went in there with a cup of tea at five and of course dropped it. I was on watch again. He reeled up to me on deck pale as death. I had been expecting it; and yet I could hardly speak. "Go and tell the captain quietly," I managed to say. He ran off muttering "My God! My God!" and I'm hanged if he didn't get hysterical while trying to tell the captain, and start screaming in the saloon, "Fully dressed! Dead! Fully dressed!" Mrs. Anthony ran out of course but she didn't get hysterical. Franklin, who was there too, told me that she hid her face on the captain's breast and then he went out and left them there. It was days before Mrs. Anthony was seen on deck. The first time I spoke to her she gave me her hand and said, "My poor father was quite fond of you, Mr. Powell." She started wiping her eyes and I fled to the other side of the deck. One would like to forget all this had ever come near her."

But clearly he could not, because after lighting his pipe he began musing aloud: "Very strong stuff it must have been. I wonder where he got it. It could hardly be at a common chemist. Well, he had it from somewhere — a mere pinch it must have been, no more."

"I have my theory," observed Marlow, "which to a certain extent does away with the added horror of a coldly premeditated crime. Chance had stepped in there too. It was not Mr. Smith who obtained the poison. It was the Great de Barral. And it was not meant for the obscure, magnanimous conqueror of Flora de Barral; it was meant for the notorious financier whose enterprises had nothing to do with magnanimity. He had his physician in his days of greatness. I even seem to remember that the man was called at the trial on some small point or other. I can imagine that de Barral went to him when he saw, as he could hardly help seeing, the possibility of a "triumph of envious rivals" — a heavy sentence.

I doubt if for love or even for money, but I think possibly, from pity that man provided him with what Mr. Powell called "strong stuff." From what Powell saw of the very act I am fairly certain it must have been contained in a capsule and that he had it about him on the last day of his trial, perhaps secured by a stitch in his waistcoat pocket. He didn't use it. Why? Did he think of his child at the last moment? Was it want of courage? We can't tell. But he found it in his clothes when he came out of jail. It had escaped investigation if there was any. Chance had armed him. And chance alone, the chance of Mr. Powell's life, forced him to turn the abominable weapon against himself.

I imparted my theory to Mr. Powell who accepted it at once as, in a sense, favourable to the father of Mrs. Anthony. Then he waved his hand. "Don't let us think of it."

I acquiesced and very soon he observed dreamily:

"I was with Captain and Mrs. Anthony sailing all over the world for near on six years. Almost as long as Franklin."

"Oh yes! What about Franklin?" I asked.

Powell smiled. "He left the Ferndale a year or so afterwards, and I took his place. Captain Anthony recommended him for a command. You don't think Captain Anthony would chuck a man aside like an old glove. But of course Mrs. Anthony did not like him very much. I don't think she ever let out a whisper against him but Captain Anthony could read her thoughts.

And again Powell seemed to lose himself in the past. I asked, for suddenly the vision of the Fynes passed through my mind.

"Any children?"

Powell gave a start. "No! No! Never had any children," and again subsided, puffing at his short briar pipe.

"Where are they now?" I inquired next as if anxious to ascertain that all Fyne's fears had been misplaced and vain as our fears often are; that there were no undesirable cousins for his dear girls, no danger of intrusion on their spotless home. Powell looked round at me slowly, his pipe smouldering in his hand.

"Don't you know?" he uttered in a deep voice.

"Know what?"

"That the Ferndale was lost this four years or more. Sunk. Collision. And Captain Anthony went down with her."

"You don't say so!" I cried quite affected as if I had known Captain Anthony personally. "Was — was Mrs. Anthony lost too?"

"You might as well ask if I was lost," Mr. Powell rejoined so testily as to surprise me. "You see me here, — don't you."

He was quite huffy, but noticing my wondering stare he smoothed his ruffled plumes. And in a musing tone.

"Yes. Good men go out as if there was no use for them in the world. It seems as if there were things that, as the Turks say, are written. Or else fate has a try and sometimes misses its mark. You remember that close shave we had of being run down at night, I told you of, my first voyage with them. This go it was just at dawn. A flat calm and a fog thick enough to slice with a knife. Only there were no explosives on board. I was on deck and I remember the cursed, murderous thing looming up alongside and Captain Anthony (we were both on deck) calling out, "Good God! What's this! Shout for all hands, Powell, to save themselves. There's no dynamite on board now. I am going to get the wife! . . ." I yelled, all the watch on deck yelled. Crash!"

Mr. Powell gasped at the recollection. "It was a Belgian Green Star liner, the Westland," he went on, "commanded by one of those stop-for-nothing skippers. Flaherty was his name and I hope he will die without absolution. She cut half through the old

Ferndale and after the blow there was a silence like death. Next I heard the captain back on deck shouting, "Set your engines slow ahead," and a howl of "Yes, yes," answering him from her forecandle; and then a whole crowd of people up there began making a row in the fog. They were throwing ropes down to us in dozens, I must say. I and the captain fastened one of them under Mrs. Anthony's arms: I remember she had a sort of dim smile on her face."

"Haul up carefully," I shouted to the people on the steamer's deck. "You've got a woman on that line."

The captain saw her landed up there safe. And then we made a rush round our decks to see no one was left behind. As we got back the captain says: "Here she's gone at last, Powell; the dear old thing! Run down at sea."

"Indeed she is gone," I said. "But it might have been worse. Shin up this rope, sir, for God's sake. I will steady it for you."

"What are you thinking about," he says angrily. "It isn't my turn. Up with you."

These were the last words he ever spoke on earth I suppose. I knew he meant to be the last to leave his ship, so I swarmed up as quick as I could, and those damned lunatics up there grab at me from above, lug me in, drag me along aft through the row and the riot of the silliest excitement I ever did see. Somebody hails from the bridge, "Have you got them all on board?" and a dozen silly asses start yelling all together, "All saved! All saved," and then that accursed Irishman on the bridge, with me roaring No! No! till I thought my head would burst, rings his engines astern. He rings the engines astern — I fighting like mad to make myself heard! And of course . . . "

I saw tears, a shower of them fall down Mr. Powell's face. His voice broke.

"The Ferndale went down like a stone and Captain Anthony went down with her, the finest man's soul that ever left a sailor's body. I raved like a maniac, like a devil, with a lot of fools crowding round me and asking, "Aren't you the captain?"

"I wasn't fit to tie the shoe-strings of the man you have drowned," I screamed at them . . . Well! Well! I could see for myself that it was no good lowering a boat. You couldn't have seen her alongside. No use. And only think, Marlow, it was I who had to go and tell Mrs. Anthony. They had taken her down below somewhere, first-class saloon. I had to go and tell her! That Flaherty, God forgive him, comes to me as white as a sheet, "I think you are the proper person." God forgive him. I wished to die a hundred times. A lot of kind ladies, passengers, were chattering excitedly around Mrs. Anthony — a real parrot house. The ship's doctor went before me. He whispers right and left and then there falls a sudden hush. Yes, I wished myself dead. But Mrs. Anthony was a brick.

Here Mr. Powell fairly burst into tears. "No one could help loving Captain Anthony. I leave you to imagine what he was to her. Yet before the week was out it was she who was helping me to pull myself together."

"Is Mrs. Anthony in England now?" I asked after a while.

He wiped his eyes without any false shame. "Oh yes." He began to look for matches, and while diving for the box under the table added: "And not very far from here either. That little village up there — you know."

"No! Really! Oh I see!"

Mr. Powell smoked austerely, very detached. But I could not let him off like this. The sly beggar. So this was the secret of his passion for sailing about the river, the reason of his fondness for that creek.

"And I suppose," I said, "that you are still as 'enthusiastic' as ever. Eh? If I were you I would just mention my enthusiasm to Mrs. Anthony. Why not?"

He caught his falling pipe neatly. But if what the French call *effarement* was ever expressed on a human countenance it was on this occasion, testifying to his modesty, his sensibility and his innocence. He looked afraid of somebody overhearing my audacious — almost sacrilegious hint — as if there had not been a mile and a half of lonely marshland and dykes between us and the nearest human habitation. And then perhaps he remembered the soothing fact for he allowed a gleam to light up his eyes, like the reflection of some inward fire tended in the sanctuary of his heart by a devotion as pure as that of any vestal.

It flashed and went out. He smiled a bashful smile, sighed:

"Pah! Foolishness. You ought to know better," he said, more sad than annoyed. "But I forgot that you never knew Captain Anthony," he added indulgently.

I reminded him that I knew Mrs. Anthony; even before he — an old friend now — had ever set eyes on her. And as he told me that Mrs. Anthony had heard of our meetings I wondered whether she would care to see me. Mr. Powell volunteered no opinion then; but next time we lay in the creek he said, "She will be very pleased. You had better go to-day."

The afternoon was well advanced before I approached the cottage. The amenity of a fine day in its decline surrounded me with a beneficent, a calming influence; I felt in the silence of the shady lane, in the pure air, in the blue sky. It is difficult to retain the memory of the conflicts, miseries, temptations and crimes of men's self-seeking existence when one is alone with the charming serenity of the unconscious nature. Breathing the dreamless peace around the picturesque cottage I was approaching, it seemed to me that it must reign everywhere, over all the globe of water and land and in the hearts of all the dwellers on this earth.

Flora came down to the garden gate to meet me, no longer the perversely tempting, sorrowful, wisp of white mist drifting in the complicated bad dream of existence. Neither did she look like a forsaken elf. I stammered out stupidly, "Again in the country, Miss . . . Mrs . . ." "She was very good, returned the pressure of my hand, but we were slightly embarrassed. Then we laughed a little. Then we became grave.

I am no lover of day-breaks. You know how thin, equivocal, is the light of the dawn. But she was now her true self, she was like a fine tranquil afternoon — and not so very far advanced either. A woman not much over thirty, with a dazzling complexion and

a little colour, a lot of hair, a smooth brow, a fine chin, and only the eyes of the Flora of the old days, absolutely unchanged.

In the room into which she led me we found a Miss Somebody — I didn't catch the name, — an unobtrusive, even an indistinct, middle-aged person in black. A companion. All very proper. She came and went and even sat down at times in the room, but a little apart, with some sewing. By the time she had brought in a lighted lamp I had heard all the details which really matter in this story. Between me and her who was once Flora de Barral the conversation was not likely to keep strictly to the weather.

The lamp had a rosy shade; and its glow wreathed her in perpetual blushes, made her appear wonderfully young as she sat before me in a deep, high-backed arm-chair. I asked:

"Tell me what is it you said in that famous letter which so upset Mrs. Fyne, and caused little Fyne to interfere in this offensive manner?"

"It was simply crude," she said earnestly. "I was feeling reckless and I wrote recklessly. I knew she would disapprove and I wrote foolishly. It was the echo of her own stupid talk. I said that I did not love her brother but that I had no scruples whatever in marrying him."

She paused, hesitating, then with a shy half-laugh:

"I really believed I was selling myself, Mr. Marlow. And I was proud of it. What I suffered afterwards I couldn't tell you; because I only discovered my love for my poor Roderick through agonies of rage and humiliation. I came to suspect him of despising me; but I could not put it to the test because of my father. Oh! I would not have been too proud. But I had to spare poor papa's feelings. Roderick was perfect, but I felt as though I were on the rack and not allowed even to cry out. Papa's prejudice against Roderick was my greatest grief. It was distracting. It frightened me. Oh! I have been miserable! That night when my poor father died suddenly I am certain they had some sort of discussion, about me. But I did not want to hold out any longer against my own heart! I could not."

She stopped short, then impulsively:

"Truth will out, Mr. Marlow."

"Yes," I said.

She went on musingly.

"Sorrow and happiness were mingled at first like darkness and light. For months I lived in a dusk of feelings. But it was quiet. It was warm . . ."

Again she paused, then going back in her thoughts. "No! There was no harm in that letter. It was simply foolish. What did I know of life then? Nothing. But Mrs. Fyne ought to have known better. She wrote a letter to her brother, a little later. Years afterwards Roderick allowed me to glance at it. I found in it this sentence: 'For years I tried to make a friend of that girl; but I warn you once more that she has the nature of a heartless adventuress . . . ' Adventuress!' repeated Flora slowly. "So be it. I have had a fine adventure."

"It was fine, then," I said interested.

“The finest in the world! Only think! I loved and I was loved, untroubled, at peace, without remorse, without fear. All the world, all life were transformed for me. And how much I have seen! How good people were to me! Roderick was so much liked everywhere. Yes, I have known kindness and safety. The most familiar things appeared lighted up with a new light, clothed with a loveliness I had never suspected. The sea itself! . . . You are a sailor. You have lived your life on it. But do you know how beautiful it is, how strong, how charming, how friendly, how mighty . . . “

I listened amazed and touched. She was silent only a little while.

“It was too good to last. But nothing can rob me of it now . . . Don’t think that I repine. I am not even sad now. Yes, I have been happy. But I remember also the time when I was unhappy beyond endurance, beyond desperation. Yes. You remember that. And later on, too. There was a time on board the Ferndale when the only moments of relief I knew were when I made Mr. Powell talk to me a little on the poop. You like him? — Don’t you?”

“Excellent fellow,” I said warmly. “You see him often?”

“Of course. I hardly know another soul in the world. I am alone. And he has plenty of time on his hands. His aunt died a few years ago. He’s doing nothing, I believe.”

“He is fond of the sea,” I remarked. “He loves it.”

“He seems to have given it up,” she murmured.

“I wonder why?”

She remained silent. “Perhaps it is because he loves something else better,” I went on. “Come, Mrs. Anthony, don’t let me carry away from here the idea that you are a selfish person, hugging the memory of your past happiness, like a rich man his treasure, forgetting the poor at the gate.”

I rose to go, for it was getting late. She got up in some agitation and went out with me into the fragrant darkness of the garden. She detained my hand for a moment and then in the very voice of the Flora of old days, with the exact intonation, showing the old mistrust, the old doubt of herself, the old scar of the blow received in childhood, pathetic and funny, she murmured, “Do you think it possible that he should care for me?”

“Just ask him yourself. You are brave.”

“Oh, I am brave enough,” she said with a sigh.

“Then do. For if you don’t you will be wronging that patient man cruelly.”

I departed leaving her dumb. Next day, seeing Powell making preparations to go ashore, I asked him to give my regards to Mrs. Anthony. He promised he would.

“Listen, Powell,” I said. “We got to know each other by chance?”

“Oh, quite!” he admitted, adjusting his hat.

“And the science of life consists in seizing every chance that presents itself,” I pursued. “Do you believe that?”

“Gospel truth,” he declared innocently.

“Well, don’t forget it.”

“Oh, I! I don’t expect now anything to present itself,” he said, jumping ashore.

He didn't turn up at high water. I set my sail and just as I had cast off from the bank, round the black barn, in the dusk, two figures appeared and stood silent, indistinct.

"Is that you, Powell?" I hailed.

"And Mrs. Anthony," his voice came impressively through the silence of the great marsh. "I am not sailing to-night. I have to see Mrs. Anthony home."

"Then I must even go alone," I cried.

Flora's voice wished me "bon voyage" in a most friendly but tremulous tone.

"You shall hear from me before long," shouted Powell, suddenly, just as my boat had cleared the mouth of the creek.

"This was yesterday," added Marlow, lolling in the arm-chair lazily. "I haven't heard yet; but I expect to hear any moment . . . What on earth are you grinning at in this sarcastic manner? I am not afraid of going to church with a friend. Hang it all, for all my belief in Chance I am not exactly a pagan . . ."

Victory

An Island Tale

This novel was first published in 1915, receiving mixed critical reviews. It features a shifting narrative and temporal perspective, with different viewpoints from different characters, as well as an omniscient narrator.

Victory tells the story of Axel Heyst, who ends up living on an island in Indonesia, after a business misadventure. Heyst visits a nearby island when a female band is playing at a hotel owned by Mr. Schomberg. Who attempts to rape one of the band members. She flees with Heyst back to his island and they become lovers.

The first edition

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On approaching the task of writing this Note for Victory, the first thing I am conscious of is the actual nearness of the book, its nearness to me personally, to the vanished mood in which it was written, and to the mixed feelings aroused by the critical notices the book obtained when first published almost exactly a year after the beginning of the war. The writing of it was finished in 1914 long before the murder of an Austrian Archduke sounded the first note of warning for a world already full of doubts and fears.

The contemporaneous very short Author's Note which is preserved in this edition bears sufficient witness to the feelings with which I consented to the publication of the book. The fact of the book having been published in the United States early in the year made it difficult to delay its appearance in England any longer. It came out in the thirteenth month of the war, and my conscience was troubled by the awful incongruity of throwing this bit of imagined drama into the welter of reality, tragic enough in all conscience, but even more cruel than tragic and more inspiring than cruel. It seemed awfully presumptuous to think there would be eyes to spare for those pages in a community which in the crash of the big guns and in the din of brave words expressing the truth of an indomitable faith could not but feel the edge of a sharp knife at its throat.

The unchanging Man of history is wonderfully adaptable both by his power of endurance and in his capacity for detachment. The fact seems to be that the play of his destiny is too great for his fears and too mysterious for his understanding. Were the trump of the Last Judgement to sound suddenly on a working day the musician at his piano would go on with his performance of Beethoven's sonata and the cobbler at his stall stick to his last in undisturbed confidence in the virtues of the leather. And with perfect propriety. For what are we to let ourselves be disturbed by an angel's vengeful music too mighty for our ears and too awful for our terrors? Thus it happens to us to be struck suddenly by the lightning of wrath. The reader will go on reading if the book pleases him and the critic will go on criticizing with that faculty of detachment born perhaps from a sense of infinite littleness and which is yet the only faculty that seems to assimilate man to the immortal gods.

It is only when the catastrophe matches the natural obscurity of our fate that even the best representative of the race is liable to lose his detachment. It is very obvious that on the arrival of the gentlemanly Mr. Jones, the single-minded Ricardo, and the faithful Pedro, Heyst, the man of universal detachment, loses his mental self-possession, that fine attitude before the universally irremediable which wears the name of stoicism. It is all a matter of proportion. There should have been a remedy for that sort of thing. And yet there is no remedy. Behind this minute instance of life's hazards Heyst sees the power of blind destiny. Besides, Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and, for the matter of that, even in love. Thinking is the great

enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man.

But I wouldn't be suspected even remotely of making fun of Axel Heyst. I have always liked him. The flesh-and-blood individual who stands behind the infinitely more familiar figure of the book I remember as a mysterious Swede right enough. Whether he was a baron, too, I am not so certain. He himself never laid claim to that distinction. His detachment was too great to make any claims, big or small, on one's credulity. I will not say where I met him because I fear to give my readers a wrong impression, since a marked incongruity between a man and his surroundings is often a very misleading circumstance. We became very friendly for a time, and I would not like to expose him to unpleasant suspicions though, personally, I am sure he would have been indifferent to suspicions as he was indifferent to all the other disadvantages of life. He was not the whole Heyst of course; he is only the physical and moral foundation of my Heyst laid on the ground of a short acquaintance. That it was short was certainly not my fault for he had charmed me by the mere amenity of his detachment which, in this case, I cannot help thinking he had carried to excess. He went away from his rooms without leaving a trace. I wondered where he had gone to — but now I know. He vanished from my ken only to drift into this adventure that, unavoidable, waited for him in a world which he persisted in looking upon as a malevolent shadow spinning in the sunlight. Often in the course of years an expressed sentiment, the particular sense of a phrase heard casually, would recall him to my mind so that I have fastened on to him many words heard on other men's lips and belonging to other men's less perfect, less pathetic moods.

The same observation will apply *mutatis mutandis* to Mr. Jones, who is built on a much slenderer connection. Mr. Jones (or whatever his name was) did not drift away from me. He turned his back on me and walked out of the room. It was in a little hotel in the island of St. Thomas in the West Indies (in the year '75) where we found him one hot afternoon extended on three chairs, all alone in the loud buzzing of flies to which his immobility and his cadaverous aspect gave a most gruesome significance. Our invasion must have displeased him because he got off the chairs brusquely and walked out, leaving with me an indelibly weird impression of his thin shanks. One of the men with me said that the fellow was the most desperate gambler he had ever come across. I said: "A professional sharper?" and got for an answer: "He's a terror; but I must say that up to a certain point he will play fair. . . ." I wonder what the point was. I never saw him again because I believe he went straight on board a mail-boat which left within the hour for other ports of call in the direction of Aspinall. Mr. Jones's characteristic insolence belongs to another man of a quite different type. I will say nothing as to the origins of his mentality because I don't intend to make any damaging admissions.

It so happened that the very same year Ricardo — the physical Ricardo — was a fellow passenger of mine on board an extremely small and extremely dirty little schooner, during a four days' passage between two places in the Gulf of Mexico whose names don't matter. For the most part he lay on deck aft as it were at my feet, and

raising himself from time to time on his elbow would talk about himself and go on talking, not exactly to me or even at me (he would not even look up but kept his eyes fixed on the deck) but more as if communing in a low voice with his familiar devil. Now and then he would give me a glance and make the hairs of his stiff little moustache stir quaintly. His eyes were green and every cat I see to this day reminds me of the exact contour of his face. What he was travelling for or what was his business in life he never confided to me. Truth to say, the only passenger on board that schooner who could have talked openly about his activities and purposes was a very snuffy and conversationally delightful friar, the superior of a convent, attended by a very young lay brother, of a particularly ferocious countenance. We had with us also, lying prostrate in the dark and unspeakable cuddy of that schooner, an old Spanish gentleman, owner of much luggage and, as Ricardo assured me, very ill indeed. Ricardo seemed to be either a servant or the confidant of that aged and distinguished-looking invalid, who early on the passage held a long murmured conversation with the friar, and after that did nothing but groan feebly, smoke cigarettes, and now and then call for Martin in a voice full of pain. Then he who had become Ricardo in the book would go below into that beastly and noisome hole, remain there mysteriously, and coming up on deck again with a face on which nothing could be read, would as likely as not resume for my edification the exposition of his moral attitude towards life illustrated by striking particular instances of the most atrocious complexion. Did he mean to frighten me? Or seduce me? Or astonish me? Or arouse my admiration? All he did was to arouse my amused incredulity. As scoundrels go he was far from being a bore. For the rest my innocence was so great then that I could not take his philosophy seriously. All the time he kept one ear turned to the cuddy in the manner of a devoted servant, but I had the idea that in some way or other he had imposed the connection on the invalid for some end of his own. The reader, therefore, won't be surprised to hear that one morning I was told without any particular emotion by the padrone of the schooner that the "rich man" down there was dead: He had died in the night. I don't remember ever being so moved by the desolate end of a complete stranger. I looked down the skylight, and there was the devoted Martin busy cording cowhide trunks belonging to the deceased whose white beard and hooked nose were the only parts I could make out in the dark depths of a horrible stuffy bunk.

As it fell calm in the course of the afternoon and continued calm during all that night and the terrible, flaming day, the late "rich man" had to be thrown overboard at sunset, though as a matter of fact we were in sight of the low pestilential mangrove-lined coast of our destination. The excellent Father Superior mentioned to me with an air of immense commiseration: "The poor man has left a young daughter." Who was to look after her I don't know, but I saw the devoted Martin taking the trunks ashore with great care just before I landed myself. I would perhaps have tracked the ways of that man of immense sincerity for a little while, but I had some of my own very pressing business to attend to, which in the end got mixed up with an earthquake

and so I had no time to give to Ricardo. The reader need not be told that I have not forgotten him, though.

My contact with the faithful Pedro was much shorter and my observation of him was less complete but incomparably more anxious. It ended in a sudden inspiration to get out of his way. It was in a hovel of sticks and mats by the side of a path. As I went in there only to ask for a bottle of lemonade I have not to this day the slightest idea what in my appearance or actions could have roused his terrible ire. It became manifest to me less than two minutes after I had set eyes on him for the first time, and though immensely surprised of course I didn't stop to think it out I took the nearest short cut — through the wall. This bestial apparition and a certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti only a couple of months afterwards, have fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal, to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards. Of Pedro never. The impression was less vivid. I got away from him too quickly.

It seems to me but natural that those three buried in a corner of my memory should suddenly get out into the light of the world — so natural that I offer no excuse for their existence, They were there, they had to come out; and this is a sufficient excuse for a writer of tales who had taken to his trade without preparation, or premeditation, and without any moral intention but that which pervades the whole scheme of this world of senses.

Since this Note is mostly concerned with personal contacts and the origins of the persons in the tale, I am bound also to speak of Lena, because if I were to leave her out it would look like a slight; and nothing would be further from my thoughts than putting a slight on Lena. If of all the personages involved in the "mystery of Samburan" I have lived longest with Heyst (or with him I call Heyst) it was at her, whom I call Lena, that I have looked the longest and with a most sustained attention. This attention originated in idleness for which I have a natural talent. One evening I wandered into a cafe, in a town not of the tropics but of the South of France. It was filled with tobacco smoke, the hum of voices, the rattling of dominoes, and the sounds of strident music. The orchestra was rather smaller than the one that performed at Schomberg's hotel, had the air more of a family party than of an enlisted band, and, I must confess, seemed rather more respectable than the Zangiaco musical enterprise. It was less pretentious also, more homely and familiar, so to speak, insomuch that in the intervals when all the performers left the platform one of them went amongst the marble tables collecting offerings of sous and francs in a battered tin receptacle recalling the shape of a sauceboat. It was a girl. Her detachment from her task seems to me now to have equalled or even surpassed Heyst's aloofness from all the mental degradations to which a man's intelligence is exposed in its way through life. Silent and wide-eyed she went from table to table with the air of a sleep-walker and with no other sound but the slight rattle of the coins to attract attention. It was long after the sea-chapter of my life had been closed but it is difficult to discard completely the characteristics of half a lifetime, and it was in something of the Jack-ashore spirit that

I dropped a five-franc piece into the sauceboat; whereupon the sleep-walker turned her head to gaze at me and said "Merci, Monsieur" in a tone in which there was no gratitude but only surprise. I must have been idle indeed to take the trouble to remark on such slight evidence that the voice was very charming and when the performers resumed their seats I shifted my position slightly in order not to have that particular performer hidden from me by the little man with the beard who conducted, and who might for all I know have been her father, but whose real mission in life was to be a model for the Zangiacomo of Victory. Having got a clear line of sight I naturally (being idle) continued to look at the girl through all the second part of the programme. The shape of her dark head inclined over the violin was fascinating, and, while resting between the pieces of that interminable programme she was, in her white dress and with her brown hands reposing in her lap, the very image of dreamy innocence. The mature, bad-tempered woman at the piano might have been her mother, though there was not the slightest resemblance between them. All I am certain of in their personal relation to each other is that cruel pinch on the upper part of the arm. That I am sure I have seen! There could be no mistake. I was in too idle a mood to imagine such a gratuitous barbarity. It may have been playfulness, yet the girl jumped up as if she had been stung by a wasp. It may have been playfulness. Yet I saw plainly poor "dreamy innocence" rub gently the affected place as she filed off with the other performers down the middle aisle between the marble tables in the uproar of voices, the rattling of dominoes through a blue atmosphere of tobacco smoke. I believe that those people left the town next day.

Or perhaps they had only migrated to the other big cafe, on the other side of the Place de la Comedie. It is very possible. I did not go across to find out. It was my perfect idleness that had invested the girl with a peculiar charm, and I did not want to destroy it by any superfluous exertion. The receptivity of my indolence made the impression so permanent that when the moment came for her meeting with Heyst I felt that she would be heroically equal to every demand of the risky and uncertain future. I was so convinced of it that I let her go with Heyst, I won't say without a pang but certainly without misgivings. And in view of her triumphant end what more could I have done for her rehabilitation and her happiness?

1920. J. C.

Part 1

Chapter 1

There is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as “black diamonds.” Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one’s waistcoat pocket — but it can’t! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst — Axel Heyst — from going away.

The Tropical Belt Coal Company went into liquidation. The world of finance is a mysterious world in which, incredible as the fact may appear, evaporation precedes liquidation. First the capital evaporates, and then the company goes into liquidation. These are very unnatural physics, but they account for the persistent inertia of Heyst, at which we “out there” used to laugh among ourselves — but not inimically. An inert body can do no harm to anyone, provokes no hostility, is scarcely worth derision. It may, indeed, be in the way sometimes; but this could not be said of Axel Heyst. He was out of everybody’s way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and in a sense as conspicuous. Everyone in that part of the world knew of him, dwelling on his little island. An island is but the top of a mountain. Axel Heyst, perched on it immovably, was surrounded, instead of the imponderable stormy and transparent ocean of air merging into infinity, by a tepid, shallow sea; a passionless offshoot of the great waters which embrace the continents of this globe. His most frequent visitors were shadows, the shadows of clouds, relieving the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics. His nearest neighbour — I am speaking now of things showing some sort of animation — was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon, and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark. Axel Heyst was also a smoker; and when he lounged out on his veranda with his cheroot, the last thing before going to bed, he made in the night the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away.

In a sense, the volcano was company to him in the shades of the night — which were often too thick, one would think, to let a breath of air through. There was seldom enough wind to blow a feather along. On most evenings of the year Heyst could have sat outside with a naked candle to read one of the books left him by his late father. It was not a mean store. But he never did that. Afraid of mosquitoes, very likely. Neither was he ever tempted by the silence to address any casual remarks to the companion glow of the volcano. He was not mad. Queer chap — yes, that may have been said, and in fact was said; but there is a tremendous difference between the two, you will allow.

On the nights of full moon the silence around Samburan — the “Round Island” of the charts — was dazzling; and in the flood of cold light Heyst could see his immediate surroundings, which had the aspect of an abandoned settlement invaded by the jungle: vague roofs above low vegetation, broken shadows of bamboo fences in the sheen of long grass, something like an overgrown bit of road slanting among ragged thickets towards the shore only a couple of hundred yards away, with a black jetty and a mound of some sort, quite inky on its unlighted side. But the most conspicuous object was a gigantic blackboard raised on two posts and presenting to Heyst, when the moon got over that side, the white letters “T. B. C. Co.” in a row at least two feet high. These were the initials of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, his employers — his late employers, to be precise.

According to the unnatural mysteries of the financial world, the T. B. C. Company’s capital having evaporated in the course of two years, the company went into liquidation — forced, I believe, not voluntary. There was nothing forcible in the process, however. It was slow; and while the liquidation — in London and Amsterdam — pursued its languid course, Axel Heyst, styled in the prospectus “manager in the tropics,” remained at his post on Samburan, the No. 1 coaling-station of the company.

And it was not merely a coaling-station. There was a coal-mine there, with an outcrop in the hillside less than five hundred yards from the rickety wharf and the imposing blackboard. The company’s object had been to get hold of all the outcrops on tropical islands and exploit them locally. And, Lord knows, there were any amount of outcrops. It was Heyst who had located most of them in this part of the tropical belt during his rather aimless wanderings, and being a ready letter-writer had written pages and pages about them to his friends in Europe. At least, so it was said.

We doubted whether he had any visions of wealth — for himself, at any rate. What he seemed mostly concerned for was the “stride forward,” as he expressed it, in the general organization of the universe, apparently. He was heard by more than a hundred persons in the islands talking of a “great stride forward for these regions.” The convinced wave of the hand which accompanied the phrase suggested tropical distances being impelled onward. In connection with the finished courtesy of his manner, it was persuasive, or at any rate silencing — for a time, at least. Nobody cared to argue with him when he talked in this strain. His earnestness could do no harm to anybody. There

was no danger of anyone taking seriously his dream of tropical coal, so what was the use of hurting his feelings?

Thus reasoned men in reputable business offices where he had his entree as a person who came out East with letters of introduction — and modest letters of credit, too — some years before these coal-outcrops began to crop up in his playfully courteous talk. From the first there was some difficulty in making him out. He was not a traveller. A traveller arrives and departs, goes on somewhere. Heyst did not depart. I met a man once — the manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malacca — to whom Heyst exclaimed, in no connection with anything in particular (it was in the billiard-room of the club):

“I am enchanted with these islands!”

He shot it out suddenly, a propos des bottes, as the French say, and while chalking his cue. And perhaps it was some sort of enchantment. There are more spells than your commonplace magicians ever dreamed of.

Roughly speaking, a circle with a radius of eight hundred miles drawn round a point in North Borneo was in Heyst’s case a magic circle. It just touched Manila, and he had been seen there. It just touched Saigon, and he was likewise seen there once. Perhaps these were his attempts to break out. If so, they were failures. The enchantment must have been an unbreakable one. The manager — the man who heard the exclamation — had been so impressed by the tone, fervour, rapture, what you will, or perhaps by the incongruity of it that he had related the experience to more than one person.

“Queer chap, that Swede,” was his only comment; but this is the origin of the name “Enchanted Heyst” which some fellows fastened on our man.

He also had other names. In his early years, long before he got so becomingly bald on the top, he went to present a letter of introduction to Mr. Tesman of Tesman Brothers, a Sourabaya firm — tip-top house. Well, Mr. Tesman was a kindly, benevolent old gentleman. He did not know what to make of that caller. After telling him that they wished to render his stay among the islands as pleasant as possible, and that they were ready to assist him in his plans, and so on, and after receiving Heyst’s thanks — you know the usual kind of conversation — he proceeded to query in a slow, paternal tone:

“And you are interested in — ?”

“Facts,” broke in Heyst in his courtly voice. “There’s nothing worth knowing but facts. Hard facts! Facts alone, Mr. Tesman.”

I don’t know if old Tesman agreed with him or not, but he must have spoken about it, because, for a time, our man got the name of “Hard Facts.” He had the singular good fortune that his sayings stuck to him and became part of his name. Thereafter he mooned about the Java Sea in some of the Tesmans’ trading schooners, and then vanished, on board an Arab ship, in the direction of New Guinea. He remained so long in that outlying part of his enchanted circle that he was nearly forgotten before he swam into view again in a native proa full of Goram vagabonds, burnt black by the sun, very lean, his hair much thinned, and a portfolio of sketches under his arm.

He showed these willingly, but was very reserved as to anything else. He had had an “amusing time,” he said. A man who will go to New Guinea for fun — well!

Later, years afterwards, when the last vestiges of youth had gone off his face and all the hair off the top of his head, and his red-gold pair of horizontal moustaches had grown to really noble proportions, a certain disreputable white man fastened upon him an epithet. Putting down with a shaking hand a long glass emptied of its contents — paid for by Heyst — he said, with that deliberate sagacity which no mere water-drinker ever attained:

“Heyst’s a puffect g’n’lman. Puffect! But he’s a ut-uto-utopist.”

Heyst had just gone out of the place of public refreshment where this pronouncement was voiced. Utopist, eh? Upon my word, the only thing I heard him say which might have had a bearing on the point was his invitation to old McNab himself. Turning with that finished courtesy of attitude, movement voice, which was his obvious characteristic, he had said with delicate playfulness:

“Come along and quench your thirst with us, Mr. McNab!”

Perhaps that was it. A man who could propose, even playfully, to quench old McNab’s thirst must have been a utopist, a pursuer of chimeras; for of downright irony Heyst was not prodigal. And, may be, this was the reason why he was generally liked. At that epoch in his life, in the fulness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bald head and long moustaches, he resembled the portraits of Charles XII., of adventurous memory. However, there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man.

Chapter 2

It was about this time that Heyst became associated with Morrison on terms about which people were in doubt. Some said he was a partner, others said he was a sort of paying guest, but the real truth of the matter was more complex. One day Heyst turned up in Timor. Why in Timor, of all places in the world, no one knows. Well, he was mooning about Delli, that highly pestilential place, possibly in search of some undiscovered facts, when he came in the street upon Morrison, who, in his way, was also an “enchanted” man. When you spoke to Morrison of going home — he was from Dorsetshire — he shuddered. He said it was dark and wet there; that it was like living with your head and shoulders in a moist gunny-bag. That was only his exaggerated style of talking. Morrison was “one of us.” He was owner and master of the Capricorn, trading brig, and was understood to be doing well with her, except for the drawback of too much altruism. He was the dearly beloved friend of a quantity of God-forsaken villages up dark creeks and obscure bays, where he traded for produce. He would often sail, through awfully dangerous channels up to some miserable settlement, only to find a very hungry population clamorous for rice, and without so much “produce” between them as would have filled Morrison’s suitcase. Amid general rejoicings, he

would land the rice all the same, explain to the people that it was an advance, that they were in debt to him now; would preach to them energy and industry, and make an elaborate note in a pocket-diary which he always carried; and this would be the end of that transaction. I don't know if Morrison thought so, but the villagers had no doubt whatever about it. Whenever a coast village sighted the brig it would begin to beat all its gongs and hoist all its streamers, and all its girls would put flowers in their hair and the crowd would line the river bank, and Morrison would beam and glitter at all this excitement through his single eyeglass with an air of intense gratification. He was tall and lantern-jawed, and clean-shaven, and looked like a barrister who had thrown his wig to the dogs.

We used to remonstrate with him:

"You will never see any of your advances if you go on like this, Morrison."

He would put on a knowing air.

"I shall squeeze them yet some day — never you fear. And that reminds me" — pulling out his inseparable pocketbook — "there's that So-and-So village. They are pretty well off again; I may just as well squeeze them to begin with."

He would make a ferocious entry in the pocketbook.

Memo: Squeeze the So-and-So village at the first time of calling.

Then he would stick the pencil back and snap the elastic on with inflexible finality; but he never began the squeezing. Some men grumbled at him. He was spoiling the trade. Well, perhaps to a certain extent; not much. Most of the places he traded with were unknown not only to geography but also to the traders' special lore which is transmitted by word of mouth, without ostentation, and forms the stock of mysterious local knowledge. It was hinted also that Morrison had a wife in each and every one of them, but the majority of us repulsed these innuendoes with indignation. He was a true humanitarian and rather ascetic than otherwise.

When Heyst met him in Delli, Morrison was walking along the street, his eyeglass tossed over his shoulder, his head down, with the hopeless aspect of those hardened tramps one sees on our roads trudging from workhouse to workhouse. Being hailed on the street he looked up with a wild worried expression. He was really in trouble. He had come the week before into Delli and the Portuguese authorities, on some pretence of irregularity in his papers, had inflicted a fine upon him and had arrested his brig.

Morrison never had any spare cash in hand. With his system of trading it would have been strange if he had; and all these debts entered in the pocketbook weren't good enough to raise a millrei on — let alone a shilling. The Portuguese officials begged him not to distress himself. They gave him a week's grace, and then proposed to sell the brig at auction. This meant ruin for Morrison; and when Heyst hailed him across the street in his usual courtly tone, the week was nearly out.

Heyst crossed over, and said with a slight bow, and in the manner of a prince addressing another prince on a private occasion:

“What an unexpected pleasure. Would you have any objection to drink something with me in that infamous wine-shop over there? The sun is really too strong to talk in the street.”

The haggard Morrison followed obediently into a sombre, cool hovel which he would have distained to enter at any other time. He was distracted. He did not know what he was doing. You could have led him over the edge of a precipice just as easily as into that wine-shop. He sat down like an automaton. He was speechless, but he saw a glass full of rough red wine before him, and emptied it. Heyst meantime, politely watchful, had taken a seat opposite.

“You are in for a bout of fever, I fear,” he said sympathetically.

Poor Morrison’s tongue was loosened at that.

“Fever!” he cried. “Give me fever. Give me plague. They are diseases. One gets over them. But I am being murdered. I am being murdered by the Portuguese. The gang here downed me at last among them. I am to have my throat cut the day after tomorrow.”

In the face of this passion Heyst made, with his eyebrows, a slight motion of surprise which would not have been misplaced in a drawing-room. Morrison’s despairing reserve had broken down. He had been wandering with a dry throat all over that miserable town of mud hovels, silent, with no soul to turn to in his distress, and positively maddened by his thoughts; and suddenly he had stumbled on a white man, figuratively and actually white — for Morrison refused to accept the racial whiteness of the Portuguese officials. He let himself go for the mere relief of violent speech, his elbows planted on the table, his eyes blood-shot, his voice nearly gone, the brim of his round pith hat shading an unshaven, livid face. His white clothes, which he had not taken off for three days, were dingy. He had already gone to the bad, past redemption. The sight was shocking to Heyst; but he let nothing of it appear in his bearing, concealing his impression under that consummate good-society manner of his. Polite attention, what’s due from one gentleman listening to another, was what he showed; and, as usual, it was catching; so that Morrison pulled himself together and finished his narrative in a conversational tone, with a man-of-the-world air.

“It’s a villainous plot. Unluckily, one is helpless. That scoundrel Cousinho — Andreas, you know — has been coveting the brig for years. Naturally, I would never sell. She is not only my livelihood; she’s my life. So he has hatched this pretty little plot with the chief of the customs. The sale, of course, will be a farce. There’s no one here to bid. He will get the brig for a song — no, not even that — a line of a song. You have been some years now in the islands, Heyst. You know us all; you have seen how we live. Now you shall have the opportunity to see how some of us end; for it is the end, for me. I can’t deceive myself any longer. You see it — don’t you?”

Morrison had pulled himself together, but one felt the snapping strain on his recovered self-possession. Heyst was beginning to say that he “could very well see all the bearings of this unfortunate — ” when Morrison interrupted him jerkily.

“Upon my word, I don’t know why I have been telling you all this. I suppose seeing a thoroughly white man made it impossible to keep my trouble to myself. Words can’t do it justice; but since I’ve told you so much I may as well tell you more. Listen. This morning on board, in my cabin I went down on my knees and prayed for help. I went down on my knees!”

“You are a believer, Morrison?” asked Heyst with a distinct note of respect.

“Surely I am not an infidel.”

Morrison was swiftly reproachful in his answer, and there came a pause, Morrison perhaps interrogating his conscience, and Heyst preserving a mien of unperturbed, polite interest.

“I prayed like a child, of course. I believe in children praying — well, women, too, but I rather think God expects men to be more self-reliant. I don’t hold with a man everlastingly bothering the Almighty with his silly troubles. It seems such cheek. Anyhow, this morning I — I have never done any harm to any God’s creature knowingly — I prayed. A sudden impulse — I went flop on my knees; so you may judge — ”

They were gazing earnestly into each other’s eyes. Poor Morrison added, as a discouraging afterthought:

“Only this is such a God-forsaken spot.”

Heyst inquired with a delicate intonation whether he might know the amount for which the brig was seized.

Morrison suppressed an oath, and named curtly a sum which was in itself so insignificant that any other person than Heyst would have exclaimed at it. And even Heyst could hardly keep incredulity out of his politely modulated voice as he asked if it was a fact that Morrison had not that amount in hand.

Morrison hadn’t. He had only a little English gold, a few sovereigns, on board. He had left all his spare cash with the Tesmans, in Samarang, to meet certain bills which would fall due while he was away on his cruise. Anyhow, that money would not have been any more good to him than if it had been in the innermost depths of the infernal regions. He said all this brusquely. He looked with sudden disfavour at that noble forehead, at those great martial moustaches, at the tired eyes of the man sitting opposite him. Who the devil was he? What was he, Morrison, doing there, talking like this? Morrison knew no more of Heyst than the rest of us trading in the Archipelago did. Had the Swede suddenly risen and hit him on the nose, he could not have been taken more aback than when this stranger, this nondescript wanderer, said with a little bow across the table:

“Oh! If that’s the case I would be very happy if you’d allow me to be of use!”

Morrison didn’t understand. This was one of those things that don’t happen — unheard of things. He had no real inkling of what it meant, till Heyst said definitely:

“I can lend you the amount.”

“You have the money?” whispered Morrison. “Do you mean here, in your pocket?”

“Yes, on me. Glad to be of use.”

Morrison, staring open-mouthed, groped over his shoulder for the cord of the eye-glass hanging down his back. When he found it, he stuck it in his eye hastily. It was as if he expected Heyst's usual white suit of the tropics to change into a shining garment, flowing down to his toes, and a pair of great dazzling wings to sprout out on the Swede's shoulders — and didn't want to miss a single detail of the transformation. But if Heyst was an angel from on high, sent in answer to prayer, he did not betray his heavenly origin by outward signs. So, instead of going on his knees, as he felt inclined to do, Morrison stretched out his hand, which Heyst grasped with formal alacrity and a polite murmur in which "Trifle — delighted — of service," could just be distinguished.

"Miracles do happen," thought the awestruck Morrison. To him, as to all of us in the Islands, this wandering Heyst, who didn't toil or spin visibly, seemed the very last person to be the agent of Providence in an affair concerned with money. The fact of his turning up in Timor or anywhere else was no more wonderful than the settling of a sparrow on one's window-sill at any given moment. But that he should carry a sum of money in his pocket seemed somehow inconceivable.

So inconceivable that as they were trudging together through the sand of the roadway to the custom-house — another mud hovel — to pay the fine, Morrison broke into a cold sweat, stopped short, and exclaimed in faltering accents:

"I say! You aren't joking, Heyst?"

"Joking!" Heyst's blue eyes went hard as he turned them on the discomposed Morrison. "In what way, may I ask?" he continued with austere politeness.

Morrison was abashed.

"Forgive me, Heyst. You must have been sent by God in answer to my prayer. But I have been nearly off my chump for three days with worry; and it suddenly struck me: 'What if it's the Devil who has sent him?'"

"I have no connection with the supernatural," said Heyst graciously, moving on. "Nobody has sent me. I just happened along."

"I know better," contradicted Morrison. "I may be unworthy, but I have been heard. I know it. I feel it. For why should you offer — "

Heyst inclined his head, as from respect for a conviction in which he could not share. But he stuck to his point by muttering that in the presence of an odious fact like this, it was natural —

Later in the day, the fine paid, and the two of them on board the brig, from which the guard had been removed, Morrison who, besides, being a gentleman was also an honest fellow began to talk about repayment. He knew very well his inability to lay by any sum of money. It was partly the fault of circumstances and partly of his temperament; and it would have been very difficult to apportion the responsibility between the two. Even Morrison himself could not say, while confessing to the fact. With a worried air he ascribed it to fatality:

"I don't know how it is that I've never been able to save. It's some sort of curse. There's always a bill or two to meet."

He plunged his hand into his pocket for the famous notebook so well known in the islands, the fetish of his hopes, and fluttered the pages feverishly.

“And yet — look,” he went on. “There it is — more than five thousand dollars owing. Surely that’s something.”

He ceased suddenly. Heyst, who had been all the time trying to look as unconcerned as he could, made reassuring noises in his throat. But Morrison was not only honest. He was honourable, too; and on this stressful day, before this amazing emissary of Providence and in the revulsion of his feelings, he made his great renunciation. He cast off the abiding illusion of his existence.

“No. No. They are not good. I’ll never be able to squeeze them. Never. I’ve been saying for years I would, but I give it up. I never really believed I could. Don’t reckon on that, Heyst. I have robbed you.”

Poor Morrison actually laid his head on the cabin table, and remained in that crushed attitude while Heyst talked to him soothingly with the utmost courtesy. The Swede was as much distressed as Morrison; for he understood the other’s feelings perfectly. No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst. But he was incapable of outward cordiality of manner, and he felt acutely his defect. Consummate politeness is not the right tonic for an emotional collapse. They must have had, both of them, a fairly painful time of it in the cabin of the brig. In the end Morrison, casting desperately for an idea in the blackness of his despondency, hit upon the notion of inviting Heyst to travel with him in his brig and have a share in his trading ventures up to the amount of his loan.

It is characteristic of Heyst’s unattached, floating existence that he was in a position to accept this proposal. There is no reason to think that he wanted particularly just then to go poking aboard the brig into all the holes and corners of the Archipelago where Morrison picked up most of his trade. Far from it; but he would have consented to almost any arrangement in order to put an end to the harrowing scene in the cabin. There was at once a great transformation act: Morrison raising his diminished head, and sticking the glass in his eye to look affectionately at Heyst, a bottle being uncorked, and so on. It was agreed that nothing should be said to anyone of this transaction. Morrison, you understand, was not proud of the episode, and he was afraid of being unmercifully chaffed.

“An old bird like me! To let myself be trapped by those damned Portuguese rascals! I should never hear the last of it. We must keep it dark.”

From quite other motives, among which his native delicacy was the principal, Heyst was even more anxious to bind himself to silence. A gentleman would naturally shrink from the part of heavenly messenger that Morrison would force upon him. It made Heyst uncomfortable, as it was. And perhaps he did not care that it should be known that he had some means, whatever they might have been — sufficient, at any rate, to enable him to lend money to people. These two had a duet down there, like conspirators in a comic opera, of “Sh — ssh, shssh! Secrecy! Secrecy!” It must have been funny, because they were very serious about it.

And for a time the conspiracy was successful in so far that we all concluded that Heyst was boarding with the good-natured — some said: sponging on the imbecile — Morrison, in his brig. But you know how it is with all such mysteries. There is always a leak somewhere. Morrison himself, not a perfect vessel by any means, was bursting with gratitude, and under the stress he must have let out something vague — enough to give the island gossip a chance. And you know how kindly the world is in its comments on what it does not understand. A rumour sprang out that Heyst, having obtained some mysterious hold on Morrison, had fastened himself on him and was sucking him dry. Those who had traced these mutters back to their origin were very careful not to believe them. The originator, it seems, was a certain Schomberg, a big, manly, bearded creature of the Teutonic persuasion, with an ungovernable tongue which surely must have worked on a pivot. Whether he was a Lieutenant of the Reserve, as he declared, I don't know. Out there he was by profession a hotel-keeper, first in Bangkok, then somewhere else, and ultimately in Sourabaya. He dragged after him up and down that section of the tropical belt a silent, frightened, little woman with long ringlets, who smiled at one stupidly, showing a blue tooth. I don't know why so many of us patronized his various establishments. He was a noxious ass, and he satisfied his lust for silly gossip at the cost of his customers. It was he who, one evening, as Morrison and Heyst went past the hotel — they were not his regular patrons — whispered mysteriously to the mixed company assembled on the veranda:

“The spider and the fly just gone by, gentlemen.” Then, very important and confidential, his thick paw at the side of his mouth: “We are among ourselves; well, gentlemen, all I can say is, don't you ever get mixed up with that Swede. Don't you ever get caught in his web.”

Chapter 3

Human nature being what it is, having a silly side to it as well as a mean side, there were not a few who pretended to be indignant on no better authority than a general propensity to believe every evil report; and a good many others who found it simply funny to call Heyst the Spider — behind his back, of course. He was as serenely unconscious of this as of his several other nicknames. But soon people found other things to say of Heyst; not long afterwards he came very much to the fore in larger affairs. He blossomed out into something definite. He filled the public eye as the manager on the spot of the Tropical Belt Coal Company with offices in London and Amsterdam, and other things about it that sounded and looked grandiose. The offices in the two capitals may have consisted — and probably did — of one room in each; but at that distance, out East there, all this had an air. We were more puzzled than dazzled, it is true; but even the most sober-minded among us began to think that there was something in it. The Tesmans appointed agents, a contract for government

mail-boats secured, the era of steam beginning for the islands — a great stride forward — Heyst's stride!

And all this sprang from the meeting of the cornered Morrison and of the wandering Heyst, which may or may not have been the direct outcome of a prayer. Morrison was not an imbecile, but he seemed to have got himself into a state of remarkable haziness as to his exact position towards Heyst. For, if Heyst had been sent with money in his pocket by a direct decree of the Almighty in answer to Morrison's prayer then there was no reason for special gratitude, since obviously he could not help himself. But Morrison believed both, in the efficacy of prayer and in the infinite goodness of Heyst. He thanked God with awed sincerity for his mercy, and could not thank Heyst enough for the service rendered as between man and man. In this (highly creditable) tangle of strong feelings Morrison's gratitude insisted on Heyst's partnership in the great discovery. Ultimately we heard that Morrison had gone home through the Suez Canal in order to push the magnificent coal idea personally in London. He parted from his brig and disappeared from our ken; but we heard that he had written a letter or letters to Heyst, saying that London was cold and gloomy; that he did not like either the men or things, that he was "as lonely as a crow in a strange country." In truth, he pined after the Capricorn — I don't mean only the tropic; I mean the ship too. Finally he went into Dorsetshire to see his people, caught a bad cold, and died with extraordinary precipitation in the bosom of his appalled family. Whether his exertions in the City of London had enfeebled his vitality I don't know; but I believe it was this visit which put life into the coal idea. Be it as it may, the Tropical Belt Coal Company was born very shortly after Morrison, the victim of gratitude and his native climate, had gone to join his forefathers in a Dorsetshire churchyard.

Heyst was immensely shocked. He got the news in the Moluccas through the Tesmans, and then disappeared for a time. It appears that he stayed with a Dutch government doctor in Amboyna, a friend of his who looked after him for a bit in his bungalow. He became visible again rather suddenly, his eyes sunk in his head, and with a sort of guarded attitude, as if afraid someone would reproach him with the death of Morrison.

Naive Heyst! As if anybody would . . . Nobody amongst us had any interest in men who went home. They were all right; they did not count any more. Going to Europe was nearly as final as going to Heaven. It removed a man from the world of hazard and adventure.

As a matter of fact, many of us did not hear of this death till months afterwards — from Schomberg, who disliked Heyst gratuitously and made up a piece of sinister whispered gossip:

"That's what comes of having anything to do with that fellow. He squeezes you dry like a lemon, then chucks you out — sends you home to die. Take warning by Morrison!"

Of course, we laughed at the innkeeper's suggestions of black mystery. Several of us heard that Heyst was prepared to go to Europe himself, to push on his coal enterprise

personally; but he never went. It wasn't necessary. The company was formed without him, and his nomination of manager in the tropics came out to him by post.

From the first he had selected Samburan, or Round Island, for the central station. Some copies of the prospectus issued in Europe, having found their way out East, were passed from hand to hand. We greatly admired the map which accompanied them for the edification of the shareholders. On it Samburan was represented as the central spot of the Eastern Hemisphere with its name engraved in enormous capitals. Heavy lines radiated from it in all directions through the tropics, figuring a mysterious and effective star — lines of influence or lines of distance, or something of that sort. Company promoters have an imagination of their own. There's no more romantic temperament on earth than the temperament of a company promoter. Engineers came out, coolies were imported, bungalows were put up on Samburan, a gallery driven into the hillside, and actually some coal got out.

These manifestations shook the soberest minds. For a time everybody in the islands was talking of the Tropical Belt Coal, and even those who smiled quietly to themselves were only hiding their uneasiness. Oh, yes; it had come, and anybody could see what would be the consequences — the end of the individual trader, smothered under a great invasion of steamers. We could not afford to buy steamers. Not we. And Heyst was the manager.

“You know, Heyst, enchanted Heyst.”

“Oh, come! He has been no better than a loafer around here as far back as any of us can remember.”

“Yes, he said he was looking for facts. Well, he's got hold of one that will do for all of us,” commented a bitter voice.

“That's what they call development — and be hanged to it!” muttered another.

Never was Heyst talked about so much in the tropical belt before.

“Isn't he a Swedish baron or something?”

“He, a baron? Get along with you!”

For my part I haven't the slightest doubt that he was. While he was still drifting amongst the islands, enigmatical and disregarded like an insignificant ghost, he told me so himself on a certain occasion. It was a long time before he materialized in this alarming way into the destroyer of our little industry — Heyst the Enemy.

It became the fashion with a good many to speak of Heyst as the Enemy. He was very concrete, very visible now. He was rushing all over the Archipelago, jumping in and out of local mail-packets as if they had been tram-cars, here, there, and everywhere — organizing with all his might. This was no mooning about. This was business. And this sudden display of purposeful energy shook the incredulity of the most sceptical more than any scientific demonstration of the value of these coal-outcrops could have done. It was impressive. Schomberg was the only one who resisted the infection. Big, manly in a portly style, and profusely bearded, with a glass of beer in his thick paw, he would approach some table where the topic of the hour was being discussed, would listen for a moment, and then come out with his invariable declaration:

“All this is very well, gentlemen; but he can’t throw any of his coal-dust in my eyes. There’s nothing in it. Why, there can’t be anything in it. A fellow like that for manager? Phoo!”

Was it the clairvoyance of imbecile hatred, or mere stupid tenacity of opinion, which ends sometimes by scoring against the world in a most astonishing manner? Most of us can remember instances of triumphant folly; and that ass Schomberg triumphed. The T.B.C. Company went into liquidation, as I began by telling you. The Tesmans washed their hands of it. The Government cancelled those famous contracts, the talk died out, and presently it was remarked here and there that Heyst had faded completely away. He had become invisible, as in those early days when he used to make a bolt clear out of sight in his attempts to break away from the enchantment of “these isles,” either in the direction of New Guinea or in the direction of Saigon — to cannibals or to cafes. The enchanted Heyst! Had he at last broken the spell? Had he died? We were too indifferent to wonder overmuch. You see we had on the whole liked him well enough. And liking is not sufficient to keep going the interest one takes in a human being. With hatred, apparently, it is otherwise. Schomberg couldn’t forget Heyst. The keen, manly Teutonic creature was a good hater. A fool often is.

“Good evening, gentlemen. Have you got everything you want? So! Good! You see? What was I always telling you? Aha! There was nothing in it. I knew it. But what I would like to know is what became of that — Swede.”

He put a stress on the word Swede as if it meant scoundrel. He detested Scandinavians generally. Why? Goodness only knows. A fool like that is unfathomable. He continued:

“It’s five months or more since I have spoken to anybody who has seen him.”

As I have said, we were not much interested; but Schomberg, of course, could not understand that. He was grotesquely dense. Whenever three people came together in his hotel, he took good care that Heyst should be with them.

“I hope the fellow did not go and drown himself,” he would add with a comical earnestness that ought to have made us shudder; only our crowd was superficial, and did not apprehend the psychology of this pious hope.

“Why? Heyst isn’t in debt to you for drinks is he?” somebody asked him once with shallow scorn.

“Drinks! Oh, dear no!”

The innkeeper was not mercenary. Teutonic temperament seldom is. But he put on a sinister expression to tell us that Heyst had not paid perhaps three visits altogether to his “establishment.” This was Heyst’s crime, for which Schomberg wished him nothing less than a long and tormented existence. Observe the Teutonic sense of proportion and nice forgiving temper.

At last, one afternoon, Schomberg was seen approaching a group of his customers. He was obviously in high glee. He squared his manly chest with great importance.

“Gentlemen, I have news of him. Who? why, that Swede. He is still on Samburan. He’s never been away from it. The company is gone, the engineers are gone, the clerks

are gone, the coolies are gone, everything's gone; but there he sticks. Captain Davidson, coming by from the westward, saw him with his own eyes. Something white on the wharf, so he steamed in and went ashore in a small boat. Heyst, right enough. Put a book into his pocket, always very polite. Been strolling on the wharf and reading. 'I remain in possession here,' he told Captain Davidson. What I want to know is what he gets to eat there. A piece of dried fish now and then — what? That's coming down pretty low for a man who turned up his nose at my table d'hôte!"

He winked with immense malice. A bell started ringing, and he led the way to the dining-room as if into a temple, very grave, with the air of a benefactor of mankind. His ambition was to feed it at a profitable price, and his delight was to talk of it behind its back. It was very characteristic of him to gloat over the idea of Heyst having nothing decent to eat.

Chapter 4

A few of us who were sufficiently interested went to Davidson for details. These were not many. He told us that he passed to the north of Samburan on purpose to see what was going on. At first, it looked as if that side of the island had been altogether abandoned. This was what he expected. Presently, above the dense mass of vegetation that Samburan presents to view, he saw the head of the flagstaff without a flag. Then, while steaming across the slight indentation which for a time was known officially as Black Diamond Bay, he made out with his glass the white figure on the coaling-wharf. It could be no one but Heyst.

"I thought for certain he wanted to be taken off, so I steamed in. He made no signs. However, I lowered a boat. I could not see another living being anywhere. Yes. He had a book in his hand. He looked exactly as we have always seen him — very neat, white shoes, cork helmet. He explained to me that he had always had a taste for solitude. It was the first I ever heard of it, I told him. He only smiled. What could I say? He isn't the sort of man one can speak familiarly to. There's something in him. One doesn't care to.

"'But what's the object? Are you thinking of keeping possession of the mine?' I asked him.

"'Something of the sort,' he says. 'I am keeping hold.'

"'But all this is as dead as Julius Caesar,' I cried. 'In fact, you have nothing worth holding on to, Heyst.'

"'Oh, I am done with facts,' says he, putting his hand to his helmet sharply with one of his short bows."

Thus dismissed, Davidson went on board his ship, swung her out, and as he was steaming away he watched from the bridge Heyst walking shoreward along the wharf. He marched into the long grass and vanished — all but the top of his white cork helmet, which seemed to swim in a green sea. Then that too disappeared, as if it had

sunk into the living depths of the tropical vegetation, which is more jealous of men's conquests than the ocean, and which was about to close over the last vestiges of the liquidated Tropical Belt Coal Company — A. Heyst, manager in the East.

Davidson, a good, simple fellow in his way, was strangely affected. It is to be noted that he knew very little of Heyst. He was one of those whom Heyst's finished courtesy of attitude and intonation most strongly disconcerted. He himself was a fellow of fine feeling, I think, though of course he had no more polish than the rest of us. We were naturally a hail-fellow-well-met crowd, with standards of our own — no worse, I daresay, than other people's; but polish was not one of them. Davidson's fineness was real enough to alter the course of the steamer he commanded. Instead of passing to the south of Samburan, he made it his practice to take the passage along the north shore, within about a mile of the wharf.

"He can see us if he likes to see us," remarked Davidson. Then he had an afterthought: "I say! I hope he won't think I am intruding, eh?"

We reassured him on the point of correct behaviour. The sea is open to all.

This slight deviation added some ten miles to Davidson's round trip, but as that was sixteen hundred miles it did not matter much.

"I have told my owner of it," said the conscientious commander of the Sissie.

His owner had a face like an ancient lemon. He was small and wizened — which was strange, because generally a Chinaman, as he grows in prosperity, puts on inches of girth and stature. To serve a Chinese firm is not so bad. Once they become convinced you deal straight by them, their confidence becomes unlimited. You can do no wrong. So Davidson's old Chinaman squeaked hurriedly:

"All right, all right, all right. You do what you like, captain — "

And there was an end of the matter; not altogether, though. From time to time the Chinaman used to ask Davidson about the white man. He was still there, eh?

"I never see him," Davidson had to confess to his owner, who would peer at him silently through round, horn-rimmed spectacles, several sizes too large for his little old face. "I never see him."

To me, on occasions he would say:

"I haven't a doubt he's there. He hides. It's very unpleasant." Davidson was a little vexed with Heyst. "Funny thing," he went on. "Of all the people I speak to, nobody ever asks after him but that Chinaman of mine — and Schomberg," he added after a while.

Yes, Schomberg, of course. He was asking everybody about everything, and arranging the information into the most scandalous shape his imagination could invent. From time to time he would step up, his blinking, cushioned eyes, his thick lips, his very chestnut beard, looking full of malice.

"Evening, gentlemen. Have you got all you want? So! Good! Well, I am told the jungle has choked the very sheds in Black Diamond Bay. Fact. He's a hermit in the wilderness now. But what can this manager get to eat there? It beats me."

Sometimes a stranger would inquire with natural curiosity:

“Who? What manager?”

“Oh, a certain Swede,” — with a sinister emphasis, as if he were saying “a certain brigand.” “Well known here. He’s turned hermit from shame. That’s what the devil does when he’s found out.”

Hermit. This was the latest of the more or less witty labels applied to Heyst during his aimless pilgrimage in this section of the tropical belt, where the inane clacking of Schomberg’s tongue vexed our ears.

But apparently Heyst was not a hermit by temperament. The sight of his land was not invincibly odious to him. We must believe this, since for some reason or other he did come out from his retreat for a while. Perhaps it was only to see whether there were any letters for him at the Tesmans. I don’t know. No one knows. But this reappearance shows that his detachment from the world was not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble. Axel Heyst ought not to have cared for his letters — or whatever it was that brought him out after something more than a year and a half in Samburan. But it was of no use. He had not the hermit’s vocation! That was the trouble, it seems.

Be this as it may, he suddenly reappeared in the world, broad chest, bald forehead, long moustaches, polite manner, and all — the complete Heyst, even to the kindly sunken eyes on which there still rested the shadow of Morrison’s death. Naturally, it was Davidson who had given him a lift out of his forsaken island. There were no other opportunities, unless some native craft were passing by — a very remote and unsatisfactory chance to wait for. Yes, he came out with Davidson, to whom he volunteered the statement that it was only for a short time — a few days, no more. He meant to go back to Samburan.

Davidson expressing his horror and incredulity of such foolishness, Heyst explained that when the company came into being he had his few belongings sent out from Europe.

To Davidson, as to any of us, the idea of Heyst, the wandering drifting, unattached Heyst, having any belongings of the sort that can furnish a house was startlingly novel. It was grotesquely fantastic. It was like a bird owning real property.

“Belongings? Do you mean chairs and tables?” Davidson asked with unconcealed astonishment.

Heyst did mean that. “My poor father died in London. It has been all stored there ever since,” he explained.

“For all these years?” exclaimed Davidson, thinking how long we all had known Heyst flitting from tree to tree in a wilderness.

“Even longer,” said Heyst, who had understood very well.

This seemed to imply that he had been wandering before he came under our observation. In what regions? And what early age? Mystery. Perhaps he was a bird that had never had a nest.

“I left school early,” he remarked once to Davidson, on the passage. “It was in England. A very good school. I was not a shining success there.”

The confessions of Heyst. Not one of us — with the probable exception of Morrison, who was dead — had ever heard so much of his history. It looks as if the experience of hermit life had the power to loosen one's tongue, doesn't it?

During that memorable passage, in the *Sissie*, which took about two days, he volunteered other hints — for you could not call it information — about his history. And Davidson was interested. He was interested not because the hints were exciting but because of that innate curiosity about our fellows which is a trait of human nature. Davidson's existence, too, running the *Sissie* along the Java Sea and back again, was distinctly monotonous and, in a sense, lonely. He never had any sort of company on board. Native deck-passengers in plenty, of course, but never a white man, so the presence of Heyst for two days must have been a godsend. Davidson was telling us all about it afterwards. Heyst said that his father had written a lot of books. He was a philosopher.

"Seems to me he must have been something of a crank, too," was Davidson's comment. "Apparently he had quarrelled with his people in Sweden. Just the sort of father you would expect Heyst to have. Isn't he a bit of a crank himself? He told me that directly his father died he lit out into the wide world on his own, and had been on the move till he fetched up against this famous coal business. Fits the son of the father somehow, don't you think?"

For the rest, Heyst was as polite as ever. He offered to pay for his passage; but when Davidson refused to hear of it he seized him heartily by the hand, gave one of his courtly bows, and declared that he was touched by his friendly proceedings.

"I am not alluding to this trifling amount which you decline to take," he went on, giving a shake to Davidson's hand. "But I am touched by your humanity." Another shake. "Believe me, I am profoundly aware of having been an object of it." Final shake of the hand. All this meant that Heyst understood in a proper sense the little *Sissie*'s periodic appearance in sight of his hermitage.

"He's a genuine gentleman," Davidson said to us. "I was really sorry when he went ashore."

We asked him where he had left Heyst.

"Why, in Sourabaya — where else?"

The Tesmans had their principal counting-house in Sourabaya. There had long existed a connection between Heyst and the Tesmans. The incongruity of a hermit having agents did not strike us, nor yet the absurdity of a forgotten cast-off, derelict manager of a wrecked, collapsed, vanished enterprise, having business to attend to. We said Sourabaya, of course, and took it for granted that he would stay with one of the Tesmans. One of us even wondered what sort of reception he would get; for it was known that Julius Tesman was unreasonably bitter about the Tropical Belt Coal fiasco. But Davidson set us right. It was nothing of the kind. Heyst went to stay in Schomberg's hotel, going ashore in the hotel launch. Not that Schomberg would think of sending his launch alongside a mere trader like the *Sissie*. But she had been meeting a coasting mail-packet, and had been signalled to. Schomberg himself was steering her.

“You should have seen Schomberg’s eyes bulge out when Heyst jumped in with an ancient brown leather bag!” said Davidson. “He pretended not to know who it was — at first, anyway. I didn’t go ashore with them. We didn’t stay more than a couple of hours altogether. Landed two thousand coconuts and cleared out. I have agreed to pick him up again on my next trip in twenty days’ time.”

Chapter 5

Davidson happened to be two days late on his return trip; no great matter, certainly, but he made a point of going ashore at once, during the hottest hour of the afternoon, to look for Heyst. Schomberg’s hotel stood back in an extensive enclosure containing a garden, some large trees, and, under their spreading boughs, a detached “hall available for concerts and other performances,” as Schomberg worded it in his advertisements. Torn, and fluttering bills, intimating in heavy red capitals CONCERTS EVERY NIGHT, were stuck on the brick pillars on each side of the gateway.

The walk had been long and confoundedly sunny. Davidson stood wiping his wet neck and face on what Schomberg called “the piazza.” Several doors opened on to it, but all the screens were down. Not a soul was in sight, not even a China boy — nothing but a lot of painted iron chairs and tables. Solitude, shade, and gloomy silence — and a faint, treacherous breeze which came from under the trees and quite unexpectedly caused the melting Davidson to shiver slightly — the little shiver of the tropics which in Sourabaya, especially, often means fever and the hospital to the incautious white man.

The prudent Davidson sought shelter in the nearest darkened room. In the artificial dusk, beyond the levels of shrouded billiard-tables, a white form heaved up from two chairs on which it had been extended. The middle of the day, table d’hote tiffin once over, was Schomberg’s easy time. He lounged out, portly, deliberate, on the defensive, the great fair beard like a cuirass over his manly chest. He did not like Davidson, never a very faithful client of his. He hit a bell on one of the tables as he went by, and asked in a distant, Officer-in-Reserve manner:

“You desire?”

The good Davidson, still sponging his wet neck, declared with simplicity that he had come to fetch away Heyst, as agreed.

“Not here!”

A Chinaman appeared in response to the bell. Schomberg turned to him very severely:

“Take the gentleman’s order.”

Davidson had to be going. Couldn’t wait — only begged that Heyst should be informed that the Sissie would leave at midnight.

“Not — here, I am telling you!”

Davidson slapped his thigh in concern.

“Dear me! Hospital, I suppose.” A natural enough surmise in a very feverish locality. The Lieutenant of the Reserve only pursed up his mouth and raised his eyebrows without looking at him. It might have meant anything, but Davidson dismissed the hospital idea with confidence. However, he had to get hold of Heyst between this and midnight:

“He has been staying here?” he asked.

“Yes, he was staying here.”

“Can you tell me where he is now?” Davidson went on placidly. Within himself he was beginning to grow anxious, having developed the affection of a self-appointed protector towards Heyst. The answer he got was:

“Can’t tell. It’s none of my business,” accompanied by majestic oscillations of the hotel-keeper’s head, hinting at some awful mystery.

Davidson was placidity itself. It was his nature. He did not betray his sentiments, which were not favourable to Schomberg.

“I am sure to find out at the Tesmans’ office,” he thought. But it was a very hot hour, and if Heyst was down at the port he would have learned already that the Sissie was in. It was even possible that Heyst had already gone on board, where he could enjoy a coolness denied to the town. Davidson, being stout, was much preoccupied with coolness and inclined to immobility. He lingered awhile, as if irresolute. Schomberg, at the door, looking out, affected perfect indifference. He could not keep it up, though. Suddenly he turned inward and asked with brusque rage:

“You wanted to see him?”

“Why, yes,” said Davidson. “We agreed to meet — ”

“Don’t you bother. He doesn’t care about that now.”

“Doesn’t he?”

“Well, you can judge for yourself. He isn’t here, is he? You take my word for it. Don’t you bother about him. I am advising you as a friend.”

“Thank you,” said Davidson, inwardly startled at the savage tone. “I think I will sit down for a moment and have a drink, after all.”

This was not what Schomberg had expected to hear. He called brutally:

“Boy!”

The Chinaman approached, and after referring him to the white man by a nod the hotel-keeper departed, muttering to himself. Davidson heard him gnash his teeth as he went.

Davidson sat alone with the billiard-tables as if there had been not a soul staying in the hotel. His placidity was so genuine that he was not unduly fretting himself over the absence of Heyst, or the mysterious manners Schomberg had treated him to. He was considering these things in his own fairly shrewd way. Something had happened; and he was loath to go away to investigate, being restrained by a presentiment that somehow enlightenment would come to him there. A poster of CONCERTS EVERY EVENING, like those on the gate, but in a good state of preservation, hung on the wall fronting him. He looked at it idly and was struck by the fact — then not so very

common — that it was a ladies' orchestra; "Zangiaco's eastern tour — eighteen performers." The poster stated that they had had the honour of playing their select repertoire before various colonial excellencies, also before pashas, sheiks, chiefs, H. H. the Sultan of Mascate, etc., etc.

Davidson felt sorry for the eighteen lady-performers. He knew what that sort of life was like, the sordid conditions and brutal incidents of such tours led by such Zangiacos who often were anything but musicians by profession. While he was staring at the poster, a door somewhere at his back opened, and a woman came in who was looked upon as Schomberg's wife, no doubt with truth. As somebody remarked cynically once, she was too unattractive to be anything else. The opinion that he treated her abominably was based on her frightened expression. Davidson lifted his hat to her. Mrs. Schomberg gave him an inclination of her sallow head and incontinently sat down behind a sort of raised counter, facing the door, with a mirror and rows of bottles at her back. Her hair was very elaborately done with two ringlets on the left side of her scraggy neck; her dress was of silk, and she had come on duty for the afternoon. For some reason or other Schomberg exacted this from her, though she added nothing to the fascinations of the place. She sat there in the smoke and noise, like an enthroned idol, smiling stupidly over the billiards from time to time, speaking to no one, and no one speaking to her. Schomberg himself took no more interest in her than may be implied in a sudden and totally unmotivated scowl. Otherwise the very Chinamen ignored her existence.

She had interrupted Davidson in his reflections. Being alone with her, her silence and open-eyed immobility made him uncomfortable. He was easily sorry for people. It seemed rude not to take any notice of her. He said, in allusion to the poster:

"Are you having these people in the house?"

She was so unused to being addressed by customers that at the sound of his voice she jumped in her seat. Davidson was telling us afterwards that she jumped exactly like a figure made of wood, without losing her rigid immobility. She did not even move her eyes; but she answered him freely, though her very lips seemed made of wood.

"They stayed here over a month. They are gone now. They played every evening."

"Pretty good, were they?"

To this she said nothing; and as she kept on staring fixedly in front of her, her silence disconcerted Davidson. It looked as if she had not heard him — which was impossible. Perhaps she drew the line of speech at the expression of opinions. Schomberg might have trained her, for domestic reasons, to keep them to herself. But Davidson felt in honour obliged to converse; so he said, putting his own interpretation on this surprising silence:

"I see — not much account. Such bands hardly ever are. An Italian lot, Mrs. Schomberg, to judge by the name of the boss?"

She shook her head negatively.

"No. He is a German really; only he dyes his hair and beard black for business. Zangiaco is his business name."

"That's a curious fact," said Davidson. His head being full of Heyst, it occurred to him that she might be aware of other facts. This was a very amazing discovery to anyone who looked at Mrs. Schomberg. Nobody had ever suspected her of having a mind. I mean even a little of it, I mean any at all. One was inclined to think of her as an It — an automaton, a very plain dummy, with an arrangement for bowing the head at times and smiling stupidly now and then. Davidson viewed her profile with a flattened nose, a hollow cheek, and one staring, unwinking, goggle eye. He asked himself: Did that speak just now? Will it speak again? It was as exciting, for the mere wonder of it, as trying to converse with a mechanism. A smile played about the fat features of Davidson; the smile of a man making an amusing experiment. He spoke again to her:

"But the other members of that orchestra were real Italians, were they not?"

Of course, he didn't care. He wanted to see whether the mechanism would work again. It did. It said they were not. They were of all sorts, apparently. It paused, with the one goggle eye immovably gazing down the whole length of the room and through the door opening on to the "piazza." It paused, then went on in the same low pitch:

"There was even one English girl."

"Poor devil!" — said Davidson, "I suppose these women are not much better than slaves really. Was that fellow with the dyed beard decent in his way?"

The mechanism remained silent. The sympathetic soul of Davidson drew its own conclusions.

"Beastly life for these women!" he said. "When you say an English girl, Mrs. Schomberg, do you really mean a young girl? Some of these orchestra girls are no chicks."

"Young enough," came the low voice out of Mrs. Schomberg's unmoved physiognomy.

Davidson, encouraged, remarked that he was sorry for her. He was easily sorry for people.

"Where did they go to from here?" he asked.

"She did not go with them. She ran away."

This was the pronouncement Davidson obtained next. It introduced a new sort of interest.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed placidly; and then, with the air of a man who knows life: "Who with?" he inquired with assurance.

Mrs. Schomberg's immobility gave her an appearance of listening intently. Perhaps she was really listening; but Schomberg must have been finishing his sleep in some distant part of the house. The silence was profound, and lasted long enough to become startling. Then, enthroned above Davidson, she whispered at last:

"That friend of yours."

"Oh, you know I am here looking for a friend," said Davidson hopefully. "Won't you tell me —"

"I've told you"

"Eh?"

A mist seemed to roll away from before Davidson's eyes, disclosing something he could not believe.

"You can't mean it!" he cried. "He's not the man for it." But the last words came out in a faint voice. Mrs. Schomberg never moved her head the least bit. Davidson, after the shock which made him sit up, went slack all over.

"Heyst! Such a perfect gentleman!" he exclaimed weakly.

Mrs. Schomberg did not seem to have heard him. This startling fact did not tally somehow with the idea Davidson had of Heyst. He never talked of women, he never seemed to think of them, or to remember that they existed; and then all at once — like this! Running off with a casual orchestra girl!

"You might have knocked me down with a feather," Davidson told us some time afterwards.

By then he was taking an indulgent view of both the parties to that amazing transaction. First of all, on reflection, he was by no means certain that it prevented Heyst from being a perfect gentleman, as before. He confronted our open grins or quiet smiles with a serious round face. Heyst had taken the girl away to Samburan; and that was no joking matter. The loneliness, the ruins of the spot, had impressed Davidson's simple soul. They were incompatible with the frivolous comments of people who had not seen it. That black jetty, sticking out of the jungle into the empty sea; these roof-ridges of deserted houses peeping dismally above the long grass! Ough! The gigantic and funereal blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation.

Thus was the sensitive Davidson. The girl must have been miserable indeed to follow such a strange man to such a spot. Heyst had, no doubt, told her the truth. He was a gentleman. But no words could do justice to the conditions of life on Samburan. A desert island was nothing to it. Moreover, when you were cast away on a desert island — why, you could not help yourself; but to expect a fiddle-playing girl out of an ambulant ladies' orchestra to remain content there for a day, for one single day, was inconceivable. She would be frightened at the first sight of it. She would scream.

The capacity for sympathy in these stout, placid men! Davidson was stirred to the depths; and it was easy to see that it was about Heyst that he was concerned. We asked him if he had passed that way lately.

"Oh, yes. I always do — about half a mile off."

"Seen anybody about?"

"No, not a soul. Not a shadow."

"Did you blow your whistle?"

"Blow the whistle? You think I would do such a thing?"

He rejected the mere possibility of such an unwarrantable intrusion. Wonderfully delicate fellow, Davidson!

"Well, but how do you know that they are there?" he was naturally asked.

Heyst had entrusted Mrs. Schomberg with a message for Davidson — a few lines in pencil on a scrap of crumpled paper. It was to the effect: that an unforeseen necessity was driving him away before the appointed time. He begged Davidson's indulgence for the apparent discourtesy. The woman of the house — meaning Mrs. Schomberg — would give him the facts, though unable to explain them, of course.

“What was there to explain?” wondered Davidson dubiously.

“He took a fancy to that fiddle-playing girl, and — ”

“And she to him, apparently,” I suggested.

“Wonderfully quick work,” reflected Davidson. “What do you think will come of it?”

“Repentance, I should say. But how is it that Mrs. Schomberg has been selected for a confidante?”

For indeed a waxwork figure would have seemed more useful than that woman whom we all were accustomed to see sitting elevated above the two billiard-tables — without expression, without movement, without voice, without sight.

“Why, she helped the girl to bolt,” said Davidson turning at me his innocent eyes, rounded by the state of constant amazement in which this affair had left him, like those shocks of terror or sorrow which sometimes leave their victim afflicted by nervous trembling. It looked as though he would never get over it.

“Mrs. Schomberg jerked Heyst's note, twisted like a pipe-light, into my lap while I sat there unsuspecting,” Davidson went on. “Directly I had recovered my senses, I asked her what on earth she had to do with it that Heyst should leave it with her. And then, behaving like a painted image rather than a live woman, she whispered, just loud enough for me to hear:

“I helped them. I got her things together, tied them up in my own shawl, and threw them into the compound out of a back window. I did it.”

“That woman that you would say hadn't the pluck to lift her little finger!” marvelled Davidson in his quiet, slightly panting voice. “What do you think of that?”

I thought she must have had some interest of her own to serve. She was too lifeless to be suspected of impulsive compassion. It was impossible to think that Heyst had bribed her. Whatever means he had, he had not the means to do that. Or could it be that she was moved by that disinterested passion for delivering a woman to a man which in respectable spheres is called matchmaking? — a highly irregular example of it!

“It must have been a very small bundle,” remarked Davidson further.

“I imagine the girl must have been specially attractive,” I said.

“I don't know. She was miserable. I don't suppose it was more than a little linen and a couple of those white frocks they wear on the platform.”

Davidson pursued his own train of thought. He supposed that such a thing had never been heard of in the history of the tropics. For where could you find anyone to steal a girl out of an orchestra? No doubt fellows here and there took a fancy to some pretty one — but it was not for running away with her. Oh dear no! It needed a lunatic like Heyst.

“Only think what it means,” wheezed Davidson, imaginative under his invincible placidity. “Just only try to think! Brooding alone on Samburan has upset his brain. He never stopped to consider, or he couldn’t have done it. No sane man . . . How is a thing like that to go on? What’s he going to do with her in the end? It’s madness.”

“You say that he’s mad. Schomberg tells us that he must be starving on his island; so he may end yet by eating her,” I suggested.

Mrs. Schomberg had had no time to enter into details, Davidson told us. Indeed, the wonder was that they had been left alone so long. The drowsy afternoon was slipping by. Footsteps and voices resounded on the veranda — I beg pardon, the piazza; the scraping of chairs, the ping of a smitten bell. Customers were turning up. Mrs. Schomberg was begging Davidson hurriedly, but without looking at him, to say nothing to anyone, when on a half-uttered word her nervous whisper was cut short. Through a small inner door Schomberg came in, his hair brushed, his beard combed neatly, but his eyelids still heavy from his nap. He looked with suspicion at Davidson, and even glanced at his wife; but he was baffled by the natural placidity of the one and the acquired habit of immobility in the other.

“Have you sent out the drinks?” he asked surlily.

She did not open her lips, because just then the head boy appeared with a loaded tray, on his way out. Schomberg went to the door and greeted the customers outside, but did not join them. He remained blocking half the doorway, with his back to the room, and was still there when Davidson, after sitting still for a while, rose to go. At the noise he made Schomberg turned his head, watched him lift his hat to Mrs. Schomberg and receive her wooden bow accompanied by a stupid grin, and then looked away. He was loftily dignified. Davidson stopped at the door, deep in his simplicity.

“I am sorry you won’t tell me anything about my friend’s absence,” he said. “My friend Heyst, you know. I suppose the only course for me now is to make inquiries down at the port. I shall hear something there, I don’t doubt.”

“Make inquiries of the devil!” replied Schomberg in a hoarse mutter.

Davidson’s purpose in addressing the hotel-keeper had been mainly to make Mrs. Schomberg safe from suspicion; but he would fain have heard something more of Heyst’s exploit from another point of view. It was a shrewd try. It was successful in a rather startling way, because the hotel-keeper’s point of view was horribly abusive. All of a sudden, in the same hoarse sinister tone, he proceeded to call Heyst many names, of which “pig-dog” was not the worst, with such vehemence that he actually choked himself. Profiting from the pause, Davidson, whose temperament could withstand worse shocks, remonstrated in an undertone:

“It’s unreasonable to get so angry as that. Even if he had run off with your cash-box — ”

The big hotel-keeper bent down and put his infuriated face close to Davidson’s.

“My cash-box! My — he — look here, Captain Davidson! He ran off with a girl. What do I care for the girl? The girl is nothing to me.”

He shot out an infamous word which made Davidson start. That's what the girl was; and he reiterated the assertion that she was nothing to him. What he was concerned for was the good name of his house. Wherever he had been established, he had always had "artist parties" staying in his house. One recommended him to the others; but what would happen now, when it got about that leaders ran the risk in his house — his house — of losing members of their troupe? And just now, when he had spent seven hundred and thirty-four guilders in building a concert-hall in his compound. Was that a thing to do in a respectable hotel? The cheek, the indecency, the impudence, the atrocity! Vagabond, impostor, swindler, ruffian, schwein-hund!

He had seized Davidson by a button of his coat, detaining him in the doorway, and exactly in the line of Mrs. Schomberg's stony gaze. Davidson stole a glance in that direction and thought of making some sort of reassuring sign to her, but she looked so bereft of senses, and almost of life, perched up there, that it seemed not worth while. He disengaged his button with firm placidity. Thereupon, with a last stifled curse, Schomberg vanished somewhere within, to try and compose his spirits in solitude. Davidson stepped out on the veranda. The party of customers there had become aware of the explosive interlude in the doorway. Davidson knew one of these men, and nodded to him in passing; but his acquaintance called out:

"Isn't he in a filthy temper? He's been like that ever since."

The speaker laughed aloud, while all the others sat smiling. Davidson stopped.

"Yes, rather." His feelings were, he told us, those of bewildered resignation; but of course that was no more visible to the others than the emotions of a turtle when it withdraws into its shell.

"It seems unreasonable," he murmured thoughtfully.

"Oh, but they had a scrap!" the other said.

"What do you mean? Was there a fight! — a fight with Heyst?" asked Davidson, much perturbed, if somewhat incredulous.

"Heyst? No, these two — the bandmaster, the fellow who's taking these women about and our Schomberg. Signor Zangiaco ran amuck in the morning, and went for our worthy friend. I tell you, they were rolling on the floor together on this very veranda, after chasing each other all over the house, doors slamming, women screaming, seventeen of them, in the dining-room; Chinamen up the trees. Hey, John? You climb tree to see the fight, eh?"

The boy, almond-eyed and impassive, emitted a scornful grunt, finished wiping the table, and withdrew.

"That's what it was — a real, go-as-you-please scrap. And Zangiaco began it. Oh, here's Schomberg. Say, Schomberg, didn't he fly at you, when the girl was missed, because it was you who insisted that the artists should go about the audience during the interval?"

Schomberg had reappeared in the doorway. He advanced. His bearing was stately, but his nostrils were extraordinarily expanded, and he controlled his voice with apparent effort.

“Certainly. That was only business. I quoted him special terms and all for your sake, gentlemen. I was thinking of my regular customers. There’s nothing to do in the evenings in this town. I think, gentlemen, you were all pleased at the opportunity of hearing a little good music; and where’s the harm of offering a grenadine, or what not, to a lady artist? But that fellow — that Swede — he got round the girl. He got round all the people out here. I’ve been watching him for years. You remember how he got round Morrison.”

He changed front abruptly, as if on parade, and marched off. The customers at the table exchanged glances silently. Davidson’s attitude was that of a spectator. Schomberg’s moody pacing of the billiard-room could be heard on the veranda.

“And the funniest part is,” resumed the man who had been speaking before — an English clerk in a Dutch house — ”the funniest part is that before nine o’clock that same morning those two were driving together in a gharry down to the port, to look for Heyst and the girl. I saw them rushing around making inquiries. I don’t know what they would have done to the girl, but they seemed quite ready to fall upon your Heyst, Davidson, and kill him on the quay.”

He had never, he said, seen anything so queer. Those two investigators working feverishly to the same end were glaring at each other with surprising ferocity. In hatred and mistrust they entered a steam-launch, and went flying from ship to ship all over the harbour, causing no end of sensation. The captains of vessels, coming on shore later in the day, brought tales of a strange invasion, and wanted to know who were the two offensive lunatics in a steam-launch, apparently after a man and a girl, and telling a story of which one could make neither head nor tail. Their reception by the roadstead was generally unsympathetic, even to the point of the mate of an American ship bundling them out over the rail with unseemly precipitation.

Meantime Heyst and the girl were a good few miles away, having gone in the night on board one of the Tesman schooners bound to the eastward. This was known afterwards from the Javanese boatmen whom Heyst hired for the purpose at three o’clock in the morning. The Tesman schooner had sailed at daylight with the usual land breeze, and was probably still in sight in the offing at the time. However, the two pursuers after their experience with the American mate, made for the shore. On landing, they had another violent row in the German language. But there was no second fight; and finally, with looks of fierce animosity, they got together into a gharry — obviously with the frugal view of sharing expenses — and drove away, leaving an astonished little crowd of Europeans and natives on the quay.

After hearing this wondrous tale, Davidson went away from the hotel veranda, which was filling with Schomberg’s regular customers. Heyst’s escapade was the general topic of conversation. Never before had that unaccountable individual been the cause of so much gossip, he judged. No! Not even in the beginnings of the Tropical Belt Coal Company when becoming for a moment a public character was he the object of a silly criticism and unintelligent envy for every vagabond and adventurer in the islands.

Davidson concluded that people liked to discuss that sort of scandal better than any other.

I asked him if he believed that this was such a great scandal after all.

“Heavens, no!” said that excellent man who, himself, was incapable of any impropriety of conduct. “But it isn’t a thing I would have done myself; I mean even if I had not been married.”

There was no implied condemnation in the statement; rather something like regret. Davidson shared my suspicion that this was in its essence the rescue of a distressed human being. Not that we were two romantics, tingeing the world to the hue of our temperament, but that both of us had been acute enough to discover a long time ago that Heyst was.

“I shouldn’t have had the pluck,” he continued. “I see a thing all round, as it were; but Heyst doesn’t, or else he would have been scared. You don’t take a woman into a desert jungle without being made sorry for it sooner or later, in one way or another; and Heyst being a gentleman only makes it worse.”

Chapter 6

We said no more about Heyst on that occasion, and it so happened that I did not meet Davidson again for some three months. When we did come together, almost the first thing he said to me was:

“I’ve seen him.”

Before I could exclaim, he assured me that he had taken no liberty, that he had not intruded. He was called in. Otherwise he would not have dreamed of breaking in upon Heyst’s privacy.

“I am certain you wouldn’t,” I assured him, concealing my amusement at his wonderful delicacy. He was the most delicate man that ever took a small steamer to and fro among the islands. But his humanity, which was not less strong and praiseworthy, had induced him to take his steamer past Samburan wharf (at an average distance of a mile) every twenty-three days — exactly. Davidson was delicate, humane, and regular.

“Heyst called you in?” I asked, interested.

Yes, Heyst had called him in as he was going by on his usual date. Davidson was examining the shore through his glasses with his unwearied and punctual humanity as he steamed past Samburan.

I saw a man in white. It could only have been Heyst. He had fastened some sort of enormous flag to a bamboo pole, and was waving it at the end of the old wharf.

Davidson didn’t like to take his steamer alongside — for fear of being indiscreet, I suppose; but he steered close inshore, stopped his engines, and lowered a boat. He went himself in that boat, which was manned, of course, by his Malay seamen.

Heyst, when he saw the boat pulling towards him, dropped his signalling-pole; and when Davidson arrived, he was kneeling down engaged busily in unfastening the flag from it.

“Was there anything wrong?” I inquired, Davidson having paused in his narrative and my curiosity being naturally aroused. You must remember that Heyst as the Archipelago knew him was not — what shall I say — was not a signalling sort of man.

“The very words that came out of my mouth,” said Davidson, “before I laid the boat against the piles. I could not help it!”

Heyst got up from his knees and began carefully folding up the flag thing, which struck Davidson as having the dimensions of a blanket.

“No, nothing wrong,” he cried. His white teeth flashed agreeably below the coppery horizontal bar of his long moustaches.

I don’t know whether it was his delicacy or his obesity which prevented Davidson from clambering upon the wharf. He stood up in the boat, and, above him, Heyst stooped low with urbane smiles, thanking him and apologizing for the liberty, exactly in his usual manner. Davidson had expected some change in the man, but there was none. Nothing in him betrayed the momentous fact that within that jungle there was a girl, a performer in a ladies’ orchestra, whom he had carried straight off the concert platform into the wilderness. He was not ashamed or defiant or abashed about it. He might have been a shade confidential when addressing Davidson. And his words were enigmatical.

“I took this course of signalling to you,” he said to Davidson, “because to preserve appearances might be of the utmost importance. Not to me, of course. I don’t care what people may say, and of course no one can hurt me. I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again. At one time I thought that intelligent observation of facts was the best way of cheating the time which is allotted to us whether we want it or not; but now I, have done with observation, too.”

Imagine poor, simple Davidson being addressed in such terms alongside an abandoned, decaying wharf jutting out of tropical bush. He had never heard anybody speak like this before; certainly not Heyst, whose conversation was concise, polite, with a faint ring of playfulness in the cultivated tones of his voice.

“He’s gone mad,” Davidson thought to himself.

But, looking at the physiognomy above him on the wharf, he was obliged to dismiss the notion of common, crude lunacy. It was truly most unusual talk. Then he remembered — in his surprise he had lost sight of it — that Heyst now had a girl there. This bizarre discourse was probably the effect of the girl. Davidson shook off the absurd feeling, and asked, wishing to make clear his friendliness, and not knowing what else to say:

“You haven’t run short of stores or anything like that?”

Heyst smiled and shook his head:

“No, no. Nothing of the kind. We are fairly well off here. Thanks, all the same. If I have taken the liberty to detain you, it is not from any uneasiness for myself and my — companion. The person I was thinking of when I made up my mind to invoke your assistance is Mrs. Schomberg.”

“I have talked with her,” interjected Davidson.

“Oh! You? Yes, I hoped she would find means to — ”

“But she didn’t tell me much,” interrupted Davidson, who was not averse from hearing something — he hardly knew what.

“H’m — Yes. But that note of mine? Yes? She found an opportunity to give it to you? That’s good, very good. She’s more resourceful than one would give her credit for.”

“Women often are — ” remarked Davidson. The strangeness from which he had suffered, merely because his interlocutor had carried off a girl, wore off as the minutes went by. “There’s a lot of unexpectedness about women,” he generalized with a didactic aim which seemed to miss its mark; for the next thing Heyst said was:

“This is Mrs. Schomberg’s shawl.” He touched the stuff hanging over his arm. “An Indian thing, I believe,” he added, glancing at his arm sideways.

“It isn’t of particular value,” said Davidson truthfully.

“Very likely. The point is that it belongs to Schomberg’s wife. That Schomberg seems to be an unconscionable ruffian — don’t you think so?”

Davidson smiled faintly.

“We out here have got used to him,” he said, as if excusing a universal and guilty toleration of a manifest nuisance. “I’d hardly call him that. I only know him as a hotel-keeper.”

“I never knew him even as that — not till this time, when you were so obliging as to take me to Sourabaya, I went to stay there from economy. The Netherlands House is very expensive, and they expect you to bring your own servant with you. It’s a nuisance.”

“Of course, of course,” protested Davidson hastily.

After a short silence Heyst returned to the matter of the shawl. He wanted to send it back to Mrs. Schomberg. He said that it might be very awkward for her if she were unable, if asked, to produce it. This had given him, Heyst, much uneasiness. She was terrified of Schomberg. Apparently she had reason to be.

Davidson had remarked that, too. Which did not prevent her, he pointed out, from making a fool of him, in a way, for the sake of a stranger.

“Oh! You know!” said Heyst. “Yes, she helped me — us.”

“She told me so. I had quite a talk with her,” Davidson informed him. “Fancy anyone having a talk with Mrs. Schomberg! If I were to tell the fellows they wouldn’t believe me. How did you get round her, Heyst? How did you think of it? Why, she looks too stupid to understand human speech and too scared to shoo a chicken away. Oh, the women, the women! You don’t know what there may be in the quietest of them.”

“She was engaged in the task of defending her position in life,” said Heyst. “It’s a very respectable task.”

“Is that it? I had some idea it was that,” confessed Davidson.

He then imparted to Heyst the story of the violent proceedings following on the discovery of his flight. Heyst’s polite attention to the tale took on a sombre cast; but he manifested no surprise, and offered no comment. When Davidson had finished he handed down the shawl into the boat, and Davidson promised to do his best to return it to Mrs. Schomberg in some secret fashion. Heyst expressed his thanks in a few simple words, set off by his manner of finished courtesy. Davidson prepared to depart. They were not looking at each other. Suddenly Heyst spoke:

“You understand that this was a case of odious persecution, don’t you? I became aware of it and — ”

It was a view which the sympathetic Davidson was capable of appreciating.

“I am not surprised to hear it,” he said placidly. “Odious enough, I dare say. And you, of course — not being a married man — were free to step in. Ah, well!”

He sat down in the stern-sheets, and already had the steering lines in his hands when Heyst observed abruptly:

“The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance; but I think that here we can safely defy the fates.”

When relating all this to me, Davidson’s only comment was:

“Funny notion of defying the fates — to take a woman in tow!”

Chapter 7

Some considerable time afterwards — we did not meet very often — I asked Davidson how he had managed about the shawl and heard that he had tackled his mission in a direct way, and had found it easy enough. At the very first call he made in Samarang he rolled the shawl as tightly as he could into the smallest possible brown-paper parcel, which he carried ashore with him. His business in the town being transacted, he got into a gharry with the parcel and drove to the hotel. With his precious experience, he timed his arrival accurately for the hour of Schomberg’s siesta. Finding the place empty as on the former occasion, he marched into the billiard-room, took a seat at the back, near the sort of dais which Mrs. Schomberg would in due course come to occupy, and broke the slumbering silence of the house by thumping a bell vigorously. Of course a Chinaman appeared promptly. Davidson ordered a drink and sat tight.

“I would have ordered twenty drinks one after another, if necessary,” he said — Davidson’s a very abstemious man — “rather than take that parcel out of the house again. Couldn’t leave it in a corner without letting the woman know it was there. It might have turned out worse for her than not bringing the thing back at all.”

And so he waited, ringing the bell again and again, and swallowing two or three iced drinks which he did not want. Presently, as he hoped it would happen, Mrs. Schomberg

came in, silk dress, long neck, ringlets, scared eyes, and silly grin — all complete. Probably that lazy beast had sent her out to see who was the thirsty customer waking up the echoes of the house at this quiet hour. Bow, nod — and she clambered up to her post behind the raised counter, looking so helpless, so inane, as she sat there, that if it hadn't been for the parcel, Davidson declared, he would have thought he had merely dreamed all that had passed between them. He ordered another drink, to get the Chinaman out of the room, and then seized the parcel, which was reposing on a chair near him, and with no more than a mutter — "this is something of yours" — he rammed it swiftly into a recess in the counter, at her feet. There! The rest was her affair. And just in time, too. Schomberg turned up, yawning affectedly, almost before Davidson had regained his seat. He cast about suspicious and irate glances. An invincible placidity of expression helped Davidson wonderfully at the moment, and the other, of course, could have no grounds for the slightest suspicion of any sort of understanding between his wife and this customer.

As to Mrs. Schomberg, she sat there like a joss. Davidson was lost in admiration. He believed, now, that the woman had been putting it on for years. She never even winked. It was immense! The insight he had obtained almost frightened him; he couldn't get over his wonder at knowing more of the real Mrs. Schomberg than anybody in the Islands, including Schomberg himself. She was a miracle of dissimulation. No wonder Heyst got the girl away from under two men's noses, if he had her to help with the job!

The greatest wonder, after all, was Heyst getting mixed up with petticoats. The fellow's life had been open to us for years and nothing could have been more detached from feminine associations. Except that he stood drinks to people on suitable occasions, like any other man, this observer of facts seemed to have no connection with earthly affairs and passions. The very courtesy of his manner, the flavour of playfulness in the voice set him apart. He was like a feather floating lightly in the workaday atmosphere which was the breath of our nostrils. For this reason whenever this looker-on took contact with things he attracted attention. First, it was the Morrison partnership of mystery, then came the great sensation of the Tropical Belt Coal where indeed varied interests were involved: a real business matter. And then came this elopement, this incongruous phenomenon of self-assertion, the greatest wonder of all, astonishing and amusing.

Davidson admitted to me that, the hubbub was subsiding; and the affair would have been already forgotten, perhaps, if that ass Schomberg had not kept on gnashing his teeth publicly about it. It was really provoking that Davidson should not be able to give one some idea of the girl. Was she pretty? He didn't know. He had stayed the whole afternoon in Schomberg's hotel, mainly for the purpose of finding out something about her. But the story was growing stale. The parties at the tables on the veranda had other, fresher, events to talk about and Davidson shrank from making direct inquiries. He sat placidly there, content to be disregarded and hoping for some chance word to

turn up. I shouldn't wonder if the good fellow hadn't been dozing. It's difficult to give you an adequate idea of Davidson's placidity.

Presently Schomberg, wandering about, joined a party that had taken the table next to Davidson's.

"A man like that Swede, gentlemen, is a public danger," he began. "I remember him for years. I won't say anything of his spying — well, he used to say himself he was looking for out-of-the-way facts and what is that if not spying? He was spying into everybody's business. He got hold of Captain Morrison, squeezed him dry, like you would an orange, and scared him off to Europe to die there. Everybody knows that Captain Morrison had a weak chest. Robbed first and murdered afterwards! I don't mince words — not I. Next he gets up that swindle of the Belt Coal. You know all about it. And now, after lining his pockets with other people's money, he kidnaps a white girl belonging to an orchestra which is performing in my public room for the benefit of my patrons, and goes off to live like a prince on that island, where nobody can get at him. A damn silly girl . . . It's disgusting — tfui!"

He spat. He choked with rage — for he saw visions, no doubt. He jumped up from his chair, and went away to flee from them — perhaps. He went into the room where Mrs. Schomberg sat. Her aspect could not have been very soothing to the sort of torment from which he was suffering.

Davidson did not feel called upon to defend Heyst. His proceeding was to enter into conversation with one and another, casually, and showing no particular knowledge of the affair, in order to discover something about the girl. Was she anything out of the way? Was she pretty? She couldn't have been markedly so. She had not attracted special notice. She was young — on that everybody agreed. The English clerk of Tesmans remembered that she had a sallow face. He was respectable and highly proper. He was not the sort to associate with such people. Most of these women were fairly battered specimens. Schomberg had them housed in what he called the Pavilion, in the grounds, where they were hard at it mending and washing their white dresses, and could be seen hanging them out to dry between the trees, like a lot of washerwomen. They looked very much like middle-aged washerwomen on the platform, too. But the girl had been living in the main building along with the boss, the director, the fellow with the black beard, and a hard-bitten, oldish woman who took the piano and was understood to be the fellow's wife.

This was not a very satisfactory result. Davidson stayed on, and even joined the table d'hote dinner, without gleaning any more information. He was resigned.

"I suppose," he wheezed placidly, "I am bound to see her some day."

He meant to take the Samburan channel every trip, as before of course.

"Yes," I said. "No doubt you will. Some day Heyst will be signalling to you again; and I wonder what it will be for."

Davidson made no reply. He had his own ideas about that, and his silence concealed a good deal of thought. We spoke no more of Heyst's girl. Before we separated, he gave me a piece of unrelated observation.

“It’s funny,” he said, “but I fancy there’s some gambling going on in the evening at Schomberg’s place, on the quiet. I’ve noticed men strolling away in twos and threes towards that hall where the orchestra used to play. The windows must be specially well shuttered, because I could not spy the smallest gleam of light from that direction; but I can’t believe that those beggars would go in there only to sit and think of their sins in the dark.”

“That’s strange. It’s incredible that Schomberg should risk that sort of thing,” I said.

Part 2

Chapter 1

As we know, Heyst had gone to stay in Schomberg's hotel in complete ignorance that his person was odious to that worthy. When he arrived, Zangiaco's Ladies' Orchestra had been established there for some time.

The business which had called him out from his seclusion in his lost corner of the Eastern seas was with the Tesmans, and it had something to do with money. He transacted it quickly, and then found himself with nothing to do while he awaited Davidson, who was to take him back to his solitude; for back to his solitude Heyst meant to go. He whom we used to refer to as the Enchanted Heyst was suffering from thorough disenchantment. Not with the islands, however. The Archipelago has a lasting fascination. It is not easy to shake off the spell of island life. Heyst was disenchanted with life as a whole. His scornful temperament, beguiled into action, suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like the gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature; and in addition, he also suffered from plain, downright remorse. He deemed himself guilty of Morrison's death. A rather absurd feeling, since no one could possibly have foreseen the horrors of the cold, wet summer lying in wait for poor Morrison at home.

It was not in Heyst's character to turn morose; but his mental state was not compatible with a sociable mood. He spent his evenings sitting apart on the veranda of Schomberg's hotel. The lamentations of string instruments issued from the building in the hotel compound, the approaches to which were decorated with Japanese paper lanterns strung up between the trunks of several big trees. Scraps of tunes more or less plaintive reached his ears. They pursued him even into his bedroom, which opened into an upstairs veranda. The fragmentary and rasping character of these sounds made their intrusion inexpressibly tedious in the long run. Like most dreamers, to whom it is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres, Heyst, the wanderer of the Archipelago, had a taste for silence which he had been able to gratify for years. The islands are very quiet. One sees them lying about, clothed in their dark garments of leaves, in a great hush of silver and azure, where the sea without murmurs meets the sky in a ring of magic stillness. A sort of smiling somnolence broods over them; the very voices of their people are soft and subdued, as if afraid to break some protecting spell.

Perhaps this was the very spell which had enchanted Heyst in the early days. For him, however, that was broken. He was no longer enchanted, though he was still a captive of the islands. He had no intention to leave them ever. Where could he have gone to, after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth. Of this fact — not such a remote one, after all — he had only lately become aware; for it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources. And though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings.

Meantime Schomberg watched Heyst out of the corner of his eye. Towards the unconscious object of his enmity he preserved a distant lieutenant-of-the-Reserve demeanour. Nudging certain of his customers with his elbow, he begged them to observe what airs “that Swede” was giving himself.

“I really don’t know why he has come to stay in my house. This place isn’t good enough for him. I wish to goodness he had gone somewhere else to show off his superiority. Here I have got up this series of concerts for you gentlemen, just to make things a little brighter generally; and do you think he’ll condescend to step in and listen to a piece or two of an evening? Not he. I know him of old. There he sits at the dark end of the piazza, all the evening long — planning some new swindle, no doubt. For two-pence I would ask him to go and look for quarters somewhere else; only one doesn’t like to treat a white man like that out in the tropics. I don’t know how long he means to stay, but I’m willing to bet a trifle that he’ll never work himself up to the point of spending the fifty cents of entrance money for the sake of a little good music.”

Nobody cared to bet, or the hotel-keeper would have lost. One evening Heyst was driven to desperation by the rasped, squeaked, scraped snatches of tunes pursuing him even to his hard couch, with a mattress as thin as a pancake and a diaphanous mosquito net. He descended among the trees, where the soft glow of Japanese lanterns picked out parts of their great rugged trunks, here and there, in the great mass of darkness under the lofty foliage. More lanterns, of the shape of cylindrical concertinas, hanging in a row from a slack string, decorated the doorway of what Schomberg called grandiloquently “my concert-hall.” In his desperate mood Heyst ascended three steps, lifted a calico curtain, and went in.

The uproar in that small, barn-like structure, built of imported pine boards, and raised clear of the ground, was simply stunning. An instrumental uproar, screaming, grunting, whining, sobbing, scraping, squeaking some kind of lively air; while a grand piano, operated upon by a bony, red-faced woman with bad-tempered nostrils, rained hard notes like hail through the tempest of fiddles. The small platform was filled with white muslin dresses and crimson sashes slanting from shoulders provided with bare arms, which sawed away without respite. Zangiaco conducted. He wore a white mess-jacket, a black dress waistcoat, and white trousers. His longish, tousled hair and his great beard were purple-black. He was horrible. The heat was terrific. There were

perhaps thirty people having drinks at several little tables. Heyst, quite overcome by the volume of noise, dropped into a chair. In the quick time of that music, in the varied, piercing clamour of the strings, in the movements of the bare arms, in the low dresses, the coarse faces, the stony eyes of the executants, there was a suggestion of brutality — something cruel, sensual and repulsive.

“This is awful!” Heyst murmured to himself.

But there is an unholy fascination in systematic noise. He did not flee from it incontinently, as one might have expected him to do. He remained, astonished at himself for remaining, since nothing could have been more repulsive to his tastes, more painful to his senses, and, so to speak, more contrary to his genius, than this rude exhibition of vigour. The Zangiaco band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. One felt as if witnessing a deed of violence; and that impression was so strong that it seemed marvellous to see the people sitting so quietly on their chairs, drinking so calmly out of their glasses, and giving no signs of distress, anger, or fear. Heyst averted his gaze from the unnatural spectacle of their indifference.

When the piece of music came to an end the relief was so great that he felt slightly dizzy, as if a chasm of silence had yawned at his feet. When he raised his eyes, the audience, most perversely, was exhibiting signs of animation and interest in their faces, and the women in white muslin dresses were coming down in pairs from the platform into the body of Schomberg’s “concert-hall.” They dispersed themselves all over the place. The male creature with the hooked nose and purple-black beard disappeared somewhere. This was the interval during which, as the astute Schomberg had stipulated, the members of the orchestra were encouraged to favour the members of the audience with their company — that is, such members as seemed inclined to fraternize with the arts in a familiar and generous manner; the symbol of familiarity and generosity consisting in offers of refreshment.

The procedure struck Heyst as highly incorrect. However, the impropriety of Schomberg’s ingenious scheme was defeated by the circumstance that most of the women were no longer young, and that none of them had ever been beautiful. Their more or less worn cheeks were slightly rouged, but apart from that fact, which might have been simply a matter of routine, they did not seem to take the success of the scheme unduly to heart. The impulse to fraternize with the arts being obviously weak in the audience, some of the musicians sat down listlessly at unoccupied tables, while others went on perambulating the central passage: arm in arm, glad enough, no doubt, to stretch their legs while resting their arms. Their crimson sashes gave a factitious touch of gaiety to the smoky atmosphere of the concert-hall; and Heyst felt a sudden pity for these beings, exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace, whose fate of cheerless dependence invested their coarse and joyless features with a touch of pathos.

Heyst was temperamentally sympathetic. To have them passing and repassing close to his little table was painful to him. He was preparing to rise and go out when he noticed that two white muslin dresses and crimson sashes had not yet left the

platform. One of these dresses concealed the raw-boned frame of the woman with the bad-tempered curve to her nostrils. She was no less a personage than Mrs. Zangiaco. She had left the piano, and, with her back to the hall, was preparing the parts for the second half of the concert, with a brusque, impatient action of her ugly elbow. This task done, she turned, and, perceiving the other white muslin dress motionless on a chair in the second row, she strode towards it between the music-stands with an aggressive and masterful gait. On the lap of that dress there lay, unclasped and idle, a pair of small hands, not very white, attached to well-formed arms. The next detail Heyst was led to observe was the arrangement of the hair — two thick, brown tresses rolled round an attractively shaped head.

“A girl, by Jove!” he exclaimed mentally.

It was evident that she was a girl. It was evident in the outline of the shoulders, in the slender white bust springing up, barred slantwise by the crimson sash, from the bell-shaped spread of muslin skirt hiding the chair on which she sat averted a little from the body of the hall. Her feet, in low white shoes, were crossed prettily.

She had captured Heyst’s awakened faculty of observation; he had the sensation of a new experience. That was because his faculty of observation had never before been captured by any feminine creature in that marked and exclusive fashion. He looked at her anxiously, as no man ever looks at another man; and he positively forgot where he was. He had lost touch with his surroundings. The big woman, advancing, concealed the girl from his sight for a moment. She bent over the seated youthful figure, in passing it very close, as if to drop a word into its ear. Her lips did certainly move. But what sort of word could it have been to make the girl jump up so swiftly? Heyst, at his table, was surprised into a sympathetic start. He glanced quickly round. Nobody was looking towards the platform; and when his eyes swept back there again, the girl, with the big woman treading at her heels, was coming down the three steps from the platform to the floor of the hall. There she paused, stumbled one pace forward, and stood still again, while the other — the escort, the dragoon, the coarse big woman of the piano — passed her roughly, and, marching truculently down the centre aisle between the chairs and tables, went out to rejoin the hook-nosed Zangiaco somewhere outside. During her extraordinary transit, as if everything in the hall were dirt under her feet, her scornful eyes met the upward glance of Heyst, who looked away at once towards the girl. She had not moved. Her arms hung down; her eyelids were lowered.

Heyst laid down his half-smoked cigar and compressed his lips. Then he got up. It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Delli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely.

It was the same impulse. But he did not recognize it. He was not thinking of Morrison then. It may be said that, for the first time since the final abandonment of the Samburan coal mine, he had completely forgotten the late Morrison. It is true that to a certain extent he had forgotten also where he was. Thus, unchecked by any sort of self consciousness, Heyst walked up the central passage.

Several of the women, by this time, had found anchorage here and there among the occupied tables. They talked to the men, leaning on their elbows, and suggesting funnily — if it hadn't been for the crimson sashes — in their white dresses an assembly of middle-aged brides with free and easy manners and hoarse voices. The murmuring noise of conversations carried on with some spirit filled Schomberg's concert-room. Nobody remarked Heyst's movements; for indeed he was not the only man on his legs there. He had been confronting the girl for some time before she became aware of his presence. She was looking down, very still, without colour, without glances, without voice, without movement. It was only when Heyst addressed her in his courteous tone that she raised her eyes.

"Excuse me," he said in English, "but that horrible female has done something to you. She has pinched you, hasn't she? I am sure she pinched you just now, when she stood by your chair."

The girl received this overture with the wide, motionless stare of profound astonishment. Heyst, vexed with himself, suspected that she did not understand what he said. One could not tell what nationality these women were, except that they were of all sorts. But she was astonished almost more by the near presence of the man himself, by his largely bald head, by the white brow, the sunburnt cheeks, the long, horizontal moustaches of crinkly bronze hair, by the kindly expression of the man's blue eyes looking into her own. He saw the stony amazement in hers give way to a momentary alarm, which was succeeded by an expression of resignation.

"I am sure she pinched your arm most cruelly," he murmured, rather disconcerted now at what he had done.

It was a great comfort to hear her say:

"It wouldn't have been the first time. And suppose she did — what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," he said with a faint, remote playfulness in his tone which had not been heard in it lately, and which seemed to catch her ear pleasantly. "I am grieved to say that I don't know. But can I do anything? What would you wish me to do? Pray command me."

Again, the greatest astonishment became visible in her face; for she now perceived how different he was from the other men in the room. He was as different from them as she was different from the other members of the ladies' orchestra.

"Command you?" she breathed, after a time, in a bewildered tone. "Who are you?" she asked a little louder.

"I am staying in this hotel for a few days. I just dropped in casually here. This outrage — "

"Don't you try to interfere," she said so earnestly that Heyst asked, in his faintly playful tone:

"Is it your wish that I should leave you?"

"I haven't said that," the girl answered. "She pinched me because I didn't get down here quick enough — "

“I can’t tell you how indignant I am — ” said Heyst. “But since you are down here now,” he went on, with the ease of a man of the world speaking to a young lady in a drawing-room, “hadn’t we better sit down?”

She obeyed his inviting gesture, and they sat down on the nearest chairs. They looked at each other across a little round table with a surprised, open gaze, self-consciousness growing on them so slowly that it was a long time before they averted their eyes; and very soon they met again, temporarily, only to rebound, as it were. At last they steadied in contact, but by that time, say some fifteen minutes from the moment when they sat down, the “interval” came to an end.

So much for their eyes. As to the conversation, it had been perfectly insignificant because naturally they had nothing to say to each other. Heyst had been interested by the girl’s physiognomy. Its expression was neither simple nor yet very clear. It was not distinguished — that could not be expected — but the features had more fineness than those of any other feminine countenance he had ever had the opportunity to observe so closely. There was in it something indefinably audacious and infinitely miserable — because the temperament and the existence of that girl were reflected in it. But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune.

“Do you sing as well as play?” he asked her abruptly.

“Never sang a note in my life,” she said, obviously surprised by the irrelevant question; for they had not been discoursing of sweet sounds. She was clearly unaware of her voice. “I don’t remember that I ever had much reason to sing since I was little,” she added.

That inelegant phrase, by the mere vibrating, warm nobility of the sound, found its way into Heyst’s heart. His mind, cool, alert, watched it sink there with a sort of vague concern at the absurdity of the occupation, till it rested at the bottom, deep down, where our unexpressed longings lie.

“You are English, of course?” he said.

“What do you think?” she answered in the most charming accents. Then, as if thinking that it was her turn to place a question: “Why do you always smile when you speak?”

It was enough to make anyone look grave, but her good faith was so evident that Heyst recovered himself at once.

“It’s my unfortunate manner — ” he said with his delicate, polished playfulness. “Is it very objectionable to you?”

She was very serious.

“No. I only noticed it. I haven’t come across so many pleasant people as all that, in my life.”

“It’s certain that this woman who plays the piano is infinitely more disagreeable than any cannibal I have ever had to do with.”

"I believe you!" She shuddered. "How did you come to have anything to do with cannibals?"

"It would be too long a tale," said Heyst with a faint smile. Heyst's smiles were rather melancholy, and accorded badly with his great moustaches, under which his mere playfulness lurked as comfortable as a shy bird in its native thicket. "Much too long. How did you get amongst this lot here?"

"Bad luck," she answered briefly.

"No doubt, no doubt," Heyst assented with slight nods. Then, still indignant at the pinch which he had divined rather than actually seen inflicted: "I say, couldn't you defend yourself somehow?"

She had risen already. The ladies of the orchestra were slowly regaining their places. Some were already seated, idle stony-eyed, before the music-stands. Heyst was standing up, too.

"They are too many for me," she said.

These few words came out of the common experience of mankind; yet by virtue of her voice, they thrilled Heyst like a revelation. His feelings were in a state of confusion, but his mind was clear.

"That's bad. But it isn't actual ill-usage that this girl is complaining of," he thought lucidly after she left him.

Chapter 2

That was how it began. How it was that it ended, as we know it did end, is not so easy to state precisely. It is very clear that Heyst was not indifferent, I won't say to the girl, but to the girl's fate. He was the same man who had plunged after the submerged Morrison whom he hardly knew otherwise than by sight and through the usual gossip of the islands. But this was another sort of plunge altogether, and likely to lead to a very different kind of partnership.

Did he reflect at all? Probably. He was sufficiently reflective. But if he did, it was with insufficient knowledge. For there is no evidence that he paused at any time between the date of that evening and the morning of the flight. Truth to say, Heyst was not one of those men who pause much. Those dreamy spectators of the world's agitation are terrible once the desire to act gets hold of them. They lower their heads and charge a wall with an amazing serenity which nothing but an indisciplined imagination can give.

He was not a fool. I suppose he knew — or at least he felt — where this was leading him. But his complete inexperience gave him the necessary audacity. The girl's voice was charming when she spoke to him of her miserable past, in simple terms, with a sort of unconscious cynicism inherent in the truth of the ugly conditions of poverty. And whether because he was humane or because her voice included all the modulations

of pathos, cheerfulness, and courage in its compass, it was not disgust that the tale awakened in him, but the sense of an immense sadness.

On a later evening, during the interval between the two parts of the concert, the girl told Heyst about herself. She was almost a child of the streets. Her father was a musician in the orchestras of small theatres. Her mother ran away from him while she was little, and the landladies of various poor lodging-houses had attended casually to her abandoned childhood. It was never positive starvation and absolute rags, but it was the hopeless grip of poverty all the time. It was her father who taught her to play the violin. It seemed that he used to get drunk sometimes, but without pleasure, and only because he was unable to forget his fugitive wife. After he had a paralytic stroke, falling over with a crash in the well of a music-hall orchestra during the performance, she had joined the Zangiaco company. He was now in a home for incurables.

“And I am here,” she finished, “with no one to care if I make a hole in the water the next chance I get or not.”

Heyst told her that he thought she could do a little better than that, if it was only a question of getting out of the world. She looked at him with special attention, and with a puzzled expression which gave to her face an air of innocence.

This was during one of the “intervals” between the two parts of the concert. She had come down that time without being incited thereto by a pinch from the awful Zangiaco woman. It is difficult to suppose that she was seduced by the uncovered intellectual forehead and the long reddish moustaches of her new friend. New is not the right word. She had never had a friend before; and the sensation of this friendliness going out to her was exciting by its novelty alone. Besides, any man who did not resemble Schomberg appeared for that very reason attractive. She was afraid of the hotel-keeper, who, in the daytime, taking advantage of the fact that she lived in the hotel itself, and not in the Pavilion with the other “artists” prowled round her, mute, hungry, portentous behind his great beard, or else assailed her in quiet corners and empty passages with deep, mysterious murmurs from behind, which, notwithstanding their clear import, sounded horribly insane somehow.

The contrast of Heyst’s quiet, polished manner gave her special delight and filled her with admiration. She had never seen anything like that before. If she had, perhaps, known kindness in her life, she had never met the forms of simple courtesy. She was interested by it as a very novel experience, not very intelligible, but distinctly pleasurable.

“I tell you they are too many for me,” she repeated, sometimes recklessly, but more often shaking her head with ominous dejection.

She had, of course, no money at all. The quantities of “black men” all about frightened her. She really had no definite idea where she was on the surface of the globe. The orchestra was generally taken from the steamer to some hotel, and kept shut up there till it was time to go on board another steamer. She could not remember the names she heard.

“How do you call this place again?” she used to ask Heyst.

“Sourabaya,” he would say distinctly, and would watch the discouragement at the outlandish sound coming into her eyes, which were fastened on his face.

He could not defend himself from compassion. He suggested that she might go to the consul, but it was his conscience that dictated this advice, not his conviction. She had never heard of the animal or of its uses. A consul! What was it? Who was he? What could he do? And when she learned that perhaps he could be induced to send her home, her head dropped on her breast.

“What am I to do when I get there?” she murmured with an intonation so just, with an accent so penetrating — the charm of her voice did not fail her even in whispering — that Heyst seemed to see the illusion of human fellowship on earth vanish before the naked truth of her existence, and leave them both face to face in a moral desert as arid as the sands of Sahara, without restful shade, without refreshing water.

She leaned slightly over the little table, the same little table at which they had sat when they first met each other; and with no other memories but of the stones in the streets her childhood had known, in the distress of the incoherent, confused, rudimentary impressions of her travels inspiring her with a vague terror of the world she said rapidly, as one speaks in desperation:

“You do something! You are a gentleman. It wasn’t I who spoke to you first, was it? I didn’t begin, did I? It was you who came along and spoke to me when I was standing over there. What did you want to speak to me for? I don’t care what it is, but you must do something.”

Her attitude was fierce and entreating at the same time — clamorous, in fact though her voice had hardly risen above a breath. It was clamorous enough to be noticed. Heyst, on purpose, laughed aloud. She nearly choked with indignation at this brutal heartlessness.

“What did you mean, then, by saying ‘command me!’?” she almost hissed.

Something hard in his mirthless stare, and a quiet final “All right,” steadied her.

“I am not rich enough to buy you out,” he went on, speaking with an extraordinary detached grin, “even if it were to be done; but I can always steal you.”

She looked at him profoundly, as though these words had a hidden and very complicated meaning.

“Get away now,” he said rapidly, “and try to smile as you go.”

She obeyed with unexpected readiness; and as she had a set of very good white teeth, the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude. Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him; and yet it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience.

By this time she was gone from the table, and had joined the other “ladies of the orchestra.” They trooped towards the platform, driven in truculently by the haughty mate of Zangiaco, who looked as though she were restraining herself with diffi-

culty from punching their backs. Zangiaco followed, with his great, pendulous dyed beard and short mess-jacket, with an aspect of hang-dog concentration imparted by his drooping head and the uneasiness of his eyes, which were set very close together. He climbed the steps last of all, turned about, displaying his purple beard to the hall, and tapped with his bow. Heyst winced in anticipation of the horrible racket. It burst out immediately unabashed and awful. At the end of the platform the woman at the piano, presenting her cruel profile, her head tilted back, banged the keys without looking at the music.

Heyst could not stand the uproar for more than a minute. He went out, his brain racked by the rhythm of some more or less Hungarian dance music. The forests inhabited by the New Guinea cannibals where he had encountered the most exciting of his earlier futile adventures were silent. And this adventure, not in its execution, perhaps, but in its nature, required even more nerve than anything he had faced before. Walking among the paper lanterns suspended to trees he remembered with regret the gloom and the dead stillness of the forests at the back of Geelvink Bay, perhaps the wildest, the unsafest, the most deadly spot on earth from which the sea can be seen. Oppressed by his thoughts, he sought the obscurity and peace of his bedroom; but they were not complete. The distant sounds of the concert reached his ear, faint indeed, but still disturbing. Neither did he feel very safe in there; for that sentiment depends not on extraneous circumstances but on our inward conviction. He did not attempt to go to sleep; he did not even unbutton the top button of his tunic. He sat in a chair and mused. Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly and sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness. But now he was troubled; a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision; the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman.

Gradually silence, a real silence, had established itself round him. The concert was over; the audience had gone; the concert-hall was dark; and even the Pavilion, where the ladies' orchestra slept after its noisy labours, showed not a gleam of light. Heyst suddenly felt restless in all his limbs, as this reaction from the long immobility would not be denied, he humoured it by passing quietly along the back veranda and out into the grounds at the side of the house, into the black shadows under the trees, where the extinguished paper lanterns were gently swinging their globes like withered fruit.

He paced there to and fro for a long time, a calm, meditative ghost in his white drill-suit, revolving in his head thoughts absolutely novel, disquieting, and seductive; accustoming his mind to the contemplation of his purpose, in order that by being faced steadily it should appear praiseworthy and wise. For the use of reason is to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices, and follies, and also our fears.

He felt that he had engaged himself by a rash promise to an action big with incalculable consequences. And then he asked himself if the girl had understood what he meant. Who could tell? He was assailed by all sorts of doubts. Raising his head, he

perceived something white flitting between the trees. It vanished almost at once; but there could be no mistake. He was vexed at being detected roaming like this in the middle of the night. Who could that be? It never occurred to him that perhaps the girl, too, would not be able to sleep. He advanced prudently. Then he saw the white, phantom-like apparition again; and the next moment all his doubts as to the state of her mind were laid at rest, because he felt her clinging to him after the manner of supplicants all the world over. Her whispers were so incoherent that he could not understand anything; but this did not prevent him from being profoundly moved. He had no illusions about her; but his sceptical mind was dominated by the fulness of his heart.

“Calm yourself, calm yourself,” he murmured in her ear, returning her clasp at first mechanically, and afterwards with a growing appreciation of her distressed humanity. The heaving of her breast and the trembling of all her limbs, in the closeness of his embrace, seemed to enter his body, to infect his very heart. While she was growing quieter in his arms, he was becoming more agitated, as if there were only a fixed quantity of violent emotion on this earth. The very night seemed more dumb, more still, and the immobility of the vague, black shapes, surrounding him more perfect.

“It will be all right,” he tried to reassure her, with a tone of conviction, speaking into her ear, and of necessity clasping her more closely than before.

Either the words or the action had a very good effect. He heard a light sigh of relief. She spoke with a calmed ardour.

“Oh, I knew it would be all right from the first time you spoke to me! Yes, indeed, I knew directly you came up to me that evening. I knew it would be all right, if you only cared to make it so; but of course I could not tell if you meant it. ‘Command me,’ you said. Funny thing for a man like you to say. Did you really mean it? You weren’t making fun of me?”

He protested that he had been a serious person all his life.

“I believe you,” she said ardently. He was touched by this declaration. “It’s the way you have of speaking as if you were amused with people,” she went on. “But I wasn’t deceived. I could see you were angry with that beast of a woman. And you are clever. You spotted something at once. You saw it in my face, eh? It isn’t a bad face — say? You’ll never be sorry. Listen — I’m not twenty yet. It’s the truth, and I can’t be so bad looking, or else — I will tell you straight that I have been worried and pestered by fellows like this before. I don’t know what comes to them — ”

She was speaking hurriedly. She choked, and then exclaimed, with an accent of despair:

“What is it? What’s the matter?”

Heyst had removed his arms from her suddenly, and had recoiled a little. “Is it my fault? I didn’t even look at them, I tell you straight. Never! Have I looked at you? Tell me. It was you that began it.”

In truth, Heyst had shrunk from the idea of competition with fellows unknown, with Schomberg the hotel-keeper. The vaporous white figure before him swayed pitifully in the darkness. He felt ashamed of his fastidiousness.

"I am afraid we have been detected," he murmured. "I think I saw somebody on the path between the house and the bushes behind you."

He had seen no one. It was a compassionate lie, if there ever was one. His compassion was as genuine as his shrinking had been, and in his judgement more honourable.

She didn't turn her head. She was obviously relieved.

"Would it be that brute?" she breathed out, meaning Schomberg, of course. "He's getting too forward with me now. What can you expect? Only this evening, after supper, he — but I slipped away. You don't mind him, do you? Why, I could face him myself now that I know you care for me. A girl can always put up a fight. You believe me? Only it isn't easy to stand up for yourself when you feel there's nothing and nobody at your back. There's nothing so lonely in the world as a girl who has got to look after herself. When I left poor dad in that home — it was in the country, near a village — I came out of the gates with seven shillings and threepence in my old purse, and my railway ticket. I tramped a mile, and got into a train — "

She broke off, and was silent for a moment.

"Don't you throw me over now," she went on. "If you did, what should I do? I should have to live, to be sure, because I'd be afraid to kill myself, but you would have done a thousand times worse than killing a body. You told me you had been always alone, you had never had a dog even. Well, then, I won't be in anybody's way if I live with you — not even a dog's. And what else did you mean when you came up and looked at me so close?"

"Close? Did I?" he murmured unstirring before her in the profound darkness. "So close as that?"

She had an outbreak of anger and despair in subdued tones.

"Have you forgotten, then? What did you expect to find? I know what sort of girl I am; but all the same I am not the sort that men turn their backs on — and you ought to know it, unless you aren't made like the others. Oh, forgive me! You aren't like the others; you are like no one in the world I ever spoke to. Don't you care for me? Don't you see — ?"

What he saw was that, white and spectral, she was putting out her arms to him out of the black shadows like an appealing ghost. He took her hands, and was affected, almost surprised, to find them so warm, so real, so firm, so living in his grasp. He drew her to him, and she dropped her head on his shoulder with a deep-sigh.

"I am dead tired," she whispered plaintively.

He put his arms around her, and only by the convulsive movements of her body became aware that she was sobbing without a sound. Sustaining her, he lost himself in the profound silence of the night. After a while she became still, and cried quietly. Then, suddenly, as if waking up, she asked:

"You haven't seen any more of that somebody you thought was spying about?"

He started at her quick, sharp whisper, and answered that very likely he had been mistaken.

“If it was anybody at all,” she reflected aloud, “it wouldn’t have been anyone but that hotel woman — the landlord’s wife.”

“Mrs. Schomberg,” Heyst said, surprised.

“Yes. Another one that can’t sleep o’ nights. Why? Don’t you see why? Because, of course, she sees what’s going on. That beast doesn’t even try to keep it from her. If she had only the least bit of spirit! She knows how I feel, too, only she’s too frightened even to look him in the face, let alone open her mouth. He would tell her to go hang herself.”

For some time Heyst said nothing. A public, active contest with the hotel-keeper was not to be thought of. The idea was horrible. Whispering gently to the girl, he tried to explain to her that as things stood, an open withdrawal from the company would be probably opposed. She listened to his explanation anxiously, from time to time pressing the hand she had sought and got hold of in the dark.

“As I told you, I am not rich enough to buy you out so I shall steal you as soon as I can arrange some means of getting away from here. Meantime it would be fatal to be seen together at night. We mustn’t give ourselves away. We had better part at once. I think I was mistaken just now; but if, as you say, that poor Mrs. Schomberg can’t sleep of nights, we must be more careful. She would tell the fellow.”

The girl had disengaged herself from his loose hold while he talked, and now stood free of him, but still clasping his hand firmly.

“Oh, no,” she said with perfect assurance. “I tell you she daren’t open her mouth to him. And she isn’t as silly as she looks. She wouldn’t give us away. She knows a trick worth two of that. She’ll help — that’s what she’ll do, if she dares do anything at all.”

“You seem to have a very clear view of the situation,” said Heyst, and received a warm, lingering kiss for this commendation.

He discovered that to part from her was not such an easy matter as he had supposed it would be.

“Upon my word,” he said before they separated, “I don’t even know your name.”

“Don’t you? They call me Alma. I don’t know why. Silly name! Magdalen too. It doesn’t matter; you can call me by whatever name you choose. Yes, you give me a name. Think of one you would like the sound of — something quite new. How I should like to forget everything that has gone before, as one forgets a dream that’s done with, fright and all! I would try.”

“Would you really?” he asked in a murmur. “But that’s not forbidden. I understand that women easily forget whatever in their past diminishes them in their eyes.”

“It’s your eyes that I was thinking of, for I’m sure I’ve never wished to forget anything till you came up to me that night and looked me through and through. I know I’m not much account; but I know how to stand by a man. I stood by father ever since I could understand. He wasn’t a bad chap. Now that I can’t be of any use

to him, I would just as soon forget all that and make a fresh start. But these aren't things that I could talk to you about. What could I ever talk to you about?"

"Don't let it trouble you," Heyst said. "Your voice is enough. I am in love with it, whatever it says."

She remained silent for a while, as if rendered breathless by this quiet statement.

"Oh! I wanted to ask you — "

He remembered that she probably did not know his name, and expected the question to be put to him now; but after a moment of hesitation she went on:

"Why was it that you told me to smile this evening in the concert-room there — you remember?"

"I thought we were being observed. A smile is the best of masks. Schomberg was at a table next but one to us, drinking with some Dutch clerks from the town. No doubt he was watching us — watching you, at least. That's why I asked you to smile."

"Ah, that's why. It never came into my head!"

"And you did it very well, too — very readily, as if you had understood my intention."

"Readily!" she repeated. "Oh, I was ready enough to smile then. That's the truth. It was the first time for years I may say that I felt disposed to smile. I've not had many chances to smile in my life, I can tell you; especially of late."

"But you do it most charmingly — in a perfectly fascinating way."

He paused. She stood still, waiting for more with the stillness of extreme delight, wishing to prolong the sensation.

"It astonished me," he added. "It went as straight to my heart as though you had smiled for the purpose of dazzling me. I felt as if I had never seen a smile before in my life. I thought of it after I left you. It made me restless."

"It did all that?" came her voice, unsteady, gentle, and incredulous.

"If you had not smiled as you did, perhaps I should not have come out here tonight," he said, with his playful earnestness of tone. "It was your triumph."

He felt her lips touch his lightly, and the next moment she was gone. Her white dress gleamed in the distance, and then the opaque darkness of the house seemed to swallow it. Heyst waited a little before he went the same way, round the corner, up the steps of the veranda, and into his room, where he lay down at last — not to sleep, but to go over in his mind all that had been said at their meeting.

"It's exactly true about that smile," he thought. There he had spoken the truth to her; and about her voice, too. For the rest — what must be must be.

A great wave of heat passed over him. He turned on his back, flung his arms crosswise on the broad, hard bed, and lay still, open-eyed under the mosquito net, till daylight entered his room, brightened swiftly, and turned to unfailing sunlight. He got up then, went to a small looking-glass hanging on the wall, and stared at himself steadily. It was not a new-born vanity which induced this long survey. He felt so strange that he could not resist the suspicion of his personal appearance having changed during the night. What he saw in the glass, however, was the man he knew before. It was almost a disappointment — a belittling of his recent experience. And then he smiled at his

naiveness; for, being over five and thirty years of age, he ought to have known that in most cases the body is the unalterable mask of the soul, which even death itself changes but little, till it is put out of sight where no changes matter any more, either to our friends or to our enemies.

Heyst was not conscious of either friends or of enemies. It was the very essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world — invulnerable because elusive.

Chapter 3

For fifteen years Heyst had wandered, invariably courteous and unapproachable, and in return was generally considered a “queer chap.” He had started off on these travels of his after the death of his father, an expatriated Swede who died in London, dissatisfied with his country and angry with all the world, which had instinctively rejected his wisdom.

Thinker, stylist, and man of the world in his time, the elder Heyst had begun by coveting all the joys, those of the great and those of the humble, those of the fools and those of the sages. For more than sixty years he had dragged on this painful earth of ours the most weary, the most uneasy soul that civilization had ever fashioned to its ends of disillusion and regret. One could not refuse him a measure of greatness, for he was unhappy in a way unknown to mediocre souls. His mother Heyst had never known, but he kept his father’s pale, distinguished face in affectionate memory. He remembered him mainly in an ample blue dressing-gown in a large house of a quiet London suburb. For three years, after leaving school at the age of eighteen, he had lived with the elder Heyst, who was then writing his last book. In this work, at the end of his life, he claimed for mankind that right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy.

Three years of such companionship at that plastic and impressionable age were bound to leave in the boy a profound mistrust of life. The young man learned to reflect, which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost. It is not the clear-sighted who lead the world. Great achievements are accomplished in a blessed, warm mental fog, which the pitiless cold blasts of the father’s analysis had blown away from the son.

“I’ll drift,” Heyst had said to himself deliberately.

He did not mean intellectually or sentimentally or morally. He meant to drift altogether and literally, body and soul, like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything.

“This shall be my defence against life,” he had said to himself with a sort of inward consciousness that for the son of his father there was no other worthy alternative.

He became a waif and stray, austere, from conviction, as others do through drink, from vice, from some weakness of character — with deliberation, as others do in despair. This, stripped of its facts, had been Heyst’s life up to that disturbing night. Next day, when he saw the girl called Alma, she managed to give him a glance of frank tenderness, quick as lightning and leaving a profound impression, a secret touch on the heart. It was in the grounds of the hotel, about tiffin time, while the Ladies of the orchestra were strolling back to their pavilion after rehearsal, or practice, or whatever they called their morning musical exercises in the hall. Heyst, returning from the town, where he had discovered that there would be difficulties in the way of getting away at once, was crossing the compound, disappointed and worried. He had walked almost unwittingly into the straggling group of Zangiaco’s performers. It was a shock to him, on coming out of his brown study, to find the girl so near to him, as if one waking suddenly should see the figure of his dream turned into flesh and blood. She did not raise her shapely head, but her glance was no dream thing. It was real, the most real impression of his detached existence — so far.

Heyst had not acknowledged it in any way, though it seemed to him impossible that its effect on him should not be visible to anyone who happened to be looking on. And there were several men on the veranda, steady customers of Schomberg’s table d’hôte, gazing in his direction — at the ladies of the orchestra, in fact. Heyst’s dread arose, not out of shame or timidity, but from his fastidiousness. On getting amongst them, however, he noticed no signs of interest or astonishment in their faces, any more than if they had been blind men. Even Schomberg himself, who had to make way for him at the top of the stairs, was completely unperturbed, and continued the conversation he was carrying on with a client.

Schomberg, indeed, had observed “that Swede” talking with the girl in the intervals. A crony of his had nudged him; and he had thought that it was so much the better; the silly fellow would keep everybody else off. He was rather pleased than otherwise and watched them out of the corner of his eye with a malicious enjoyment of the situation — a sort of Satanic glee. For he had little doubt of his personal fascination, and still less of his power to get hold of the girl, who seemed too ignorant to know how to help herself, and who was worse than friendless, since she had for some reason incurred the animosity of Mrs. Zangiaco, a woman with no conscience. The aversion she showed him as far as she dared (for it is not always safe for the helpless to display the delicacy of their sentiments), Schomberg pardoned on the score of feminine conventional silliness. He had told Alma, as an argument, that she was a clever enough girl to see that she could do no better than to put her trust in a man of substance, in the prime of life, who knew his way about. But for the excited trembling of his voice, and the extraordinary way in which his eyes seemed to be starting out of his crimson, hirsute countenance, such speeches had every character of calm, unselfish advice — which, after the manner of lovers, passed easily into sanguine plans for the future.

“We’ll soon get rid of the old woman,” he whispered to her hurriedly, with panting ferocity. “Hang her! I’ve never cared for her. The climate don’t suit her; I shall tell her to go to her people in Europe. She will have to go, too! I will see to it. Eins, zwei, march! And then we shall sell this hotel and start another somewhere else.”

He assured her that he didn’t care what he did for her sake; and it was true. Forty-five is the age of recklessness for many men, as if in defiance of the decay and death waiting with open arms in the sinister valley at the bottom of the inevitable hill. Her shrinking form, her downcast eyes, when she had to listen to him, cornered at the end of an empty corridor, he regarded as signs of submission to the overpowering force of his will, the recognition of his personal fascinations. For every age is fed on illusions, lest men should renounce life early and the human race come to an end.

It’s easy to imagine Schomberg’s humiliation, his shocked fury, when he discovered that the girl who had for weeks resisted his attacks, his prayers, and his fiercest protestations, had been snatched from under his nose by “that Swede,” apparently without any trouble worth speaking of. He refused to believe the fact. He would have it, at first, that the Zangiacomos, for some unfathomable reason, had played him a scurvy trick, but when no further doubt was possible, he changed his view of Heyst. The despised Swede became for Schomberg the deepest, the most dangerous, the most hateful of scoundrels. He could not believe that the creature he had coveted with so much force and with so little effect, was in reality tender, docile to her impulse, and had almost offered herself to Heyst without a sense of guilt, in a desire of safety, and from a profound need of placing her trust where her woman’s instinct guided her ignorance. Nothing would serve Schomberg but that she must have been circumvented by some occult exercise of force or craft, by the laying of some subtle trap. His wounded vanity wondered ceaselessly at the means “that Swede” had employed to seduce her away from a man like him — Schomberg — as though those means were bound to have been extraordinary, unheard of, inconceivable. He slapped his forehead openly before his customers; he would sit brooding in silence or else would burst out unexpectedly declaiming against Heyst without measure, discretion, or prudence, with swollen features and an affectation of outraged virtue which could not have deceived the most childlike of moralists for a moment — and greatly amused his audience.

It became a recognized entertainment to go and hear his abuse of Heyst, while sipping iced drinks on the veranda of the hotel. It was, in a manner, a more successful draw than the Zangiacoconcerts had ever been — intervals and all. There was never any difficulty in starting the performer off. Anybody could do it, by almost any distant allusion. As likely as not he would start his endless denunciations in the very billiard-room where Mrs. Schomberg sat enthroned as usual, swallowing her sobs, concealing her tortures of abject humiliation and terror under her stupid, set, everlasting grin, which, having been provided for her by nature, was an excellent mask, in as much as nothing — not even death itself, perhaps — could tear it away.

But nothing lasts in this world, at least without changing its physiognomy. So, after a few weeks, Schomberg regained his outward calm, as if his indignation had dried

up within him. And it was time. He was becoming a bore with his inability to talk of anything else but Heyst's unfitness to be at large, Heyst's wickedness, his wiles, his astuteness, and his criminality. Schomberg no longer pretended to despise him. He could not have done it. After what had happened he could not pretend, even to himself. But his bottled-up indignation was fermenting venomously. At the time of his immoderate loquacity one of his customers, an elderly man, had remarked one evening:

"If that ass keeps on like this, he will end by going crazy."

And this belief was less than half wrong. Schomberg had Heyst on the brain. Even the unsatisfactory state of his affairs, which had never been so unpromising since he came out East directly after the Franco-Prussian War, he referred to some subtly noxious influence of Heyst. It seemed to him that he could never be himself again till he had got even with that artful Swede. He was ready to swear that Heyst had ruined his life. The girl so unfairly, craftily, basely decoyed away would have inspired him to success in a new start. Obviously Mrs. Schomberg, whom he terrified by savagely silent moods combined with underhand, poisoned glances, could give him no inspiration. He had grown generally neglectful, but with a partiality for reckless expedients, as if he did not care when and how his career as a hotel-keeper was to be brought to an end. This demoralized state accounted for what Davidson had observed on his last visit to the Schomberg establishment, some two months after Heyst's secret departure with the girl to the solitude of Samburan.

The Schomberg of a few years ago — the Schomberg of the Bangkok days, for instance, when he started the first of his famed table d'hote dinners — would never have risked anything of the sort. His genius ran to catering, "white man for white men" and to the inventing, elaborating, and retailing of scandalous gossip with asinine unctiousness and impudent delight. But now his mind was perverted by the pangs of wounded vanity and of thwarted passion. In this state of moral weakness Schomberg allowed himself to be corrupted.

Chapter 4

The business was done by a guest who arrived one fine morning by mail-boat — immediately from Celebes, having boarded her in Macassar, but generally, Schomberg understood, from up China Sea way; a wanderer clearly, even as Heyst was, but not alone and of quite another kind.

Schomberg, looking up from the stern-sheets of his steam-launch, which he used for boarding passenger ships on arrival, discovered a dark sunken stare plunging down on him over the rail of the first-class part of the deck. He was no great judge of physiognomy. Human beings, for him, were either the objects of scandalous gossip or else recipients of narrow strips of paper, with proper bill-heads stating the name of his hotel — "W. Schomberg, proprietor, accounts settled weekly."

So in the clean-shaven, extremely thin face hanging over the mail-boat's rail Schomberg saw only the face of a possible "account." The steam-launches of other hotels were also alongside, but he obtained the preference.

"You are Mr. Schomberg, aren't you?" the face asked quite unexpectedly.

"I am at your service," he answered from below; for business is business, and its forms and formulas must be observed, even if one's manly bosom is tortured by that dull rage which succeeds the fury of baffled passion, like the glow of embers after a fierce blaze.

Presently the possessor of the handsome but emaciated face was seated beside Schomberg in the stern-sheets of the launch. His body was long and loose-jointed, his slender fingers, intertwined, clasped the leg resting on the knee, as he lolled back in a careless yet tense attitude. On the other side of Schomberg sat another passenger, who was introduced by the clean-shaven man as —

"My secretary. He must have the room next to mine."

"We can manage that easily for you."

Schomberg steered with dignity, staring straight ahead, but very much interested by these two promising "accounts." Their belongings, a couple of large leather trunks browned by age and a few smaller packages, were piled up in the bows. A third individual — a nondescript, hairy creature — had modestly made his way forward and had perched himself on the luggage. The lower part of his physiognomy was over-developed; his narrow and low forehead, unintelligently furrowed by horizontal wrinkles, surmounted wildly hirsute cheeks and a flat nose with wide, baboon-like nostrils. There was something equivocal in the appearance of his shaggy, hair-smothered humanity. He, too, seemed to be a follower of the clean-shaven man, and apparently had travelled on deck with native passengers, sleeping under the awnings. His broad, squat frame denoted great strength. Grasping the gunwales of the launch, he displayed a pair of remarkably long arms, terminating in thick, brown hairy paws of simian aspect.

"What shall we do with the fellow of mine?" the chief of the party asked Schomberg. "There must be a boarding-house somewhere near the port — some grog-shop where they could let him have a mat to sleep on?"

Schomberg said there was a place kept by a Portuguese half-caste.

"A servant of yours?" he asked.

"Well, he hangs on to me. He is an alligator-hunter. I picked him up in Colombia, you know. Ever been in Colombia?"

"No," said Schomberg, very much surprised. "An alligator-hunter? Funny trade! Are you coming from Colombia, then?"

"Yes, but I have been coming for a long time. I come from a good many places. I am travelling west, you see."

"For sport, perhaps?" suggested Schomberg.

"Yes. Sort of sport. What do you say to chasing the sun?"

"I see — a gentleman at large," said Schomberg, watching a sailing canoe about to cross his bow, and ready to clear it by a touch of the helm.

The other passenger made himself heard suddenly.

“Hang these native craft! They always get in the way.”

He was a muscular, short man with eyes that gleamed and blinked, a harsh voice, and a round, toneless, pock-marked face ornamented by a thin, dishevelled moustache, sticking out quaintly under the tip of a rigid nose. Schomberg made the reflection that there was nothing secretarial about him. Both he and his long, lank principal wore the usual white suit of the tropics, cork helmets, pipe-clayed white shoes — all correct. The hairy nondescript creature perched on their luggage in the bow had a check shirt and blue dungaree trousers. He gazed in their direction from forward in an expectant, trained-animal manner.

“You spoke to me first,” said Schomberg in his manly tones. “You were acquainted with my name. Where did you hear of me, gentlemen, may I ask?”

“In Manila,” answered the gentleman at large, readily. “From a man with whom I had a game of cards one evening in the Hotel Castille.”

“What man? I’ve no friends in Manila that I know of,” wondered Schomberg with a severe frown.

“I can’t tell you his name. I’ve clean forgotten it; but don’t you worry. He was anything but a friend of yours. He called you all the names he could think of. He said you set a lot of scandal going about him once, somewhere — in Bangkok, I think. Yes, that’s it. You were running a table d’hote in Bangkok at one time, weren’t you?”

Schomberg, astounded by the turn of the information, could only throw out his chest more and exaggerate his austere Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve manner. A table d’hote? Yes, certainly. He always — for the sake of white men. And here in this place, too? Yes, in this place, too.

“That’s all right, then.” The stranger turned his black, cavernous, mesmerizing glance away from the bearded Schomberg, who sat gripping the brass tiller in a sweating palm. “Many people in the evening at your place?”

Schomberg had recovered somewhat.

“Twenty covers or so, take one day with another,” he answered feelingly, as befitted a subject on which he was sensitive. “Ought to be more, if only people would see that it’s for their own good. Precious little profit I get out of it. You are partial to tables d’hote, gentlemen?”

The new guest made answer that he liked a hotel where one could find some local people in the evening. It was infernally dull otherwise. The secretary, in sign of approval, emitted a grunt of astonishing ferocity, as if proposing to himself to eat the local people. All this sounded like a longish stay, thought Schomberg, satisfied under his grave air; till, remembering the girl snatched away from him by the last guest who had made a prolonged stay in his hotel, he ground his teeth so audibly that the other two looked at him in wonder. The momentary convulsion of his florid physiognomy seemed to strike them dumb. They exchanged a quick glance. Presently the clean-shaven man fired out another question in his curt, unceremonious manner:

“You have no women in your hotel, eh?”

“Women!” Schomberg exclaimed indignantly, but also as if a little frightened. “What on earth do you mean by women? What women? There’s Mrs. Schomberg, of course,” he added, suddenly appeased, with lofty indifference.

“If she knows how to keep her place, then it will do. I can’t stand women near me. They give me the horrors,” declared the other. “They are a perfect curse!”

During this outburst the secretary wore a savage grin. The chief guest closed his sunken eyes, as if exhausted, and leaned the back of his head against the stanchion of the awning. In this pose, his long, feminine eyelashes were very noticeable, and his regular features, sharp line of the jaw, and well-cut chin were brought into prominence, giving him a used-up, weary, depraved distinction. He did not open his eyes till the steam-launch touched the quay. Then he and the other man got ashore quickly, entered a carriage, and drove away to the hotel, leaving Schomberg to look after their luggage and take care of their strange companion. The latter, looking more like a performing bear abandoned by his show men than a human being, followed all Schomberg’s movements step by step, close behind his back, muttering to himself in a language that sounded like some sort of uncouth Spanish. The hotel-keeper felt uncomfortable till at last he got rid of him at an obscure den where a very clean, portly Portuguese half-caste, standing serenely in the doorway, seemed to understand exactly how to deal with clients of every kind. He took from the creature the strapped bundle it had been hugging closely through all its peregrinations in that strange town, and cut short Schomberg’s attempts at explanation by a most confident —

“I comprehend very well, sir.”

“It’s more than I do,” thought Schomberg, going away thankful at being relieved of the alligator-hunter’s company. He wondered what these fellows were, without being able to form a guess of sufficient probability. Their names he learned that very day by direct inquiry “to enter in my books,” he explained in his formal military manner, chest thrown out, beard very much in evidence.

The shaven man, sprawling in a long chair, with his air of withered youth, raised his eyes languidly.

“My name? Oh, plain Mr. Jones — put that down — a gentleman at large. And this is Ricardo.” The pock-marked man, lying prostrate in another long chair, made a grimace, as if something had tickled the end of his nose, but did not come out of his supineness. “Martin Ricardo, secretary. You don’t want any more of our history, do you? Eh, what? Occupation? Put down, well — tourists. We’ve been called harder names before now; it won’t hurt our feelings. And that fellow of mine — where did you tuck him away? Oh, he will be all right. When he wants anything he’ll take it. He’s Peter. Citizen of Colombia. Peter, Pedro — I don’t know that he ever had any other name. Pedro, alligator hunter. Oh, yes — I’ll pay his board with the half-caste. Can’t help myself. He’s so confoundedly devoted to me that if I were to give him the sack he would fly at my throat. Shall I tell you how I killed his brother in the wilds of Colombia? Well, perhaps some other time — it’s a rather long story. What I shall always regret is that I didn’t kill him, too. I could have done it without any extra

trouble then; now it's too late. Great nuisance; but he's useful sometimes. I hope you are not going to put all this in your book?"

The offhand, hard manner and the contemptuous tone of "plain Mr. Jones" disconcerted Schomberg utterly. He had never been spoken to like this in his life. He shook his head in silence and withdrew, not exactly scared — though he was in reality of a timid disposition under his manly exterior — but distinctly mystified and impressed.

Chapter 5

Three weeks later, after putting his cash-box away in the safe which filled with its iron bulk a corner of their room, Schomberg turned towards his wife, but without looking at her exactly, and said:

"I must get rid of these two. It won't do!"

Mrs. Schomberg had entertained that very opinion from the first; but she had been broken years ago into keeping her opinions to herself. Sitting in her night attire in the light of a single candle, she was careful not to make a sound, knowing from experience that her very assent would be resented. With her eyes she followed the figure of Schomberg, clad in his sleeping suit, and moving restlessly about the room.

He never glanced her way, for the reason that Mrs. Schomberg, in her night attire, looked the most unattractive object in existence — miserable, insignificant, faded, crushed, old. And the contrast with the feminine form he had ever in his mind's eye made his wife's appearance painful to his aesthetic sense.

Schomberg walked about swearing and fuming for the purpose of screwing his courage up to the sticking point.

"Hang me if I ought not to go now, at once, this minute, into his bedroom, and tell him to be off — him and that secretary of his — early in the morning. I don't mind a round game of cards, but to make a decoy of my table d'hote — my blood boils! He came here because some lying rascal in Manila told him I kept a table d'hote."

He said these things, not for Mrs. Schomberg's information, but simply thinking aloud, and trying to work his fury up to a point where it would give him courage enough to face "plain Mr. Jones."

"Impudent overbearing, swindling sharper," he went on. "I have a good mind to —"

He was beside himself in his lurid, heavy, Teutonic manner, so unlike the picturesque, lively rage of the Latin races; and though his eyes strayed about irresolutely, yet his swollen, angry features awakened in the miserable woman over whom he had been tyrannizing for years a fear for his precious carcass, since the poor creature had nothing else but that to hold on to in the world. She knew him well; but she did not know him altogether. The last thing a woman will consent to discover in a man whom she loves, or on whom she simply depends, is want of courage. And, timid in her corner, she ventured to say pressingly:

"Be careful, Wilhelm! Remember the knives and revolvers in their trunks."

In guise of thanks for that anxious reminder, he swore horribly in the direction of her shrinking person. In her scanty nightdress, and barefooted, she recalled a mediaeval penitent being reprov'd for her sins in blasphemous terms. Those lethal weapons were always present to Schomberg's mind. Personally, he had never seen them. His part, ten days after his guests' arrival, had been to lounge in manly, careless attitudes on the veranda — keeping watch — while Mrs. Schomberg, provided with a bunch of assorted keys, her discoloured teeth chattering and her globular eyes absolutely idiotic with fright, was "going through" the luggage of these strange clients. Her terrible Wilhelm had insisted on it.

"I'll be on the look-out, I tell you," he said. "I shall give you a whistle when I see them coming back. You couldn't whistle. And if he were to catch you at it, and chuck you out by the scruff of the neck, it wouldn't hurt you much; but he won't touch a woman. Not he! He has told me so. Affected beast. I must find out something about their little game, and so there's an end of it. Go in! Go now! Quick march!"

It had been an awful job; but she did go in, because she was much more afraid of Schomberg than of any possible consequences of the act. Her greatest concern was lest no key of the bunch he had provided her with should fit the locks. It would have been such a disappointment for Wilhelm. However, the trunks, she found, had been left open; but her investigation did not last long. She was frightened of firearms, and generally of all weapons, not from personal cowardice, but as some women are, almost superstitiously, from an abstract horror of violence and murder. She was out again on the veranda long before Wilhelm had any occasion for a warning whistle. The instinctive, motiveless fear being the most difficult to overcome, nothing could induce her to return to her investigations, neither threatening growls nor ferocious hisses, nor yet a poke or two in the ribs.

"Stupid female!" muttered the hotel-keeper, perturbed by the notion of that armoury in one of his bedrooms. This was from no abstract sentiment, with him it was constitutional. "Get out of my sight," he snarled. "Go and dress yourself for the table d'hôte."

Left to himself, Schomberg had meditated. What the devil did this mean? His thinking processes were sluggish and spasmodic; but suddenly the truth came to him.

"By heavens, they are desperadoes!" he thought.

Just then he beheld "plain Mr. Jones" and his secretary with the ambiguous name of Ricardo entering the grounds of the hotel. They had been down to the port on some business, and now were returning; Mr. Jones lank, spare, opening his long legs with angular regularity like a pair of compasses, the other stepping out briskly by his side. Conviction entered Schomberg's heart. They were two desperadoes — no doubt about it. But as the funk which he experienced was merely a general sensation, he managed to put on his most severe Officer-of-the-Reserve manner, long before they had closed with him.

"Good morning, gentlemen."

Being answered with derisive civility, he became confirmed in his sudden conviction of their desperate character. The way Mr. Jones turned his hollow eyes on one, like an incurious spectre, and the way the other, when addressed, suddenly retracted his lips and exhibited his teeth without looking round — here was evidence enough to settle that point. Desperadoes! They passed through the billiard-room, inscrutably mysterious, to the back of the house, to join their violated trunks.

“Tiffin bell will ring in five minutes, gentlemen.” Schomberg called after them, exaggerating the deep manliness of his tone.

He had managed to upset himself very much. He expected to see them come back infuriated and begin to bully him with an odious lack of restraint. Desperadoes! However they didn’t; they had not noticed anything unusual about their trunks and Schomberg recovered his composure and said to himself that he must get rid of this deadly incubus as soon as practicable. They couldn’t possibly want to stay very long; this was not the town — the colony — for desperate characters. He shrank from action. He dreaded any kind of disturbance — ”fracas” he called it — in his hotel. Such things were not good for business. Of course, sometimes one had to have a “fracas;” but it had been a comparatively trifling task to seize the frail Zangiaco — whose bones were no larger than a chicken’s — round the ribs, lift him up bodily, dash him to the ground, and fall on him. It had been easy. The wretched, hook-nosed creature lay without movement, buried under its purple beard.

Suddenly, remembering the occasion of that “fracas,” Schomberg groaned with the pain as of a hot coal under his breastbone, and gave himself up to desolation. Ah, if he only had that girl with him he would have been masterful and resolute and fearless — fight twenty desperadoes — care for nobody on earth! Whereas the possession of Mrs. Schomberg was no incitement to a display of manly virtues. Instead of caring for no one, he felt that he cared for nothing. Life was a hollow sham; he wasn’t going to risk a shot through his lungs or his liver in order to preserve its integrity. It had no savour — damn it!

In his state of moral decomposition, Schomberg, master as he was of the art of hotel-keeping, and careful of giving no occasion for criticism to the powers regulating that branch of human activity, let things take their course; though he saw very well where that course was tending. It began first with a game or two after dinner — for the drinks, apparently — with some lingering customer, at one of the little tables ranged against the walls of the billiard-room. Schomberg detected the meaning of it at once. “That’s what it was! This was what they were!” And, moving about restlessly (at that time his morose silent period had set in), he cast sidelong looks at the game; but he said nothing. It was not worth while having a row with men who were so overbearing. Even when money appeared in connection with these postprandial games, into which more and more people were being drawn, he still refrained from raising the question; he was reluctant to draw unduly the attention of “plain Mr. Jones” and of the equivocal Ricardo, to his person. One evening, however, after the public rooms of the hotel had

become empty, Schomberg made an attempt to grapple with the problem in an indirect way.

In a distant corner the tired China boy dozed on his heels, his back against the wall. Mrs. Schomberg had disappeared, as usual, between ten and eleven. Schomberg walked about slowly in and out of the room and the veranda, thoughtful, waiting for his two guests to go to bed. Then suddenly he approached them, militarily, his chest thrown out, his voice curt and soldierly.

“Hot night, gentlemen.”

Mr Jones, lolling back idly in a chair, looked up. Ricardo, as idle, but more upright, made no sign.

“Won’t you have a drink with me before retiring?” went on Schomberg, sitting down by the little table.

“By all means,” said Mr. Jones lazily.

Ricardo showed his teeth in a strange, quick grin. Schomberg felt painfully how difficult it was to get in touch with these men, both so quiet, so deliberate, so menacingly unceremonious. He ordered the Chinaman to bring in the drinks. His purpose was to discover how long these guests intended to stay. Ricardo displayed no conversational vein, but Mr. Jones appeared communicative enough. His voice somehow matched his sunken eyes. It was hollow without being in the least mournful; it sounded distant, uninterested, as though he were speaking from the bottom of a well. Schomberg learned that he would have the privilege of lodging and boarding these gentlemen for at least a month more. He could not conceal his discomfiture at this piece of news.

“What’s the matter? Don’t you like to have people in your house?” asked plain Mr. Jones languidly. “I should have thought the owner of a hotel would be pleased.”

He lifted his delicate and beautifully pencilled eyebrows. Schomberg muttered something about the locality being dull and uninteresting to travellers — nothing going on — too quiet altogether, but he only provoked the declaration that quiet had its charm sometimes, and even dullness was welcome as a change.

“We haven’t had time to be dull for the last three years,” added plain Mr. Jones, his eyes fixed darkly on Schomberg whom he further more invited to have another drink, this time with him, and not to worry himself about things he did not understand; and especially not to be inhospitable — which in a hotel-keeper is highly unprofessional.

“I don’t understand,” grumbled Schomberg. “Oh, yes, I understand perfectly well. I — ”

“You are frightened,” interrupted Mr. Jones. “What is the matter?”

“I don’t want any scandal in my place. That’s what’s the matter.”

Schomberg tried to face the situation bravely, but that steady, black stare affected him. And when he glanced aside uncomfortably, he met Ricardo’s grin uncovering a lot of teeth, though the man seemed absorbed in his thoughts all the time.

“And, moreover,” went on Mr. Jones in that distant tone of his, “you can’t help yourself. Here we are and here we stay. Would you try to put us out? I dare say you

could do it; but you couldn't do it without getting hurt — very badly hurt. We can promise him that, can't we, Martin?"

The secretary retracted his lips and looked up sharply at Schomberg, as if only too anxious to leap upon him with teeth and claws.

Schomberg managed to produce a deep laugh.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Mr Jones closed his eyes wearily, as if the light hurt them, and looked remarkably like a corpse for a moment. This was bad enough; but when he opened them again, it was almost a worse trial for Schomberg's nerves. The spectral intensity of that glance, fixed on the hotel-keeper (and this was most frightful) without any definite expression, seemed to dissolve the last grain of resolution in his character.

"You don't think, by any chance, that you have to do with ordinary people, do you?" inquired Mr. Jones, in his lifeless manner, which seemed to imply some sort of menace from beyond the grave.

"He's a gentleman," testified Martin Ricardo with a sudden snap of the lips, after which his moustaches stirred by themselves in an odd, feline manner.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," said plain Mr. Jones, while Schomberg, dumb and planted heavily in his chair looked from one to the other, leaning forward a little. "Of course I am that; but Ricardo attaches too much importance to a social advantage. What I mean, for instance, is that he, quiet and inoffensive as you see him sitting here, would think nothing of setting fire to this house of entertainment of yours. It would blaze like a box of matches. Think of that! It wouldn't advance your affairs much, would it? — whatever happened to us."

"Come, come gentlemen," remonstrated Schomberg, in a murmur. "This is very wild talk!"

"And you have been used to deal with tame people, haven't you? But we aren't tame. We once kept a whole angry town at bay for two days, and then we got away with our plunder. It was in Venezuela. Ask Martin here — he can tell you."

Instinctively Schomberg looked at Ricardo, who only passed the tip of his tongue over his lips with an uncanny sort of gusto, but did not offer to begin.

"Well, perhaps it would be a rather long story," Mr. Jones conceded after a short silence.

"I have no desire to hear it, I am sure," said Schomberg. "This isn't Venezuela. You wouldn't get away from here like that. But all this is silly talk of the worst sort. Do you mean to say you would make deadly trouble for the sake of a few guilders that you and that other" — eyeing Ricardo suspiciously, as one would look at a strange animal — "gentleman can win of an evening? Isn't as if my customers were a lot of rich men with pockets full of cash. I wonder you take so much trouble and risk for so little money."

Schomberg's argument was met by Mr. Jones's statement that one must do something to kill time. Killing time was not forbidden. For the rest, being in a communicative mood, Mr. Jones said languidly and in a voice indifferent, as if issuing from

a tomb, that he depended on himself, as if the world were still one great, wild jungle without law. Martin was something like that, too — for reasons of his own.

All these statements Ricardo confirmed by short, inhuman grins. Schomberg lowered his eyes, for the sight of these two men intimidated him; but he was losing patience.

“Of course, I could see at once that you were two desperate characters — something like what you say. But what would you think if I told you that I am pretty near as desperate as you two gentlemen? ‘Here’s that Schomberg has an easy time running his hotel,’ people think; and yet it seems to me I would just as soon let you rip me open and burn the whole show as not. There!”

A low whistle was heard. It came from Ricardo, and was derisive. Schomberg, breathing heavily, looked on the floor. He was really desperate. Mr. Jones remained languidly sceptical.

“Tut, tut! You have a tolerable business. You are perfectly tame; you — ” He paused, then added in a tone of disgust: “You have a wife.”

Schomberg tapped the floor angrily with his foot and uttered an indistinct, laughing curse.

“What do you mean by flinging that damned trouble at my head?” he cried. “I wish you would carry her off with you some where to the devil! I wouldn’t run after you.”

The unexpected outburst affected Mr. Jones strangely. He had a horrified recoil, chair and all, as if Schomberg had thrust a wriggling viper in his face.

“What’s this infernal nonsense?” he muttered thickly. “What do you mean? How dare you?”

Ricardo chuckled audibly.

“I tell you I am desperate,” Schomberg repeated. “I am as desperate as any man ever was. I don’t care a hang what happens to me!”

“Well, then” — Mr. Jones began to speak with a quietly threatening effect, as if the common words of daily use had some other deadly meaning to his mind — “well, then, why should you make yourself ridiculously disagreeable to us? If you don’t care, as you say, you might just as well let us have the key of that music-shed of yours for a quiet game; a modest bank — a dozen candles or so. It would be greatly appreciated by your clients, as far as I can judge from the way they betted on a game of ecarte I had with that fair, baby-faced man — what’s his name? They just yearn for a modest bank. And I am afraid Martin here would take it badly if you objected; but of course you won’t. Think of the calls for drinks!”

Schomberg, raising his eyes, at last met the gleams in two dark caverns under Mr. Jones’s devilish eyebrows, directed upon him impenetrably. He shuddered as if horrors worse than murder had been lurking there, and said, nodding towards Ricardo:

“I dare say he wouldn’t think twice about sticking me, if he had you at his back! I wish I had sunk my launch, and gone to the bottom myself in her, before I boarded the steamer you came by. Ah, well, I’ve been already living in hell for weeks, so you don’t make much difference. I’ll let you have the concert-room — and hang the consequences.

But what about the boy on late duty? If he sees the cards and actual money passing, he will be sure to blab, and it will be all over the town in no time.”

A ghastly smile stirred the lips of Mr. Jones.

“Ah, I see you want to make a success of it. Very good. That’s the way to get on. Don’t let it disturb you. You chase all the Chinamen to bed early, and we’ll get Pedro here every evening. He isn’t the conventional waiter’s cut, but he will do to run to and fro with the tray, while you sit here from nine to eleven serving out drinks and gathering the money.”

“There will be three of them now,” thought the unlucky Schomberg.

But Pedro, at any rate, was just a simple, straightforward brute, if a murderous one. There was no mystery about him, nothing uncanny, no suggestion of a stealthy, deliberate wildcat turned into a man, or of an insolent spectre on leave from Hades, endowed with skin and bones and a subtle power of terror. Pedro with his fangs, his tangled beard, and queer stare of his little bear’s eyes was, by comparison, delightfully natural. Besides, Schomberg could no longer help himself.

“That will do very well,” he asserted mournfully. “But if you gentlemen, if you had turned up here only three months ago — ay, less than three months ago — you would have found somebody very different from what I am now to talk to you. It’s true. What do you think of that?”

“I scarcely know what to think. I should think it was a lie. You were probably as tame three months ago as you are now. You were born tame, like most people in the world.”

Mr Jones got up spectrally, and Ricardo imitated him with a snarl and a stretch. Schomberg, in a brown study, went on, as if to himself:

“There has been an orchestra here — eighteen women.”

Mr Jones let out an exclamation of dismay, and looked about as if the walls around him and the whole house had been infected with plague. Then he became very angry, and swore violently at Schomberg for daring to bring up such subjects. The hotel-keeper was too much surprised to get up. He gazed from his chair at Mr. Jones’s anger, which had nothing spectral in it but was not the more comprehensible for that.

“What’s the matter?” he stammered out. “What subject? Didn’t you hear me say it was an orchestra? There’s nothing wrong in that. Well, there was a girl amongst them — ” Schomberg’s eyes went stony; he clasped his hands in front of his breast with such force that his knuckles came out white. “Such a girl! Tame, am I? I would have kicked everything to pieces about me for her. And she, of course . . . I am in the prime of life . . . then a fellow bewitched her — a vagabond, a false, lying, swindling, underhand, stick-at-nothing brute. Ah!”

His entwined fingers cracked as he tore his hands apart, flung out his arms, and leaned his forehead on them in a passion of fury. The other two looked at his shaking back — the attenuated Mr. Jones with mingled scorn and a sort of fear, Ricardo with the expression of a cat which sees a piece of fish in the pantry out of reach. Schomberg flung himself backwards. He was dry-eyed, but he gulped as if swallowing sobs.

“No wonder you can do with me what you like. You have no idea — just let me tell you of my trouble — ”

“I don’t want to know anything of your beastly trouble,” said Mr. Jones, in his most lifelessly positive voice.

He stretched forth an arresting hand, and, as Schomberg remained open-mouthed, he walked out of the billiard-room in all the uncanniness of his thin shanks. Ricardo followed at his leader’s heels; but he showed his teeth to Schomberg over his shoulder.

Chapter 6

From that evening dated those mysterious but significant phenomena in Schomberg’s establishment which attracted Captain Davidson’s casual notice when he dropped in, placid yet astute, in order to return Mrs. Schomberg’s Indian shawl. And strangely enough, they lasted some considerable time. It argued either honesty and bad luck or extraordinary restraint on the part of “plain Mr. Jones and Co.” in their discreet operations with cards.

It was a curious and impressive sight, the inside of Schomberg’s concert-hall, encumbered at one end by a great stack of chairs piled up on and about the musicians’ platform, and lighted at the other by two dozen candles disposed about a long trestle table covered with green cloth. In the middle, Mr. Jones, a starved spectre turned into a banker, faced Ricardo, a rather nasty, slow-moving cat turned into a croupier. By contrast, the other faces round that table, anything between twenty and thirty, must have looked like collected samples of intensely artless, helpless humanity — pathetic in their innocent watch for the small turns of luck which indeed might have been serious enough for them. They had no notice to spare for the hairy Pedro, carrying a tray with the clumsiness of a creature caught in the woods and taught to walk on its hind legs.

As to Schomberg, he kept out of the way. He remained in the billiard-room, serving out drinks to the unspeakable Pedro with an air of not seeing the growling monster, of not knowing where the drinks went, of ignoring that there was such a thing as a music-room over there under the trees within fifty yards of the hotel. He submitted himself to the situation with a low-spirited stoicism compounded of fear and resignation. Directly the party had broken up, (he could see dark shapes of the men drifting singly and in knots through the gate of the compound), he would withdraw out of sight behind a door not quite closed, in order to avoid meeting his two extraordinary guests; but he would watch through the crack their contrasted forms pass through the billiard-room and disappear on their way to bed. Then he would hear doors being slammed upstairs; and a profound silence would fall upon the whole house, upon his hotel appropriated, haunted by those insolently outspoken men provided with a whole armoury of weapons in their trunks. A profound silence. Schomberg sometimes could not resist the notion that he must be dreaming. Shuddering, he would pull himself together, and creep out,

with movements strangely inappropriate to the Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve bearing by which he tried to keep up his self-respect before the world.

A great loneliness oppressed him. One after another he would extinguish the lamps, and move softly towards his bedroom, where Mrs. Schomberg waited for him — no fit companion for a man of his ability and “in the prime of life.” But that life, alas, was blighted. He felt it; and never with such force as when on opening the door he perceived that woman sitting patiently in a chair, her toes peeping out under the edge of her night-dress, an amazingly small amount of hair on her head drooping on the long stalk of scraggy neck, with that everlasting scared grin showing a blue tooth and meaning nothing — not even real fear. For she was used to him.

Sometimes he was tempted to screw the head off the stalk. He imagined himself doing it — with one hand, a twisting movement. Not seriously, of course. Just a simple indulgence for his exasperated feelings. He wasn't capable of murder. He was certain of that. And, remembering suddenly the plain speeches of Mr. Jones, he would think: “I suppose I am too tame for that” — quite unaware that he had murdered the poor woman morally years ago. He was too unintelligent to have the notion of such a crime. Her bodily presence was bitterly offensive, because of its contrast with a very different feminine image. And it was no use getting rid of her. She was a habit of years, and there would be nothing to put in her place. At any rate, he could talk to that idiot half the night if he chose.

That night he had been vapouring before her as to his intention to face his two guests and, instead of that inspiration he needed, had merely received the usual warning: “Be careful, Wilhelm.” He did not want to be told to be careful by an imbecile female. What he needed was a pair of woman's arms which, flung round his neck, would brace him up for the encounter. Inspire him, he called it to himself.

He lay awake a long time; and his slumbers, when they came, were unsatisfactory and short. The morning light had no joy for his eyes. He listened dismally to the movements in the house. The Chinamen were unlocking and flinging wide the doors of the public rooms which opened on the veranda. Horrors! Another poisoned day to get through somehow! The recollection of his resolve made him feel actually sick for a moment. First of all the lordly, abandoned attitudes of Mr. Jones disconcerted him. Then there was his contemptuous silence. Mr. Jones never addressed himself to Schomberg with any general remarks, never opened his lips to him unless to say “Good morning” — two simple words which, uttered by that man, seemed a mockery of a threatening character. And, lastly, it was not a frank physical fear he inspired — for as to that, even a cornered rat will fight — but a superstitious shrinking awe, something like an invincible repugnance to seek speech with a wicked ghost. That it was a daylight ghost surprisingly angular in his attitudes, and for the most part spread out on three chairs, did not make it any easier. Daylight only made him a more weird, a more disturbing and unlawful apparition. Strangely enough in the evening when he came out of his mute supineness, this unearthly side of him was less obtrusive. At the gaming-table, when actually handling the cards, it was probably sunk quite out of

sight; but Schomberg, having made up his mind in ostrich-like fashion to ignore what was going on, never entered the desecrated music-room. He had never seen Mr. Jones in the exercise of his vocation — or perhaps it was only his trade.

“I will speak to him tonight,” Schomberg said to himself, while he drank his morning tea, in pyjamas, on the veranda, before the rising sun had topped the trees of the compound, and while the undried dew still lay silvery on the grass, sparkled on the blossoms of the central flower-bed, and darkened the yellow gravel of the drive. “That’s what I’ll do. I won’t keep out of sight tonight. I shall come out and catch him as he goes to bed carrying the cash-box.”

After all, what was the fellow but a common desperado? Murderous? Oh, yes; murderous enough, perhaps — and the muscles of Schomberg’s stomach had a quivering contraction under his airy attire. But even a common desperado would think twice or, more likely, a hundred times, before openly murdering an inoffensive citizen in a civilized, European-ruled town. He jerked his shoulders. Of course! He shuddered again, and paddled back to his room to dress himself. His mind was made up, and he would think no more about it; but still he had his doubts. They grew and unfolded themselves with the progress of the day, as some plants do. At times they made him perspire more than usual, and they did away with the possibility of his afternoon siesta. After turning over on his couch more than a dozen times, he gave up this mockery of repose, got up, and went downstairs.

It was between three and four o’clock, the hour of profound peace. The very flowers seemed to doze on their stalks set with sleepy leaves. Not even the air stirred, for the sea-breeze was not due till later. The servants were out of sight, catching naps in the shade somewhere behind the house. Mrs. Schomberg in a dim up-stair room with closed jalousies, was elaborating those two long pendant ringlets which were such a feature of her hairdressing for her afternoon duties. At that time no customers ever troubled the repose of the establishment. Wandering about his premises in profound solitude, Schomberg recoiled at the door of the billiard-room, as if he had seen a snake in his path. All alone with the billiards, the bare little tables, and a lot of untenanted chairs, Mr. Secretary Ricardo sat near the wall, performing with lightning rapidity something that looked like tricks with his own personal pack of cards, which he always carried about in his pocket. Schomberg would have backed out quietly if Ricardo had not turned his head. Having been seen, the hotel-keeper elected to walk in as the lesser risk of the two. The consciousness of his inwardly abject attitude towards these men caused him always to throw his chest out and assume a severe expression. Ricardo watched his approach, clasping the pack of cards in both hands.

“You want something, perhaps?” suggested Schomberg in his lieutenant-of-the-Reserve voice.

Ricardo shook his head in silence and looked expectant. With him Schomberg exchanged at least twenty words every day. He was infinitely more communicative than his patron. At times he looked very much like an ordinary human being of his class;

and he seemed to be in an amiable mood at that moment. Suddenly spreading some ten cards face downward in the form of a fan, he thrust them towards Schomberg.

“Come, man, take one quick!”

Schomberg was so surprised that he took one hurriedly, after a very perceptible start. The eyes of Martin Ricardo gleamed phosphorescent in the half-light of the room screened from the heat and glare of the tropics.

“That’s the king of hearts you’ve got,” he chuckled, showing his teeth in a quick flash.

Schomberg, after looking at the card, admitted that it was, and laid it down on the table.

“I can make you take any card I like nine times out of ten,” exulted the secretary, with a strange curl of his lips and a green flicker in his raised eyes.

Schomberg looked down at him dumbly. For a few seconds neither of them stirred; then Ricardo lowered his glance, and, opening his fingers, let the whole pack fall on the table. Schomberg sat down. He sat down because of the faintness in his legs, and for no other reason. His mouth was dry. Having sat down, he felt that he must speak. He squared his shoulders in parade style.

“You are pretty good at that sort of thing,” he said.

“Practice makes perfect,” replied the secretary.

His precarious amiability made it impossible for Schomberg to get away. Thus, from his very timidity, the hotel-keeper found himself engaged in a conversation the thought of which filled him with apprehension. It must be said, in justice to Schomberg, that he concealed his funk very creditably. The habit of throwing out his chest and speaking in a severe voice stood him in good stead. With him, too, practice made perfect; and he would probably have kept it up to the end, to the very last moment, to the ultimate instant of breaking strain which would leave him grovelling on the floor. To add to his secret trouble, he was at a loss what to say. He found nothing else but the remark:

“I suppose you are fond of cards.”

“What would you expect?” asked Ricardo in a simple, philosophical tone. “It is likely I should not be?” Then, with sudden fire: “Fond of cards? Ay, passionately!”

The effect of this outburst was augmented by the quiet lowering of the eyelids, by a reserved pause as though this had been a confession of another kind of love. Schomberg cudgelled his brains for a new topic, but he could not find one. His usual scandalous gossip would not serve this turn. That desperado did not know anyone anywhere within a thousand miles. Schomberg was almost compelled to keep to the subject.

“I suppose you’ve always been so — from your early youth.”

Ricardo’s eyes remained cast down. His fingers toyed absently with the pack on the table.

“I don’t know that it was so early. I first got in the way of it playing for tobacco — in forecastles of ships, you know — common sailor games. We used to spend whole watches below at it, round a chest, under a slush lamp. We would hardly spare the time to get a bite of salt horse — neither eat nor sleep. We could hardly stand when

the watches were mustered on deck. Talk of gambling!" He dropped the reminiscent tone to add the information, "I was bred to the sea from a boy, you know."

Schomberg had fallen into a reverie, but without losing the sense of impending calamity. The next words he heard were:

"I got on all right at sea, too. Worked up to be mate. I was mate of a schooner — a yacht, you might call her — a special good berth too, in the Gulf of Mexico, a soft job that you don't run across more than once in a lifetime. Yes, I was mate of her when I left the sea to follow him."

Ricardo tossed up his chin to indicate the room above; from which Schomberg, his wits painfully aroused by this reminder of Mr. Jones's existence, concluded that the latter had withdrawn into his bedroom. Ricardo, observing him from under lowered eyelids, went on:

"It so happened that we were shipmates."

"Mr Jones, you mean? Is he a sailor too?"

Ricardo raised his eyelids at that.

"He's no more Mr. Jones than you are," he said with obvious pride. "He a sailor! That just shows your ignorance. But there! A foreigner can't be expected to know any better. I am an Englishman, and I know a gentleman at sight. I should know one drunk, in the gutter, in jail, under the gallows. There's a something — it isn't exactly the appearance, it's a — no use me trying to tell you. You ain't an Englishman, and if you were, you wouldn't need to be told."

An unsuspected stream of loquacity had broken its dam somewhere deep within the man, had diluted his fiery blood and softened his pitiless fibre. Schomberg experienced mingled relief and apprehension, as if suddenly an enormous savage cat had begun to wind itself about his legs in inexplicable friendliness. No prudent man under such circumstances would dare to stir. Schomberg didn't stir. Ricardo assumed an easy attitude, with an elbow on the table. Schomberg squared his shoulders afresh.

"I was employed, in that there yacht — schooner, whatever you call it — by ten gentlemen at once. That surprises you, eh? Yes, yes, ten. Leastwise there were nine of them gents good enough in their way, and one downright gentleman, and that was . . ."

Ricardo gave another upward jerk of his chin as much as to say: He! The only one.

"And no mistake," he went on. "I spotted him from the first day. How? Why? Ay, you may ask. Hadn't seen that many gentlemen in my life. Well, somehow I did. If you were an Englishman, you would —"

"What was your yacht?" Schomberg interrupted as impatiently as he dared; for this harping on nationality jarred on his already tried nerves. "What was the game?"

"You have a headpiece on you! Game! 'Xactly. That's what it was — the sort of silliness gentlemen will get up among themselves to play at adventure. A treasure-hunting expedition. Each of them put down so much money, you understand, to buy the schooner. Their agent in the city engaged me and the skipper. The greatest secrecy and all that. I reckon he had a twinkle in his eye all the time — and no mistake. But

that wasn't our business. Let them bust their money as they like. The pity of it was that so little of it came our way. Just fair pay and no more. And damn any pay, much or little, anyhow — that's what I say!"

He blinked his eyes greenishly in the dim light. The heat seemed to have stilled everything in the world but his voice. He swore at large, abundantly, in snarling undertones, it was impossible to say why, then calmed down as inexplicably, and went on, as a sailor yarns.

"At first there were only nine of them adventurous sparks, then, just a day or two before the sailing date, he turned up. Heard of it somehow, somewhere — I would say from some woman, if I didn't know him as I do. He would give any woman a ten-mile berth. He can't stand them. Or maybe in a flash bar. Or maybe in one of them grand clubs in Pall Mall. Anyway, the agent netted him in all right — cash down, and only about four and twenty hours for him to get ready; but he didn't miss his ship. Not he! You might have called it a pier-head jump — for a gentleman. I saw him come along. Know the West India Docks, eh?"

Schomberg did not know the West India Docks. Ricardo looked at him pensively for a while, and then continued, as if such ignorance had to be disregarded.

"Our tug was already alongside. Two loafers were carrying his dunnage behind him. I told the dockman at our moorings to keep all fast for a minute. The gangway was down already; but he made nothing of it. Up he jumps, one leap, swings his long legs over the rail, and there he is on board. They pass up his swell dunnage, and he puts his hand in his trousers pocket and throws all his small change on the wharf for them chaps to pick up. They were still promenading that wharf on all fours when we cast off. It was only then that he looked at me — quietly, you know; in a slow way. He wasn't so thin then as he is now; but I noticed he wasn't so young as he looked — not by a long chalk. He seemed to touch me inside somewhere. I went away pretty quick from there; I was wanted forward anyhow. I wasn't frightened. What should I be frightened for? I only felt touched — on the very spot. But Jee-miny, if anybody had told me we should be partners before the year was out — well, I would have — "

He swore a variety of strange oaths, some common, others quaintly horrible to Schomberg's ears, and all mere innocent exclamations of wonder at the shifts and changes of human fortune. Schomberg moved slightly in his chair. But the admirer and partner of "plain Mr. Jones" seemed to have forgotten Schomberg's existence for the moment. The stream of ingenuous blasphemy — some of it in bad Spanish — had run dry, and Martin Ricardo, connoisseur in gentlemen, sat dumb with a stony gaze as if still marvelling inwardly at the amazing elections, conjunctions, and associations of events which influence man's pilgrimage on this earth.

At last Schomberg spoke tentatively:

"And so the — the gentleman, up there, talked you over into leaving a good berth?" Ricardo started.

"Talked me over! Didn't need to talk me over. Just beckoned to me, and that was enough. By that time we were in the Gulf of Mexico. One night we were lying at anchor,

close to a dry sandbank — to this day I am not sure where it was — off the Colombian coast or thereabouts. We were to start digging the next morning, and all hands had turned in early, expecting a hard day with the shovels. Up he comes, and in his quiet, tired way of speaking — you can tell a gentleman by that as much as by anything else almost — up he comes behind me and says, just like that into my ear, in a manner: ‘Well, what do you think of our treasure hunt now?’

“I didn’t even turn my head; ‘xactly as I stood, I remained, and I spoke no louder than himself:

“‘If you want to know, sir, it’s nothing but just damned tom-foolery.’

“We had, of course, been having short talks together at one time or another during the passage. I dare say he had read me like a book. There ain’t much to me, except that I have never been tame, even when walking the pavement and cracking jokes and standing drinks to chums — ay, and to strangers, too. I would watch them lifting their elbows at my expense, or splitting their side at my fun — I can be funny when I like, you bet!”

A pause for self-complacent contemplation of his own fun and generosity checked the flow of Ricardo’s speech. Schomberg was concerned to keep within bounds the enlargement of his eyes, which he seemed to feel growing bigger in his head.

“Yes, yes,” he whispered hastily.

“I would watch them and think: ‘You boys don’t know who I am. If you did — !’ With girls, too. Once I was courting a girl. I used to kiss her behind the ear and say to myself: ‘If you only knew who’s kissing you, my dear, you would scream and bolt!’ Ha! ha! Not that I wanted to do them any harm; but I felt the power in myself. Now, here we sit, friendly like, and that’s all right. You aren’t in my way. But I am not friendly to you. I just don’t care. Some men do say that; but I really don’t. You are no more to me one way or another than that fly there. Just so. I’d squash you or leave you alone. I don’t care what I do.”

If real force of character consists in overcoming our sudden weaknesses, Schomberg displayed plenty of that quality. At the mention of the fly, he re-enforced the severe dignity of his attitude as one inflates a collapsing toy balloon with a great effort of breath. The easy-going, relaxed attitude of Ricardo was really appalling.

“That’s so,” he went on. “I am that sort of fellow. You wouldn’t think it, would you? No. You have to be told. So I am telling you, and I dare say you only half believe it. But you can’t say to yourself that I am drunk, stare at me as you may. I haven’t had anything stronger than a glass of iced water all day. Takes a real gentleman to see through a fellow. Oh, yes — he spotted me. I told you we had a few talks at sea about one thing or another. And I used to watch him down the skylight, playing cards in the cuddy with the others. They had to pass the time away somehow. By the same token he caught me at it once, and it was then that I told him I was fond of cards — and generally lucky in gambling, too. Yes, he had sized me up. Why not? A gentleman’s just like any other man — and something more.”

It flashed through Schomberg's mind: that these two were indeed well matched in their enormous dissimilarity, identical souls in different disguises.

"Says he to me" — Ricardo started again in a gossiping manner — 'I'm packed up. It's about time to go, Martin.'

"It was the first time he called me Martin. Says I:

"Is that it, sir?"

"You didn't think I was after that sort of treasure, did you? I wanted to clear out from home quietly. It's a pretty expensive way of getting a passage across, but it has served my turn.'

"I let him know very soon that I was game for anything, from pitch and toss to wilful murder, in his company.

"Wilful murder?' says he in his quiet way. 'What the deuce is that? What are you talking about? People do get killed sometimes when they get in one's way, but that's self-defence — you understand?"

"I told him I did. And then I said I would run below for a minute, to ram a few of my things into a sailor's bag I had. I've never cared for a lot of dunnage; I believed in going about flying light when I was at sea. I came back and found him strolling up and down the deck, as if he were taking a breath of fresh air before turning in, like any other evening.

"Ready?"

"Yes, sir.'

"He didn't even look at me. We had had a boat in the water astern ever since we came to anchor in the afternoon. He throws the stump of his cigar overboard.

"Can you get the captain out on deck?' he asks.

"That was the last thing in the world I should have thought of doing. I lost my tongue for a moment.

"I can try,' says I.

"Well, then, I am going below. You get him up and keep him with you till I come back on deck. Mind! Don't let him go below till I return.'

"I could not help asking why he told me to rouse a sleeping man, when we wanted everybody on board to sleep sweetly till we got clear of the schooner. He laughs a little and says that I didn't see all the bearings of this business.

"Mind,' he says, 'don't let him leave you till you see me come up again.' He puts his eyes close to mine. 'Keep him with you at all costs.'

"And that means?' says I.

"All costs to him — by every possible or impossible means. I don't want to be interrupted in my business down below. He would give me lots of trouble. I take you with me to save myself trouble in various circumstances; and you've got to enter on your work right away.'

"Just so, sir,' says I; and he slips down the companion.

"With a gentleman you know at once where you are; but it was a ticklish job. The skipper was nothing to me one way or another, any more than you are at this moment,

Mr. Schomberg. You may light your cigar or blow your brains out this minute, and I don't care a hang which you do, both or neither. To bring the skipper up was easy enough. I had only to stamp on the deck a few times over his head. I stamped hard. But how to keep him up when he got there?

“‘Anything the matter; Mr. Ricardo?’ I heard his voice behind me.

“‘There he was, and I hadn't thought of anything to say to him; so I didn't turn round. The moonlight was brighter than many a day I could remember in the North Sea.

“‘Why did you call me? What are you staring at out there, Mr. Ricardo?’

“‘He was deceived by my keeping my back to him. I wasn't staring at anything, but his mistake gave me a notion.

“‘I am staring at something that looks like a canoe over there,’ I said very slowly.

“‘The skipper got concerned at once. It wasn't any danger from the inhabitants, whoever they were.

“‘Oh, hang it!’ says he. ‘That's very unfortunate.’ He had hoped that the schooner being on the coast would not get known so very soon. ‘Dashed awkward, with the business we've got in hand, to have a lot of niggers watching operations. But are you certain this is a canoe?’

“‘It may be a drift-log,’ I said; ‘but I thought you had better have a look with your own eyes. You may make it out better than I can.’

“‘His eyes weren't anything as good as mine. But he says:

“‘Certainly. Certainly. You did quite right.’

“‘And it's a fact I had seen some drift-logs at sunset. I saw what they were then and didn't trouble my head about them, forgot all about it till that very moment. Nothing strange in seeing drift-logs off a coast like that; and I'm hanged if the skipper didn't make one out in the wake of the moon. Strange what a little thing a man's life hangs on sometimes — a single word! Here you are, sitting unsuspecting before me, and you may let out something unbeknown to you that would settle your hash. Not that I have any ill-feeling. I have no feelings. If the skipper had said, ‘O, bosh!’ and had turned his back on me, he would not have gone three steps towards his bed; but he stood there and stared. And now the job was to get him off the deck when he was no longer wanted there.

“‘We are just trying to make out if that object there is a canoe or a log,’ says he to Mr. Jones.

“‘Mr Jones had come up, lounging as carelessly as when he went below. While the skipper was jawing about boats and drifting logs. I asked by signs, from behind, if I hadn't better knock him on the head and drop him quietly overboard. The night was slipping by, and we had to go. It couldn't be put off till next night no more. No. No more. And do you know why?’”

Schomberg made a slight negative sign with his head. This direct appeal annoyed him, jarred on the induced quietude of a great talker forced into the part of a listener and sunk in it as a man sinks into slumber. Mr. Ricardo struck a note of scorn.

“Don’t know why? Can’t you guess? No? Because the boss had got hold of the skipper’s cash-box by then. See?”

Chapter 7

“A common thief!”

Schomberg bit his tongue just too late, and woke up completely as he saw Ricardo retract his lips in a cat-like grin; but the companion of “plain Mr. Jones” didn’t alter his comfortable, gossiping attitude.

“Garn! What if he did want to see his money back, like any tame shopkeeper, hash-seller, gin-slinger, or ink-spewer does? Fancy a mud turtle like you trying to pass an opinion on a gentleman! A gentleman isn’t to be sized up so easily. Even I ain’t up to it sometimes. For instance, that night, all he did was to waggle his finger at me. The skipper stops his silly chatter, surprised.

“‘Eh? What’s the matter?’ asks he.

“The matter! It was his reprieve — that’s what was the matter.

“‘O, nothing, nothing,’ says my gentleman. ‘You are perfectly right. A log — nothing but a log.’

“Ha, ha! Reprieve, I call it, because if the skipper had gone on with his silly argument much longer he would have had to be knocked out of the way. I could hardly hold myself in on account of the precious minutes. However, his guardian angel put it into his head to shut up and go back to his bed. I was ramping mad about the lost time.”

“‘Why didn’t you let me give him one on his silly coconut sir?’ I asks.

“‘No ferocity, no ferocity,’ he says, raising his finger at me as calm as you please.

“You can’t tell how a gentleman takes that sort of thing. They don’t lose their temper. It’s bad form. You’ll never see him lose his temper — not for anybody to see anyhow. Ferocity ain’t good form, either — that much I’ve learned by this time, and more, too. I’ve had that schooling that you couldn’t tell by my face if I meant to rip you up the next minute — as of course I could do in less than a jiffy. I have a knife up the leg of my trousers.”

“You haven’t!” exclaimed Schomberg incredulously.

Mr Ricardo was as quick as lightning in changing his lounging, idle attitude for a stooping position, and exhibiting the weapon with one jerk at the left leg of his trousers. Schomberg had just a view of it, strapped to a very hairy limb, when Mr. Ricardo, jumping up, stamped his foot to get the trouser-leg down, and resumed his careless pose with one elbow on the table.

“It’s a more handy way to carry a tool than you would think,” he went on, gazing abstractedly into Schomberg’s wide-open eyes. “Suppose some little difference comes up during a game. Well, you stoop to pick up a dropped card, and when you come up — there you are ready to strike, or with the thing up you sleeve ready to throw. Or you just dodge under the table when there’s some shooting coming. You wouldn’t believe

the damage a fellow with a knife under the table can do to ill-conditioned skunks that want to raise trouble, before they begin to understand what the screaming's about, and make a bolt — those that can, that is."

The roses of Schomberg's cheek at the root of his chestnut beard faded perceptibly. Ricardo chuckled faintly.

"But no ferocity — no ferocity! A gentleman knows. What's the good of getting yourself into a state? And no shirking necessity, either. No gentleman ever shirks. What I learn I don't forget. Why! We gambled on the plains, with a damn lot of cattlemen in ranches; played fair, mind — and then had to fight for our winnings afterwards as often as not. We've gambled on the hills and in the valleys and on the sea-shore, and out of sight of land — mostly fair. Generally it's good enough. We began in Nicaragua first, after we left that schooner and her fool errand. There were one hundred and twenty-seven sovereigns and some Mexican dollars in that skipper's cash-box. Hardly enough to knock a man on the head for from behind, I must confess; but that the skipper had a narrow escape the governor himself could not deny afterwards.

"Do you want me to understand, sir, that you mind there being one life more or less on this earth?" I asked him, a few hours after we got away.

"Certainly not," says he.

"Well, then, why did you stop me?"

"There's a proper way of doing things. You'll have to learn to be correct. There's also unnecessary exertion. That must be avoided, too — if only for the look of the thing.' A gentleman's way of putting things to you — and no mistake!

"At sunrise we got into a creek, to lie hidden in case the treasure hunt party had a mind to take a spell hunting for us. And dash me if they didn't! We saw the schooner away out, running to leeward, with ten pairs of binoculars sweeping the sea, no doubt on all sides. I advised the governor to give her time to beat back again before we made a start. So we stayed up that creek something like ten days, as snug as can be. On the seventh day we had to kill a man, though — the brother of this Pedro here. They were alligator-hunters, right enough. We got our lodgings in their hut. Neither the boss nor I could habla Espanol — speak Spanish, you know — much then. Dry bank, nice shade, jolly hammocks, fresh fish, good game, everything lovely. The governor chucked them a few dollars to begin with; but it was like boarding with a pair of savage apes, anyhow. By and by we noticed them talking a lot together. They had twigged the cash-box, and the leather portmanteaus, and my bag — a jolly lot of plunder to look at. They must have been saying to each other:

"No one's ever likely to come looking for these two fellows, who seem to have fallen from the moon. Let's cut their throats.'

"Why, of course! Clear as daylight. I didn't need to spy one of them sharpening a devilish long knife behind some bushes, while glancing right and left with his wild eyes, to know what was in the wind. Pedro was standing by, trying the edge of another long knife. They thought we were away on our lookout at the mouth of the river, as was usual with us during the day. Not that we expected to see much of the schooner,

but it was just as well to make certain, if possible; and then it was cooler out of the woods, in the breeze. Well, the governor was there right enough, lying comfortable on a rug, where he could watch the offing, but I had gone back to the hut to get a chew of tobacco out of my bag. I had not broken myself of the habit then, and I couldn't be happy unless I had a lump as big as a baby's fist in my cheek."

At the cannibalistic comparison, Schomberg muttered a faint, sickly "don't." Ricardo hitched himself up in his seat and glanced down his outstretched legs complacently.

"I am tolerably light on my feet, as a general thing," he went on. "Dash me if I don't think I could drop a pinch of salt on a sparrow's tail, if I tried. Anyhow, they didn't hear me. I watched them two brown, hairy brutes not ten yards off. All they had on was white linen drawers rolled up on their thighs. Not a word they said to each other. Antonio was down on his thick hams, busy rubbing a knife on a flat stone; Pedro was leaning against a small tree and passing his thumb along the edge of his blade. I got away quieter than a mouse, you bet."

"I didn't say anything to the boss then. He was leaning on his elbow on his rug, and didn't seem to want to be spoken to. He's like that — sometimes that familiar you might think he would eat out of your hand, and at others he would snub you sharper than a devil — but always quiet. Perfect gentleman, I tell you. I didn't bother him, then; but I wasn't likely to forget them two fellows, so businesslike with their knives. At that time we had only one revolver between us two — the governor's six-shooter, but loaded only in five chambers; and we had no more cartridges. He had left the box behind in a drawer in his cabin. Awkward! I had nothing but an old clasp-knife — no good at all for anything serious.

"In the evening we four sat round a bit of fire outside the sleeping-shed, eating broiled fish off plantain leaves, with roast yams for bread — the usual thing. The governor and I were on one side, and these two beauties cross-legged on the other, grunting a word or two to each other, now and then, hardly human speech at all, and their eyes down, fast on the ground. For the last three days we couldn't get them to look us in the face. Presently I began to talk to the boss quietly, just as I am talking to you now, careless like, and I told him all I had observed. He goes on picking up pieces of fish and putting them into his mouth as calm as anything. It's a pleasure to have anything to do with a gentleman. Never looked across at them once.

"'And now,' says I, yawning on purpose, 'we've got to stand watch at night, turn about, and keep our eyes skinned all day, too, and mind we don't get jumped upon suddenly.'

"'It's perfectly intolerable,' says the governor. 'And you with no weapon of any sort!'

"'I mean to stick pretty close to you, sir, from this on, if you don't mind,' says I.

"He just nods the least bit, wipes his fingers on the plantain leaf, puts his hand behind his back, as if to help himself to rise from the ground, snatches his revolver from under his jacket and plugs a bullet plumb centre into Mr. Antonio's chest. See what it is to have to do with a gentleman. No confounded fuss, and things done out of hand. But he might have tipped me a wink or something. I nearly jumped out of my

skin. Scared ain't in it! I didn't even know who had fired. Everything had been so still just before that the bang of the shot seemed the loudest noise I had ever heard. The honourable Antonio pitches forward — they always do, towards the shot; you must have noticed that yourself — yes, he pitches forward on to the embers, and all that lot of hair on his face and head flashes up like a pinch of gunpowder. Greasy, I expect; always scraping the fat off them alligators' hides — ”

“Look here,” exclaimed Schomberg violently, as if trying to burst some invisible bonds, “do you mean to say that all this happened?”

“No,” said Ricardo coolly. “I am making it all up as I go along, just to help you through the hottest part of the afternoon. So down he pitches his nose on the red embers, and up jumps our handsome Pedro and I at the same time, like two Jacks-in-the-box. He starts to bolt away, with his head over his shoulder, and I, hardly knowing what I was doing, spring on his back. I had the sense to get my hands round his neck at once, and it's about all I could do to lock my fingers tight under his jaw. You saw the beauty's neck, didn't you? Hard as iron, too. Down we both went. Seeing this the governor puts his revolver in his pocket.

“‘Tie his legs together, sir,’ I yell. ‘I'm trying to strangle him.’

“There was a lot of their fibre-lines lying about. I gave him a last squeeze and then got up.

“‘I might have shot you,’ says the governor, quite concerned.

“‘But you are glad to have saved a cartridge, sir,’ I tell him.

“My jump did save it. It wouldn't have done to let him get away in the dark like that, and have the beauty dodging around in the bushes, perhaps, with the rusty flint-lock gun they had. The governor owned up that the jump was the correct thing.

“‘But he isn't dead,’ says he, bending over him.

“Might as well hope to strangle an ox. We made haste to tie his elbows back, and then, before he came to himself, we dragged him to a small tree, sat him up, and bound him to it, not by the waist but by the neck — some twenty turns of small line round his throat and the trunk, finished off with a reef-knot under his ear. Next thing we did was to attend to the honourable Antonio, who was making a great smell frizzling his face on the red coals. We pushed and rolled him into the creek, and left the rest to the alligators.

“I was tired. That little scrap took it out of me something awful. The governor hadn't turned a hair. That's where a gentleman has the pull of you. He don't get excited. No gentleman does — or hardly ever. I fell asleep all of a sudden and left him smoking by the fire I had made up, his railway rug round his legs, as calm as if he were sitting in a first-class carriage. We hardly spoke ten words to each other after it was over, and from that day to this we have never talked of the business. I wouldn't have known he remembered it if he hadn't alluded to it when talking with you the other day — you know, with regard to Pedro.”

“It surprised you, didn't it? That's why I am giving you this yarn of how he came to be with us, like a sort of dog — dashed sight more useful, though. You know how he

can trot around with trays? Well, he could bring down an ox with his fist, at a word from the boss, just as cleverly. And fond of the governor! Oh, my word! More than any dog is of any man.”

Schomberg squared his chest.

“Oh, and that’s one of the things I wanted to mention to Mr. Jones,” he said. “It’s unpleasant to have that fellow round the house so early. He sits on the stairs at the back for hours before he is needed here, and frightens people so that the service suffers. The Chinamen — ”

Ricardo nodded and raised his hand.

“When I first saw him he was fit to frighten a grizzly bear, let alone a Chinaman. He’s become civilized now to what he once was. Well, that morning, first thing on opening my eyes, I saw him sitting there, tied up by the neck to the tree. He was blinking. We spent the day watching the sea, and we actually made out the schooner working to windward, which showed that she had given us up. Good! When the sun rose again, I took a squint at our Pedro. He wasn’t blinking. He was rolling his eyes, all white one minute and black the next, and his tongue was hanging out a yard. Being tied up short by the neck like this would daunt the arch devil himself — in time — in time, mind! I don’t know but that even a real gentleman would find it difficult to keep a stiff lip to the end. Presently we went to work getting our boat ready. I was busying myself setting up the mast, when the governor passes the remark:

“‘I think he wants to say something.’

“I had heard a sort of croaking going on for some time, only I wouldn’t take any notice; but then I got out of the boat and went up to him, with some water. His eyes were red — red and black and half out of his head. He drank all the water I gave him, but he hadn’t much to say for himself. I walked back to the governor.

“‘He asks for a bullet in his head before we go,’ I said. I wasn’t at all pleased.

“‘Oh, that’s out of the question altogether,’ says the governor.

“He was right there. Only four shots left, and ninety miles of wild coast to put behind us before coming to the first place where you could expect to buy revolver cartridges.

“‘Anyhow,’ I tells him, ‘he wants to be killed some way or other, as a favour.’

“And then I go on setting up the boat’s mast. I didn’t care much for the notion of butchering a man bound hand and foot and fastened by the neck besides. I had a knife then — the honourable Antonio’s knife; and that knife is this knife.

“Ricardo gave his leg a resounding slap.

“First spoil in my new life,” he went on with harsh joviality. “The dodge of carrying it down there I learned later. I carried it stuck in my belt that day. No, I hadn’t much stomach for the job; but when you work with a gentleman of the real right sort you may depend on your feelings being seen through your skin. Says the governor suddenly:

“‘It may even be looked upon as his right’ — you hear a gentleman speaking there? — ’but what do you think of taking him with us in the boat?’

“And the governor starts arguing that the beggar would be useful in working our way along the coast. We could get rid of him before coming to the first place that was a little civilized. I didn’t want much talking over. Out I scrambled from the boat.

“‘Ay, but will he be manageable, sir?’

“‘Oh, yes. He’s daunted. Go on, cut him loose — I take the responsibility.’

“‘Right you are, sir.’

“He sees me come along smartly with his brother’s knife in my hand — I wasn’t thinking how it looked from his side of the fence, you know — and jiminy, it nearly killed him! He stared like a crazed bullock and began to sweat and twitch all over, something amazing. I was so surprised, that I stopped to look at him. The drops were pouring over his eyebrows, down his beard, off his nose — and he gurgled. Then it struck me that he couldn’t see what was in my mind. By favour or by right he didn’t like to die when it came to it; not in that way, anyhow. When I stepped round to get at the lashing, he let out a sort of soft bellow. Thought I was going to stick him from behind, I guess. I cut all the turns with one slash, and he went over on his side, flop, and started kicking with his tied legs. Laugh! I don’t know what there was so funny about it, but I fairly shouted. What between my laughing and his wriggling, I had a job in cutting him free. As soon as he could feel his limbs he makes for the bank, where the governor was standing, crawls up to him on his hands and knees, and embraces his legs. Gratitude, eh? You could see that being allowed to live suited that chap down to the ground. The governor gets his legs away from him gently and just mutters to me:

“‘Let’s be off. Get him into the boat.’

“It was not difficult,” continued Ricardo, after eyeing Schomberg fixedly for a moment. “He was ready enough to get into the boat, and — here he is. He would let himself be chopped into small pieces — with a smile, mind; with a smile! — for the governor. I don’t know about him doing that much for me; but pretty near, pretty near. I did the tying up and the untying, but he could see who was the boss. And then he knows a gentleman. A dog knows a gentleman — any dog. It’s only some foreigners that don’t know; and nothing can teach them, either.”

“And you mean to say,” asked Schomberg, disregarding what might have been annoying for himself in the emphasis of the final remark, “you mean to say that you left steady employment at good wages for a life like this?”

“There!” began Ricardo quietly. “That’s just what a man like you would say. You are that tame! I follow a gentleman. That ain’t the same thing as to serve an employer. They give you wages as they’d fling a bone to a dog, and they expect you to be grateful. It’s worse than slavery. You don’t expect a slave that’s bought for money to be grateful. And if you sell your work — what is it but selling your own self? You’ve got so many days to live and you sell them one after another. Hey? Who can pay me enough for my life? Ay! But they throw at you your week’s money and expect you to say ‘thank you’ before you pick it up.”

He mumbled some curses, directed at employers generally, as it seemed, then blazed out:

“Work be damned! I ain’t a dog walking on its hind legs for a bone; I am a man who’s following a gentleman. There’s a difference which you will never understand, Mr. Tame Schomberg.”

He yawned slightly. Schomberg, preserving a military stiffness reinforced by a slight frown, had allowed his thoughts to stray away. They were busy detailing the image of a young girl — absent — gone — stolen from him. He became enraged. There was that rascal looking at him insolently. If the girl had not been shamefully decoyed away from him, he would not have allowed anyone to look at him insolently. He would have made nothing of hitting that rogue between the eyes. Afterwards he would have kicked the other without hesitation. He saw himself doing it; and in sympathy with this glorious vision Schomberg’s right foot, and arm moved convulsively.

At this moment he came out of his sudden reverie to note with alarm the wide-awake curiosity of Mr. Ricardo’s stare.

“And so you go like this about the world, gambling,” he remarked inanely, to cover his confusion. But Ricardo’s stare did not change its character, and he continued vaguely:

“Here and there and everywhere.” He pulled himself together, squared his shoulders. “Isn’t it very precarious?” he said firmly.

The word precarious — seemed to be effective, because Ricardo’s eyes lost their dangerously interested expression.

“No, not so bad,” Ricardo said, with indifference. “It’s my opinion that men will gamble as long as they have anything to put on a card. Gamble? That’s nature. What’s life itself? You never know what may turn up. The worst of it is that you never can tell exactly what sort of cards you are holding yourself. What’s trumps? — that is the question. See? Any man will gamble if only he’s given a chance, for anything or everything. You too — ”

“I haven’t touched a card now for twenty years,” said Schomberg in an austere tone.

“Well, if you got your living that way you would be no worse than you are now, selling drinks to people — beastly beer and spirits, rotten stuff fit to make an old he-goat yell if you poured it down its throat. Pooh! I can’t stand the confounded liquor. Never could. A whiff of neat brandy in a glass makes me feel sick. Always did. If everybody was like me, liquor would be going a-begging. You think it’s funny in a man, don’t you?”

Schomberg made a vague gesture of toleration. Ricardo hitched up his chair and settled his elbow afresh on the table.

“French siros I must say I do like. Saigon’s the place for them. I see you have siros in the bar. Hang me if I ain’t getting dry, conversing like this with you. Come, Mr. Schomberg, be hospitable, as the governor says.”

Schomberg rose and walked with dignity to the counter. His footsteps echoed loudly on the floor of polished boards. He took down a bottle, labelled “Sirop de Groseille.” The little sounds he made, the clink of glass, the gurgling of the liquid, the pop of the soda-water cork had a preternatural sharpness. He came back carrying a pink and glistening tumbler. Mr. Ricardo had followed his movements with oblique, coyly

expectant yellow eyes, like a cat watching the preparation of a saucer of milk, and the satisfied sound after he had drunk might have been a slightly modified form of purring, very soft and deep in his throat. It affected Schomberg unpleasantly as another example of something inhuman in those men wherein lay the difficulty of dealing with them. A spectre, a cat, an ape — there was a pretty association for a mere man to remonstrate with, he reflected with an inward shudder; for Schomberg had been overpowered, as it were, by his imagination, and his reason could not react against that fanciful view of his guests. And it was not only their appearance. The morals of Mr. Ricardo seemed to him to be pretty much the morals of a cat. Too much. What sort of argument could a mere man offer to a . . . or to a spectre, either! What the morals of a spectre could be, Schomberg had no idea. Something dreadful, no doubt. Compassion certainly had no place in them. As to the ape — well, everybody knew what an ape was. It had no morals. Nothing could be more hopeless.

Outwardly, however, having picked up the cigar which he had laid aside to get the drink, with his thick fingers, one of them ornamented by a gold ring, Schomberg smoked with moody composure. Facing him, Ricardo blinked slowly for a time, then closed his eyes altogether, with the placidity of the domestic cat dozing on the hearth-rug. In another moment he opened them very wide, and seemed surprised to see Schomberg there.

“You’re having a very slack time today, aren’t you?” he observed. “But then this whole town is confoundedly slack, anyhow; and I’ve never faced such a slack party at a table before. Come eleven o’clock, they begin to talk of breaking up. What’s the matter with them? Want to go to bed so early, or what?”

“I reckon you don’t lose a fortune by their wanting to go to bed,” said Schomberg, with sombre sarcasm.

“No,” admitted Ricardo, with a grin that stretched his thin mouth from ear to ear, giving a sudden glimpse of his white teeth. “Only, you see, when I once start, I would play for nuts, for parched peas, for any rubbish. I would play them for their souls. But these Dutchmen aren’t any good. They never seem to get warmed up properly, win or lose. I’ve tried them both ways, too. Hang them for a beggarly, bloodless lot of animated cucumbers!”

“And if anything out of the way was to happen, they would be just as cool in locking you and your gentleman up,” Schomberg snarled unpleasantly.

“Indeed!” said Ricardo slowly, taking Schomberg’s measure with his eyes. “And what about you?”

“You talk mighty big,” burst out the hotel-keeper. “You talk of ranging all over the world, and doing great things, and taking fortune by the scruff of the neck, but here you stick at this miserable business!”

“It isn’t much of a lay — that’s a fact,” admitted Ricardo unexpectedly.

Schomberg was red in the face with audacity.

“I call it paltry,” he spluttered.

“That’s how it looks. Can’t call it anything else.” Ricardo seemed to be in an accommodating mood. “I should be ashamed of it myself, only you see the governor is subject to fits — ”

“Fits!” Schomberg cried out, but in a low tone. “You don’t say so!” He exulted inwardly, as if this disclosure had in some way diminished the difficulty of the situation. “Fits! That’s a serious thing, isn’t it? You ought to take him to the civil hospital — a lovely place.”

Ricardo nodded slightly, with a faint grin.

“Serious enough. Regular fits of laziness, I call them. Now and then he lays down on me like this, and there’s no moving him. If you think I like it, you’re a long way out. Generally speaking, I can talk him over. I know how to deal with a gentleman. I am no daily-bread slave. But when he has said, ‘Martin, I am bored,’ then look out! There’s nothing to do but to shut up, confound it!”

Schomberg, very much cast down, had listened open-mouthed.

“What’s the cause of it?” he asked. “Why is he like this? I don’t understand.”

“I think I do,” said Ricardo. “A gentleman, you know, is not such a simple person as you or I; and not so easy to manage, either. If only I had something to lever him out with!”

“What do you mean, to lever him out with?” muttered Schomberg hopelessly.

Ricardo was impatient with this denseness.

“Don’t you understand English? Look here! I couldn’t make this billiard table move an inch if I talked to it from now till the end of days — could I? Well, the governor is like that, too, when the fits are on him. He’s bored. Nothing’s worthwhile, nothing’s good enough, that’s mere sense. But if I saw a capstan bar lying about here, I would soon manage to shift that billiard table of yours a good many inches. And that’s all there is to it.”

He rose noiselessly, stretched himself, supple and stealthy, with curious sideways movements of his head and unexpected elongations of his thick body, glanced out of the corners of his eyes in the direction of the door, and finally leaned back against the table, folding his arms on his breast comfortably, in a completely human attitude.

“That’s another thing you can tell a gentleman by — his freakishness. A gentleman ain’t accountable to nobody, any more than a tramp on the roads. He ain’t got to keep time. The governor got like this once in a one-horse Mexican pueblo on the uplands, away from everywhere. He lay all day long in a dark room — ”

“Drunk?” This word escaped Schomberg by inadvertence at which he became frightened. But the devoted secretary seemed to find it natural.

“No, that never comes on together with this kind of fit. He just lay there full length on a mat, while a ragged, bare-legged boy that he had picked up in the street sat in the patio, between two oleanders near the open door of his room, strumming on a guitar and singing tristes to him from morning to night. You know tristes — twang, twang, twang, aouh, hoo! Chroo, yah!”

Schomberg uplifted his hands in distress. This tribute seemed to flatter Ricardo. His mouth twitched grimly.

“Like that — enough to give colic to an ostrich, eh? Awful. Well, there was a cook there who loved me — an old fat, Negro woman with spectacles. I used to hide in the kitchen and turn her to, to make me dulces — sweet things, you know, mostly eggs and sugar — to pass the time away. I am like a kid for sweet things. And, by the way, why don’t you ever have a pudding at your tablydott, Mr. Schomberg? Nothing but fruit, morning, noon, and night. Sickening! What do you think a fellow is — a wasp?”

Schomberg disregarded the injured tone.

“And how long did that fit, as you call it, last?” he asked anxiously.

“Weeks, months, years, centuries, it seemed to me,” returned Mr. Ricardo with feeling. “Of an evening the governor would stroll out into the sala and fritter his life away playing cards with the juez of the place — a little Dago with a pair of black whiskers — ekarty, you know, a quick French game, for small change. And the comandante, a one-eyed, half-Indian, flat-nosed ruffian, and I, we had to stand around and bet on their hands. It was awful!”

“Awful,” echoed Schomberg, in a Teutonic throaty tone of despair. “Look here, I need your rooms.”

“To be sure. I have been thinking that for some time past,” said Ricardo indifferently.

“I was mad when I listened to you. This must end!”

“I think you are mad yet,” said Ricardo, not even unfolding his arms or shifting his attitude an inch. He lowered his voice to add: “And if I thought you had been to the police, I would tell Pedro to catch you round the waist and break your fat neck by jerking your head backward — snap! I saw him do it to a big buck nigger who was flourishing a razor in front of the governor. It can be done. You hear a low crack, that’s all — and the man drops down like a limp rag.”

Not even Ricardo’s head, slightly inclined on the left shoulder, had moved; but when he ceased the greenish irises which had been staring out of doors glided into the corners of his eyes nearest to Schomberg and stayed there with a coyly voluptuous expression.

Chapter 8

Schomberg felt desperation, that lamentable substitute for courage, ooze out of him. It was not so much the threat of death as the weirdly circumstantial manner of its declaration which affected him. A mere “I’ll murder you,” however ferocious in tone, and earnest, in purpose, he could have faced; but before this novel mode of speech and procedure, his imagination being very sensitive to the unusual, he collapsed as if indeed his moral neck had been broken — snap!

“Go to the police? Of course not. Never dreamed of it. Too late now. I’ve let myself be mixed up in this. You got my consent while I wasn’t myself. I explained it to you at the time.”

Ricardo's eye glided gently off Schomberg to stare far away.

"Ay! Some trouble with a girl. But that's nothing to us."

"Naturally. What I say is, what's the good of all that savage talk to me?" A bright argument occurred to him. "It's out of proportion; for even if I were fool enough to go to the police now, there's nothing serious to complain about. It would only mean deportation for you. They would put you on board the first west-bound steamer to Singapore." He had become animated. "Out of this to the devil," he added between his teeth for his own private satisfaction.

Ricardo made no comment, and gave no sign of having heard a single word. This discouraged Schomberg, who had looked up hopefully.

"Why do you want to stick here?" he cried. "It can't pay you people to fool around like this. Didn't you worry just now about moving your governor? Well, the police would move him for you; and from Singapore you can go on to the east coast of Africa."

"I'll be hanged if the fellow isn't up to that silly trick!" was Ricardo's comment, spoken in an ominous tone which recalled Schomberg to the realities of his position.

"No! No!" he protested. "It's a manner of speaking. Of course I wouldn't."

"I think that trouble about the girl has really muddled your brains, Mr. Schomberg. Believe me, you had better part friends with us; for, deportation or no deportation, you'll be seeing one of us turning up before long to pay you off for any nasty dodge you may be hatching in that fat head of yours."

"Gott im Himmel!" groaned Schomberg. "Will nothing move him out? Will he stop here immer — I mean always? Suppose I were to make it worth your while, couldn't you —"

"No," Ricardo interrupted. "I couldn't, unless I had something to lever him out with. I've told you that before."

"An inducement?" muttered Schomberg.

"Ay. The east coast of Africa isn't good enough. He told me the other day that it will have to wait till he is ready for it; and he may not be ready for a long time, because the east coast can't run away, and no one is likely to run off with it."

These remarks, whether considered as truisms or as depicting Mr. Jones's mental state, were distinctly discouraging to the long-suffering Schomberg; but there is truth in the well-known saying that places the darkest hour before the dawn. The sound of words, apart from the context, has its power; and these two words, 'run off,' had a special affinity to the hotel-keeper's, haunting idea. It was always present in his brain, and now it came forward evoked by a purely fortuitous expression. No, nobody could run off with a continent; but Heyst had run off with the girl!

Ricardo could have had no conception of the cause of Schomberg's changed expression. Yet it was noticeable enough to interest him so much that he stopped the careless swinging of his leg and said, looking at the hotel-keeper:

"There's not much use arguing against that sort of talk — is there?"

Schomberg was not listening.

"I could put you on another track," he said slowly, and stopped, as if suddenly choked by an unholy emotion of intense eagerness combined with fear of failure. Ricardo waited, attentive, yet not without a certain contempt.

"On the track of a man!" Schomberg uttered convulsively, and paused again, consulting his rage and his conscience.

"The man in the moon, eh?" suggested Ricardo, in a jeering murmur.

Schomberg shook his head.

"It would be nearly as safe to rook him as if he were the Man in the moon. You go and try. It isn't so very far."

He reflected. These men were thieves and murderers as well as gamblers. Their fitness for purposes of vengeance was appallingly complete. But he preferred not to think of it in detail. He put it to himself summarily that he would be paying Heyst out and would, at the same time, relieve himself of these men's oppression. He had only to let loose his natural gift for talking scandalously about his fellow creatures. And in this case his great practice in it was assisted by hate, which, like love, has an eloquence of its own. With the utmost ease he portrayed for Ricardo, now seriously attentive, a Heyst fattened by years of private and public rapines, the murderer of Morrison, the swindler of many shareholders, a wonderful mixture of craft and impudence, of deep purposes and simple wiles, of mystery and futility. In this exercise of his natural function Schomberg revived, the colour coming back to his face, loquacious, florid, eager, his manliness set off by the military bearing.

"That's the exact story. He was seen hanging about this part of the world for years, spying into everybody's business: but I am the only one who has seen through him from the first — contemptible, double-faced, stick-at-nothing, dangerous fellow."

"Dangerous, is he?"

Schomberg came to himself at the sound of Ricardo's voice.

"Well, you know what I mean," he said uneasily. "A lying, circumventing, soft-spoken, polite, stuck-up rascal. Nothing open about him."

Mr Ricardo had slipped off the table, and was prowling about the room in an oblique, noiseless manner. He flashed a grin at Schomberg in passing, and a snarling:

"Ah! H'm!"

"Well, what more dangerous do you want?" argued Schomberg. "He's in no way a fighting man, I believe," he added negligently.

"And you say he has been living alone there?"

"Like the man in the moon," answered Schomberg readily. "There's no one that cares a rap what becomes of him. He has been lying low, you understand, after bagging all that plunder."

"Plunder, eh? Why didn't he go home with it?" inquired Ricardo.

The henchman of plain Mr. Jones was beginning to think that this was something worth looking into. And he was pursuing truth in the manner of men of sounder morality and purer intentions than his own; that is he pursued it in the light of his own experience and prejudices. For facts, whatever their origin (and God only knows where

they come from), can be only tested by our own particular suspicions. Ricardo was suspicious all round. Schomberg, such is the tonic of recovered self-esteem, Schomberg retorted fearlessly:

“Go home? Why don’t you go home? To hear your talk, you must have made a pretty considerable pile going round winning people’s money. You ought to be ready by this time.”

Ricardo stopped to look at Schomberg with surprise.

“You think yourself very clever, don’t you?” he said.

Schomberg just then was so conscious of being clever that the snarling irony left him unmoved. There was positively a smile in his noble Teutonic beard, the first smile for weeks. He was in a felicitous vein.

“How do you know that he wasn’t thinking of going home? As a matter of fact, he was on his way home.”

“And how do I know that you are not amusing yourself by spinning out a blamed fairy tale?” interrupted Ricardo roughly. “I wonder at myself listening to the silly rot!”

Schomberg received this turn of temper unmoved. He did not require to be very subtly observant to notice that he had managed to arouse some sort of feeling, perhaps of greed, in Ricardo’s breast.

“You won’t believe me? Well! You can ask anybody that comes here if that — that Swede hadn’t got as far as this house on his way home. Why should he turn up here if not for that? You ask anybody.”

“Ask, indeed!” returned the other. “Catch me asking at large about a man I mean to drop on! Such jobs must be done on the quiet — or not at all.”

The peculiar intonation of the last phrase touched the nape of Schomberg’s neck with a chill. He cleared his throat slightly and looked away as though he had heard something indelicate. Then, with a jump as it were:

“Of course he didn’t tell me. Is it likely? But haven’t I got eyes? Haven’t I got my common sense to tell me? I can see through people. By the same token, he called on the Tesmans. Why did he call on the Tesmans two days running, eh? You don’t know? You can’t tell?”

He waited complacently till Ricardo had finished swearing quite openly at him for a confounded chatterer, and then went on:

“A fellow doesn’t go to a counting-house in business hours for a chat about the weather, two days running. Then why? To close his account with them one day, and to get his money out the next! Clear, what?”

Ricardo, with his trick of looking one way and moving another approached Schomberg slowly.

“To get his money?” he purred.

“Gewiss,” snapped Schomberg with impatient superiority. “What else? That is, only the money he had with the Tesmans. What he has buried or put away on the island, devil only knows. When you think of the lot of hard cash that passed through that man’s hands, for wages and stores and all that — and he’s just a cunning thief, I

tell you.” Ricardo’s hard stare discomposed the hotel-keeper, and he added in an embarrassed tone: “I mean a common, sneaking thief — no account at all. And he calls himself a Swedish baron, too! Tfui!”

“He’s a baron, is he? That foreign nobility ain’t much,” commented Mr. Ricardo seriously. “And then what? He hung about here!”

“Yes, he hung about,” said Schomberg, making a wry mouth. “He — hung about. That’s it. Hung — ”

His voice died out. Curiosity was depicted in Ricardo’s countenance.

“Just like that; for nothing? And then turned about and went back to that island again?”

“And went back to that island again,” Schomberg echoed lifelessly, fixing his gaze on the floor.

“What’s the matter with you?” asked Ricardo with genuine surprise. “What is it?”

Schomberg, without looking up, made an impatient gesture. His face was crimson, and he kept it lowered. Ricardo went back to the point.

“Well, but how do you account for it? What was his reason? What did he go back to the island for?”

“Honeymoon!” spat out Schomberg viciously.

Perfectly still, his eyes downcast, he suddenly, with no preliminary stir, hit the table with his fist a blow which caused the utterly unprepared Ricardo to leap aside. And only then did Schomberg look up with a dull, resentful expression.

Ricardo stared hard for a moment, spun on his heel, walked to the end of the room, came back smartly, and muttered a profound “Ay! Ay!” above Schomberg’s rigid head. That the hotel-keeper was capable of a great moral effort was proved by a gradual return of his severe, Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve manner.

“Ay, ay!” repeated Ricardo more deliberately than before, and as if after a further survey of the circumstances, “I wish I hadn’t asked you, or that you had told me a lie. It don’t suit me to know that there’s a woman mixed up in this affair. What’s she like? It’s the girl you — ”

“Leave off!” muttered Schomberg, utterly pitiful behind his stiff military front.

“Ay, ay!” Ricardo ejaculated for the third time, more and more enlightened and perplexed. “Can’t bear to talk about it — so bad as that? And yet I would bet she isn’t a miracle to look at.”

Schomberg made a gesture as if he didn’t know, as if he didn’t care. Then he squared his shoulders and frowned at vacancy.

“Swedish baron — h’m!” Ricardo continued meditatively. “I believe the governor would think that business worth looking up, quite, if I put it to him properly. The governor likes a duel, if you will call it so; but I don’t know a man that can stand up to him on the square. Have you ever seen a cat play with a mouse? It’s a pretty sight!”

Ricardo, with his voluptuously gleaming eyes and the coy expression, looked so much like a cat that Schomberg would have felt all the alarm of a mouse if other feelings had not had complete possession of his breast.

“There are no lies between you and me,” he said, more steadily than he thought he could speak.

“What’s the good now? He funks women. In that Mexican pueblo where we lay grounded on our beef-bones, so to speak, I used to go to dances of an evening. The girls there would ask me if the English caballero in the posada was a monk in disguise, or if he had taken a vow to the sancissima madre not to speak to a woman, or whether — You can imagine what fairly free-spoken girls will ask when they come to the point of not caring what they say; and it used to vex me. Yes, the governor funks facing women.”

“One woman?” interjected Schomberg in guttural tones.

“One may be more awkward to deal with than two, or two hundred, for that matter. In a place that’s full of women you needn’t look at them unless you like; but if you go into a room where there is only one woman, young or old, pretty or ugly, you have got to face her. And, unless you are after her, then — the governor is right enough — she’s in the way.”

“Why notice them?” muttered Schomberg. “What can they do?”

“Make a noise, if nothing else,” opined Mr. Ricardo curtly, with the distaste of a man whose path is a path of silence; for indeed, nothing is more odious than a noise when one is engaged in a weighty and absorbing card game. “Noise, noise, my friend,” he went on forcibly; “confounded screeching about something or other, and I like it no more than the governor does. But with the governor there’s something else besides. He can’t stand them at all.”

He paused to reflect on this psychological phenomenon, and as no philosopher was at hand to tell him that there is no strong sentiment without some terror, as there is no real religion without a little fetishism, he emitted his own conclusion, which surely could not go to the root of the matter.

“I’m hanged if I don’t think they are to him what liquor is to me. Brandy — pah!”

He made a disgusted face, and produced a genuine shudder. Schomberg listened to him in wonder. It looked as if the very scoundrelism, of that — that Swede would protect him; the spoil of his iniquity standing between the thief and the retribution.

“That’s so, old buck.” Ricardo broke the silence after contemplating Schomberg’s mute dejection with a sort of sympathy. “I don’t think this trick will work.”

“But that’s silly,” whispered the man deprived of the vengeance which he had seemed already to hold in his hand, by a mysterious and exasperating idiosyncrasy.

“Don’t you set yourself to judge a gentleman.” Ricardo without anger administered a moody rebuke. “Even I can’t understand the governor thoroughly. And I am an Englishman and his follower. No, I don’t think I care to put it before him, sick as I am of staying here.”

Ricardo could not be more sick of staying than Schomberg was of seeing him stay. Schomberg believed so firmly in the reality of Heyst as created by his own power of false inferences, of his hate, of his love of scandal, that he could not contain a stifled

cry of conviction as sincere as most of our convictions, the disguised servants of our passions, can appear at a supreme moment.

"It would have been like going to pick up a nugget of a thousand pounds, or two or three times as much, for all I know. No trouble, no — "

"The petticoat's the trouble," Ricardo struck in.

He had resumed his noiseless, feline, oblique prowling, in which an observer would have detected a new character of excitement, such as a wild animal of the cat species, anxious to make a spring, might betray. Schomberg saw nothing. It would probably have cheered his drooping spirits; but in a general way he preferred not to look at Ricardo. Ricardo, however, with one of his slanting, gliding, restless glances, observed the bitter smile on Schomberg's bearded lips — the unmistakable smile of ruined hopes.

"You are a pretty unforgiving sort of chap," he said, stopping for a moment with an air of interest. "Hang me if I ever saw anybody look so disappointed! I bet you would send black plague to that island if you only knew how — eh, what? Plague too good for them? Ha, ha, ha!"

He bent down to stare at Schomberg who sat unstirring with stony eyes and set features, and apparently deaf to the rasping derision of that laughter so close to his red fleshy ear.

"Black plague too good for them, ha, ha!" Ricardo pressed the point on the tormented hotel-keeper. Schomberg kept his eyes down obstinately.

"I don't wish any harm to the girl — " he muttered.

"But did she bolt from you? A fair bilk? Come!"

"Devil only knows what that villainous Swede had done to her — what he promised her, how he frightened her. She couldn't have cared for him, I know." Schomberg's vanity clung to the belief in some atrocious, extraordinary means of seduction employed by Heyst. "Look how he bewitched that poor Morrison," he murmured.

"Ah, Morrison — got all his money, what?"

"Yes — and his life."

"Terrible fellow, that Swedish baron! How is one to get at him?"

Schomberg exploded.

"Three against one! Are you shy? Do you want me to give you a letter of introduction?"

"You ought to look at yourself in a glass," Ricardo said quietly. "Dash me if you don't get a stroke of some kind presently. And this is the fellow who says women can do nothing! That one will do for you, unless you manage to forget her."

"I wish I could," Schomberg admitted earnestly. "And it's all the doing of that Swede. I don't get enough sleep, Mr. Ricardo. And then, to finish me off, you gentlemen turn up . . . as if I hadn't enough worry."

"That's done you good," suggested the secretary with ironic seriousness. "Takes your mind off that silly trouble. At your age too."

He checked himself, as if in pity, and changing his tone:

"I would really like to oblige you while doing a stroke of business at the same time."

“A good stroke,” insisted Schomberg, as if it were mechanically. In his simplicity he was not able to give up the idea which had entered his head. An idea must be driven out by another idea, and with Schomberg ideas were rare and therefore tenacious. “Minted gold,” he murmured with a sort of anguish.

Such an expressive combination of words was not without effect upon Ricardo. Both these men were amenable to the influence of verbal suggestions. The secretary of “plain Mr. Jones” sighed and murmured.

“Yes. But how is one to get at it?”

“Being three to one,” said Schomberg, “I suppose you could get it for the asking.”

“One would think the fellow lived next door,” Ricardo growled impatiently. “Hang it all, can’t you understand a plain question? I have asked you the way.”

Schomberg seemed to revive.

“The way?”

The torpor of deceived hopes underlying his superficial changes of mood had been pricked by these words which seemed pointed with purpose.

“The way is over the water, of course,” said the hotel-keeper. “For people like you, three days in a good, big boat is nothing. It’s no more than a little outing, a bit of a change. At this season the Java Sea is a pond. I have an excellent, safe boat — a ship’s life-boat — carry thirty, let alone three, and a child could handle her. You wouldn’t get a wet face at this time of the year. You might call it a pleasure-trip.”

“And yet, having this boat, you didn’t go after her yourself — or after him? Well, you are a fine fellow for a disappointed lover.”

Schomberg gave a start at the suggestion.

“I am not three men,” he said sulkily, as the shortest answer of the several he could have given.

“Oh, I know your sort,” Ricardo let fall negligently. “You are like most people — or perhaps just a little more peaceable than the rest of the buying and selling gang that bosses this rotten show. Well, well, you respectable citizen,” he went on, “let us go thoroughly into the matter.”

When Schomberg had been made to understand that Mr. Jones’s henchman was ready to discuss, in his own words, “this boat of yours, with courses and distances,” and such concrete matters of no good augury to that villainous Swede, he recovered his soldierly bearing, squared his shoulders, and asked in his military manner:

“You wish, then, to proceed with the business?”

Ricardo nodded. He had a great mind to, he said. A gentleman had to be humoured as much as possible; but he must be managed, too, on occasions, for his own good. And it was the business of the right sort of “follower” to know the proper time and the proper methods of that delicate part of his duty. Having exposed this theory Ricardo proceeded to the application.

“I’ve never actually lied to him,” he said, “and I ain’t going to now. I shall just say nothing about the girl. He will have to get over the shock the best he can. Hang it all! Too much humouring won’t do here.”

“Funny thing,” Schomberg observed crisply.

“Is it? Ay, you wouldn’t mind taking a woman by the throat in some dark corner and nobody by, I bet!”

Ricardo’s dreadful, vicious, cat-like readiness to get his claws out at any moment startled Schomberg as usual. But it was provoking too.

“And you?” he defended himself. “Don’t you want me to believe you are up to anything?”

“I, my boy? Oh, yes. I am not that gentleman; neither are you. Take ‘em by the throat or chuck ‘em under the chin is all one to me — almost,” affirmed Ricardo, with something obscurely ironical in his complacency. “Now, as to this business. A three days’ jaunt in a good boat isn’t a thing to frighten people like us. You are right, so far; but there are other details.”

Schomberg was ready enough to enter into details. He explained that he had a small plantation, with a fairly habitable hut on it, on Madura. He proposed that his guest should start from town in his boat, as if going for an excursion to that rural spot. The custom-house people on the quay were used to see his boat go off on such trips.

From Madura, after some repose and on a convenient day, Mr. Jones and party would make the real start. It would all be plain sailing. Schomberg undertook to provision the boat. The greatest hardship the voyagers need apprehend would be a mild shower of rain. At that season of the year there were no serious thunderstorms.

Schomberg’s heart began to thump as he saw himself nearing his vengeance. His speech was thick but persuasive.

“No risk at all — none whatever.”

Ricardo dismissed these assurances of safety with an impatient gesture. He was thinking of other risks.

“The getting away from here is all right; but we may be sighted at sea, and that may bring awkwardness later on. A ship’s boat with three white men in her, knocking about out of sight of land, is bound to make talk. Are we likely to be seen on our way?”

“No, unless by native craft,” said Schomberg.

Ricardo nodded, satisfied. Both these white men looked on native life as a mere play of shadows. A play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs. No. Native craft did not count, of course. It was an empty, solitary part of the sea, Schomberg expounded further. Only the Ternate mail-boat crossed that region about the eighth of every month, regularly — nowhere near the island though. Rigid, his voice hoarse, his heart thumping, his mind concentrated on the success of his plan, the hotel-keeper multiplied words, as if to keep as many of them as possible between himself and the murderous aspect of his purpose.

“So, if you gentlemen depart from my plantation quietly at sunset on the eighth — always best to make a start at night, with a land breeze — it’s a hundred to one — What am I saying? — it’s a thousand to one that no human eye will see you on the passage. All you’ve got to do is keep her heading north-east for, say, fifty hours;

perhaps not quite so long. There will always be draft enough to keep a boat moving; you may reckon on that; and then — ”

The muscles about his waist quivered under his clothes with eagerness, with impatience, and with something like apprehension, the true nature of which was not clear to him. And he did not want to investigate it. Ricardo regarded him steadily, with those dry eyes of his shining more like polished stones than living tissue.

“And then what?” he asked.

“And then — why, you will astonish der herr baron — ha, ha!”

Schomberg seemed to force the words and the laugh out of himself in a hoarse bass.

“And you believe he has all that plunder by him?” asked Ricardo, rather perfunctorily, because the fact seemed to him extremely probable when looked at all round by his acute mind.

Schomberg raised his hands and lowered them slowly.

“How can it be otherwise? He was going home, he was on his way, in this hotel. Ask people. Was it likely he would leave it behind him?”

Ricardo was thoughtful. Then, suddenly raising his head, he remarked:

“Steer north-east for fifty hours, eh? That’s not much of a sailing direction. I’ve heard of a port being missed before on better information. Can’t you say what sort of landfall a fellow may expect? But I suppose you have never seen that island yourself?”

Schomberg admitted that he had not seen it, in a tone in which a man congratulates himself on having escaped the contamination of an unsavoury experience. No, certainly not. He had never had any business to call there. But what of that? He could give Mr. Ricardo as good a sea-mark as anybody need wish for. He laughed nervously. Miss it! He defied anyone that came within forty miles of it to miss the retreat of that villainous Swede.

“What do you think of a pillar of smoke by day and a loom of fire at night? There’s a volcano in full blast near that island — enough to guide almost a blind man. What more do you want? An active volcano to steer by?”

These last words he roared out exultingly, then jumped up and glared. The door to the left of the bar had swung open, and Mrs. Schomberg, dressed for duty, stood facing him down the whole length of the room. She clung to the handle for a moment, then came in and glided to her place, where she sat down to stare straight before her, as usual.

Part 3

Chapter 1

Tropical nature had been kind to the failure of the commercial enterprise. The desolation of the headquarters of the Tropical Belt Coal Company had been screened from the side of the sea; from the side where prying eyes — if any were sufficiently interested, either in malice or in sorrow — could have noted the decaying bones of that once sanguine enterprise.

Heyst had been sitting among the bones buried so kindly in the grass of two wet seasons' growth. The silence of his surroundings, broken only by such sounds as a distant roll of thunder, the lash of rain through the foliage of some big trees, the noise of the wind tossing the leaves of the forest, and of the short seas breaking against the shore, favoured rather than hindered his solitary meditation.

A meditation is always — in a white man, at least — more or less an interrogative exercise. Heyst meditated in simple terms on the mystery of his actions; and he answered himself with the honest reflection:

“There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all.”

He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that this primeval ancestor is not easily suppressed. The oldest voice in the world is just the one that never ceases to speak. If anybody could have silenced its imperative echoes, it should have been Heyst's father, with his contemptuous, inflexible negation of all effort; but apparently he could not. There was in the son a lot of that first ancestor who, as soon as he could uplift his muddy frame from the celestial mould, started inspecting and naming the animals of that paradise which he was so soon to lose.

Action — the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth! The barbed hook, baited with the illusions of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations!

“And I, the son of my father, have been caught too, like the silliest fish of them all.” Heyst said to himself.

He suffered. He was hurt by the sight of his own life, which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness. He remembered always his last evening with his father. He remembered the thin features, the great mass of white hair, and the ivory complexion. A five-branched candlestick stood on a little table by the side of the easy chair. They had been talking a long time. The noises of the street had died out one by one, till at

last, in the moonlight, the London houses began to look like the tombs of an unvisited, unhonoured, cemetery of hopes.

He had listened. Then, after a silence, he had asked — for he was really young then: “Is there no guidance?”

His father was in an unexpectedly soft mood on that night, when the moon swam in a cloudless sky over the begrimed shadows of the town.

“You still believe in something, then?” he said in a clear voice, which had been growing feeble of late. “You believe in flesh and blood, perhaps? A full and equable contempt would soon do away with that, too. But since you have not attained to it, I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity. It is perhaps the least difficult — always remembering that you, too, if you are anything, are as pitiful as the rest, yet never expecting any pity for yourself.”

“What is one to do, then?” sighed the young man, regarding his father, rigid in the high-backed chair.

“Look on — make no sound,” were the last words of the man who had spent his life in blowing blasts upon a terrible trumpet which filled heaven and earth with ruins, while mankind went on its way unheeding.

That very night he died in his bed, so quietly that they found him in his usual attitude of sleep, lying on his side, one hand under his cheek, and his knees slightly bent. He had not even straightened his legs.

His son buried the silenced destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs. He observed that the death of that bitter contemner of life did not trouble the flow of life’s stream, where men and women go by thick as dust, revolving and jostling one another like figures cut out of cork and weighted with lead just sufficiently to keep them in their proudly upright posture.

After the funeral, Heyst sat alone, in the dusk, and his meditation took the form of a definite vision of the stream, of the fatuously jostling, nodding, spinning figures hurried irresistibly along, and giving no sign of being aware that the voice on the bank had been suddenly silenced . . . Yes. A few obituary notices generally insignificant and some grossly abusive. The son had read them all with mournful detachment.

“This is the hate and rage of their fear,” he thought to himself, “and also of wounded vanity. They shriek their little shriek as they fly past. I suppose I ought to hate him too . . .”

He became aware of his eyes being wet. It was not that the man was his father. For him it was purely a matter of hearsay which could not in itself cause this emotion. No! It was because he had looked at him so long that he missed him so much. The dead man had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride he determined not to enter it.

A few slow tears rolled down his face. The rooms, filling with shadows, seemed haunted by a melancholy, uneasy presence which could not express itself. The young man got up with a strange sense of making way for something impalpable that claimed

possession, went out of the house, and locked the door. A fortnight later he started on his travels — to “look on and never make a sound.”

The elder Heyst had left behind him a little money and a certain quantity of movable objects, such as books, tables, chairs, and pictures, which might have complained of heartless desertion after many years of faithful service; for there is a soul in things. Heyst, our Heyst, had often thought of them, reproachful and mute, shrouded and locked up in those rooms, far away in London with the sounds of the street reaching them faintly, and sometimes a little sunshine, when the blinds were pulled up and the windows opened from time to time in pursuance of his original instructions and later reminders. It seemed as if in his conception of a world not worth touching, and perhaps not substantial enough to grasp, these objects familiar to his childhood and his youth, and associated with the memory of an old man, were the only realities, something having an absolute existence. He would never have them sold, or even moved from the places they occupied when he looked upon them last. When he was advised from London that his lease had expired, and that the house, with some others as like it as two peas, was to be demolished, he was surprisingly distressed.

He had entered by then the broad, human path of inconsistencies. Already the Tropical Belt Coal Company was in existence. He sent instructions to have some of the things sent out to him at Samburan, just as any ordinary, credulous person would have done. They came, torn out from their long repose — a lot of books, some chairs and tables, his father’s portrait in oils, which surprised Heyst by its air of youth, because he remembered his father as a much older man; a lot of small objects, such as candlesticks, inkstands, and statuettes from his father’s study, which surprised him because they looked so old and so much worn.

The manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, unpacking them on the veranda in the shade besieged by a fierce sunshine, must have felt like a remorseful apostate before these relics. He handled them tenderly; and it was perhaps their presence there which attached him to the island when he woke up to the failure of his apostasy. Whatever the decisive reason, Heyst had remained where another would have been glad to be off. The excellent Davidson had discovered the fact without discovering the reason, and took a humane interest in Heyst’s strange existence, while at the same time his native delicacy kept him from intruding on the other’s whim of solitude. He could not possibly guess that Heyst, alone on the island, felt neither more nor less lonely than in any other place, desert or populous. Davidson’s concern was, if one may express it so, the danger of spiritual starvation; but this was a spirit which had renounced all outside nourishment, and was sustaining itself proudly on its own contempt of the usual coarse ailments which life offers to the common appetites of men.

Neither was Heyst’s body in danger of starvation, as Schomberg had so confidently asserted. At the beginning of the company’s operations the island had been provisioned in a manner which had outlasted the need. Heyst did not need to fear hunger; and his very loneliness had not been without some alleviation. Of the crowd of imported

Chinese labourers, one at least had remained in Samburan, solitary and strange, like a swallow left behind at the migrating season of his tribe.

Wang was not a common coolie. He had been a servant to white men before. The agreement between him and Heyst consisted in the exchange of a few words on the day when the last batch of the mine coolies was leaving Samburan. Heyst, leaning over the balustrade of the veranda, was looking on, as calm in appearance as though he had never departed from the doctrine that this world, for the wise, is nothing but an amusing spectacle. Wang came round the house, and standing below, raised up his yellow, thin face.

"All finished?" he asked. Heyst nodded slightly from above, glancing towards the jetty. A crowd of blue-clad figures with yellow faces and calves was being hustled down into the boats of the chartered steamer lying well out, like a painted ship on a painted sea; painted in crude colours, without shadows, without feeling, with brutal precision.

"You had better hurry up if you don't want to be left behind."

But the Chinaman did not move.

"We stop," he declared. Heyst looked down at him for the first time.

"You want to stop here?"

"Yes."

"What were you? What was your work here?"

"Mess-loom boy."

"Do you want to stay with me here as my boy?" inquired Heyst, surprised.

The Chinaman unexpectedly put on a deprecatory expression, and said, after a marked pause:

"Can do."

"You needn't," said Heyst, "unless you like. I propose to stay on here — it may be for a very long time. I have no power to make you go if you wish to remain, but I don't see why you should."

"Catchee one piecee wife," remarked Wang unemotionally, and marched off, turning his back on the wharf and the great world beyond, represented by the steamer waiting for her boats.

Heyst learned presently that Wang had persuaded one of the women of Alfuro village, on the west shore of the island, beyond the central ridge, to come over to live with him in a remote part of the company's clearing. It was a curious case, inasmuch as the Alfuros, having been frightened by the sudden invasion of Chinamen, had blocked the path over the ridge by felling a few trees, and had kept strictly on their own side. The coolies, as a body, mistrusting the manifest mildness of these harmless fisher-folk, had kept to their lines, without attempting to cross the island. Wang was the brilliant exception. He must have been uncommonly fascinating, in a way that was not apparent to Heyst, or else uncommonly persuasive. The woman's services to Heyst were limited to the fact that she had anchored Wang to the spot by her charms, which remained unknown to the white man, because she never came near the houses. The couple lived at the edge of the forest, and she could sometimes be seen gazing towards

the bungalow shading her eyes with her hand. Even from a distance she appeared to be a shy, wild creature, and Heyst, anxious not to try her primitive nerves unduly, scrupulously avoided that side of the clearing in his strolls.

The day — or rather the first night — after his hermit life began, he was aware of vague sounds of revelry in that direction. Emboldened by the departure of the invading strangers, some Alfuros, the woman's friends and relations, had ventured over the ridge to attend something in the nature of a wedding feast. Wang had invited them. But this was the only occasion when any sound louder than the buzzing of insects had troubled the profound silence of the clearing. The natives were never invited again. Wang not only knew how to live according to conventional proprieties, but had strong personal views as to the manner of arranging his domestic existence. After a time Heyst perceived that Wang had annexed all the keys. Any keys left lying about vanished after Wang had passed that way. Subsequently some of them — those that did not belong to the store-rooms and the empty bungalows, and could not be regarded as the common property of this community of two — were returned to Heyst, tied in a bunch with a piece of string. He found them one morning lying by the side of his plate. He had not been inconvenienced by their absence, because he never locked up anything in the way of drawers and boxes. Heyst said nothing. Wang also said nothing. Perhaps he had always been a taciturn man; perhaps he was influenced by the genius of the locality, which was certainly that of silence. Till Heyst and Morrison had landed in Black Diamond Bay, and named it, that side of Samburan had hardly ever heard the sound of human speech. It was easy to be taciturn with Heyst, who had plunged himself into an abyss of meditation over books, and remained in it till the shadow of Wang falling across the page, and the sound of a rough, low voice uttering the Malay word "makan," would force him to climb out to a meal.

Wang in his native province in China might have been an aggressively, sensitively genial person; but in Samburan he had clothed himself in a mysterious stolidity and did not seem to resent not being spoken to except in single words, at a rate which did not average half a dozen per day. And he gave no more than he got. It is to be presumed that if he suffered he made up for it with the Alfuro woman. He always went back to her at the first fall of dusk, vanishing from the bungalow suddenly at this hour, like a sort of topsy-turvy, day-hunting, Chinese ghost with a white jacket and a pigtail. Presently, giving way to a Chinaman's ruling passion, he could be observed breaking the ground near his hut, between the mighty stumps of felled trees, with a miner's pickaxe. After a time, he discovered a rusty but serviceable spade in one of the empty store-rooms, and it is to be supposed that he got on famously; but nothing of it could be seen, because he went to the trouble of pulling to pieces one of the company's sheds in order to get materials for making a high and very close fence round his patch, as if the growing of vegetables were a patented process, or an awful and holy mystery entrusted to the keeping of his race.

Heyst, following from a distance the progress of Wang's gardening and of these precautions — there was nothing else to look at — was amused at the thought that he,

in his own person, represented the market for its produce. The Chinaman had found several packets of seeds in the store-rooms, and had surrendered to an irresistible impulse to put them into the ground. He would make his master pay for the vegetables which he was raising to satisfy his instinct. And, looking silently at the silent Wang going about his work in the bungalow in his unhasty, steady way; Heyst envied the Chinaman's obedience to his instincts, the powerful simplicity of purpose which made his existence appear almost automatic in the mysterious precision of its facts.

Chapter 2

During his master's absence at Sourabaya, Wang had busied himself with the ground immediately in front of the principal bungalow. Emerging from the fringe of grass growing across the shore end of the coal-jetty, Heyst beheld a broad, clear space, black and level, with only one or two clumps of charred twigs, where the flame had swept from the front of his house to the nearest trees of the forest.

"You took the risk of firing the grass?" Heyst asked.

Wang nodded. Hanging on the arm of the white man before whom he stood was the girl called Alma; but neither from the Chinaman's eyes nor from his expression could anyone have guessed that he was in the slightest degree aware of the fact.

"He has been tidying the place in his labour-saving way," explained Heyst, without looking at the girl, whose hand rested on his forearm. "He's the whole establishment, you see. I told you I hadn't even a dog to keep me company here."

Wang had marched off towards the wharf.

"He's like those waiters in that place," she said. That place was Schomberg's hotel.

"One Chinaman looks very much like another," Heyst remarked. "We shall find it useful to have him here. This is the house."

They faced, at some distance, the six shallow steps leading up to the veranda. The girl had abandoned Heyst's arm.

"This is the house," he repeated.

She did not offer to budge away from his side, but stood staring fixedly at the steps, as if they had been something unique and impracticable. He waited a little, but she did not move.

"Don't you want to go in?" he asked, without turning his head to look at her. "The sun's too heavy to stand about here." He tried to overcome a sort of fear, a sort of impatient faintness, and his voice sounded rough. "You had better go in," he concluded.

They both moved then, but at the foot of the stairs Heyst stopped, while the girl went on rapidly, as if nothing could stop her now. She crossed the veranda swiftly, and entered the twilight of the big central room opening upon it, and then the deeper twilight of the room beyond. She stood still in the dusk, in which her dazzled eyes could scarcely make out the forms of objects, and sighed a sigh of relief. The impression of

the sunlight, of sea and sky, remained with her like a memory of a painful trial gone through — done with at last!

Meanwhile Heyst had walked back slowly towards the jetty; but he did not get so far as that. The practical and automatic Wang had got hold of one of the little trucks that had been used for running baskets of coal alongside ships. He appeared pushing it before him, loaded lightly with Heyst's bag and the bundle of the girl's belongings, wrapped in Mrs. Schomberg's shawl. Heyst turned about and walked by the side of the rusty rails on which the truck ran. Opposite the house Wang stopped, lifted the bag to his shoulder, balanced it carefully, and then took the bundle in his hand.

"Leave those things on the table in the big room — understand?"

"Me savee," grunted Wang, moving off.

Heyst watched the Chinaman disappear from the veranda. It was not till he had seen Wang come out that he himself entered the twilight of the big room. By that time Wang was out of sight at the back of the house, but by no means out of hearing. The Chinaman could hear the voice of him who, when there were many people there, was generally referred to as "Number One." Wang was not able to understand the words, but the tone interested him.

"Where are you?" cried Number One.

Then Wang heard, much more faint, a voice he had never heard before — a novel impression which he acknowledged by cocking his head slightly to one side.

"I am here — out of the sun."

The new voice sounded remote and uncertain. Wang heard nothing more, though he waited for some time, very still, the top of his shaven poll exactly level with the floor of the back veranda. His face meanwhile preserved an inscrutable immobility. Suddenly he stooped to pick up the lid of a deal candle-box which was lying on the ground by his foot. Breaking it up with his fingers, he directed his steps towards the cookshed, where, squatting on his heels, he proceeded to kindle a small fire under a very sooty kettle, possibly to make tea. Wang had some knowledge of the more superficial rites and ceremonies of white men's existence, otherwise so enigmatically remote to his mind, and containing unexpected possibilities of good and evil, which had to be watched for with prudence and care.

Chapter 3

That morning, as on all the others of the full tale of mornings since his return with the girl to Samburan, Heyst came out on the veranda and spread his elbows on the railing, in an easy attitude of proprietorship. The bulk of the central ridge of the island cut off the bungalow from sunrises, whether glorious or cloudy, angry or serene. The dwellers therein were debarred from reading early the fortune of the new-born day. It sprang upon them in its fulness with a swift retreat of the great shadow when the sun, clearing the ridge, looked down, hot and dry, with a devouring glare like the eye of an

enemy. But Heyst, once the Number One of this locality, while it was comparatively teeming with mankind, appreciated the prolongation of early coolness, the subdued, lingering half-light, the faint ghost of the departed night, the fragrance of its dewy, dark soul captured for a moment longer between the great glow of the sky and the intense blaze of the uncovered sea.

It was naturally difficult for Heyst to keep his mind from dwelling on the nature and consequences of this, his latest departure from the part of an unconcerned spectator. Yet he had retained enough of his wrecked philosophy to prevent him from asking himself consciously how it would end. But at the same time he could not help being temperamentally, from long habit and from set purpose, a spectator still, perhaps a little less naive but (as he discovered with some surprise) not much more far sighted than the common run of men. Like the rest of us who act, all he could say to himself, with a somewhat affected grimness, was:

“We shall see!”

This mood of grim doubt intruded on him only when he was alone. There were not many such moments in his day now; and he did not like them when they came. On this morning he had no time to grow uneasy. Alma came out to join him long before the sun, rising above the Samburan ridge, swept the cool shadow of the early morning and the remnant of the night’s coolness clear off the roof under which they had dwelt for more than three months already. She came out as on other mornings. He had heard her light footsteps in the big room — the room where he had unpacked the cases from London; the room now lined with the backs of books halfway up on its three sides. Above the cases the fine matting met the ceiling of tightly stretched white calico. In the dusk and coolness nothing gleamed except the gilt frame of the portrait of Heyst’s father, signed by a famous painter, lonely in the middle of a wall.

Heyst did not turn round.

“Do you know what I was thinking of?” he asked.

“No,” she said. Her tone betrayed always a shade of anxiety, as though she were never certain how a conversation with him would end. She leaned on the guard-rail by his side.

“No,” she repeated. “What was it?” She waited. Then, rather with reluctance than shyness, she asked:

“Were you thinking of me?”

“I was wondering when you would come out,” said Heyst, still without looking at the girl — to whom, after several experimental essays in combining detached letters and loose syllables, he had given the name of Lena.

She remarked after a pause:

“I was not very far from you.”

“Apparently you were not near enough for me.”

“You could have called if you wanted me,” she said. “And I wasn’t so long doing my hair.”

“Apparently it was too long for me.”

“Well, you were thinking of me, anyhow. I am glad of it. Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn’t be in the world at all!”

He turned round and looked at her. She often said things which surprised him. A vague smile faded away on her lips before his scrutiny.

“What is it?” he asked. “Is it a reproach?”

“A reproach! Why, how could it be?” she defended herself.

“Well, what did it mean?” he insisted.

“What I said — just what I said. Why aren’t you fair?”

“Ah, this is at least a reproach!”

She coloured to the roots of her hair.

“It looks as if you were trying to make out that I am disagreeable,” she murmured. “Am I? You will make me afraid to open my mouth presently. I shall end by believing I am no good.”

Her head drooped a little. He looked at her smooth, low brow, the faintly coloured cheeks, and the red lips parted slightly, with the gleam of her teeth within.

“And then I won’t be any good,” she added with conviction. “That I won’t! I can only be what you think I am.”

He made a slight movement. She put her hand on his arm, without raising her head, and went on, her voice animated in the stillness of her body:

“It is so. It couldn’t be any other way with a girl like me and a man like you. Here we are, we two alone, and I can’t even tell where we are.”

“A very well-known spot of the globe,” Heyst uttered gently. “There must have been at least fifty thousand circulars issued at the time — a hundred and fifty thousand, more likely. My friend was looking after that, and his ideas were large and his belief very strong. Of us two it was he who had the faith. A hundred and fifty thousand, certainly.”

“What is it you mean?” she asked in a low tone.

“What should I find fault with you for?” Heyst went on. “For being amiable, good, gracious — and pretty?”

A silence fell. Then she said:

“It’s all right that you should think that of me. There’s no one here to think anything of us, good or bad.”

The rare timbre of her voice gave a special value to what she uttered. The indefinable emotion which certain intonations gave him, he was aware, was more physical than moral. Every time she spoke to him she seemed to abandon to him something of herself — something excessively subtle and inexpressible, to which he was infinitely sensible, which he would have missed horribly if she were to go away. While he was looking into her eyes she raised her bare forearm, out of the short sleeve, and held it in the air till he noticed it and hastened to pose his great bronze moustaches on the whiteness of the skin. Then they went in.

Wang immediately appeared in front, and, squatting on his heels, began to potter mysteriously about some plants at the foot of the veranda. When Heyst and the girl came out again, the Chinaman had gone in his peculiar manner, which suggested vanishing out of existence rather than out of sight, a process of evaporation rather than of movement. They descended the steps, looking at each other, and started off smartly across the cleared ground; but they were not ten yards away when, without perceptible stir or sound, Wang materialized inside the empty room. The Chinaman stood still with roaming eyes, examining the walls as if for signs, for inscriptions; exploring the floor as if for pitfalls, for dropped coins. Then he cocked his head slightly at the profile of Heyst's father, pen in hand above a white sheet of paper on a crimson tablecloth; and, moving forward noiselessly, began to clear away the breakfast things.

Though he proceeded without haste, the unerring precision of his movements, the absolute soundlessness of the operation, gave it something of the quality of a conjuring trick. And, the trick having been performed, Wang vanished from the scene, to materialize presently in front of the house. He materialized walking away from it, with no visible or guessable intention; but at the end of some ten paces he stopped, made a half turn, and put his hand up to shade his eyes. The sun had topped the grey ridge of Samburan. The great morning shadow was gone; and far away in the devouring sunshine Wang was in time to see Number One and the woman, two remote white specks against the sombre line of the forest. In a moment they vanished. With the smallest display of action, Wang also vanished from the sunlight of the clearing.

Heyst and Lena entered the shade of the forest path which crossed the island, and which, near its highest point had been blocked by felled trees. But their intention was not to go so far. After keeping to the path for some distance, they left it at a point where the forest was bare of undergrowth, and the trees, festooned with creepers, stood clear of one another in the gloom of their own making. Here and there great splashes of light lay on the ground. They moved, silent in the great stillness, breathing the calmness, the infinite isolation, the repose of a slumber without dreams. They emerged at the upper limit of vegetation, among some rocks; and in a depression of the sharp slope, like a small platform, they turned about and looked from on high over the sea, lonely, its colour effaced by sunshine, its horizon a heat mist, a mere unsubstantial shimmer in the pale and blinding infinity overhung by the darker blaze of the sky.

"It makes my head swim," the girl murmured, shutting her eyes and putting her hand on his shoulder.

Heyst, gazing fixedly to the southward, exclaimed:

"Sail ho!"

A moment of silence ensued.

"It must be very far away," he went on. "I don't think you could see it. Some native craft making for the Moluccas, probably. Come, we mustn't stay here."

With his arm round her waist, he led her down a little distance, and they settled themselves in the shade; she, seated on the ground, he a little lower, reclining at her feet.

"You don't like to look at the sea from up there?" he said after a time.

She shook her head. That empty space was to her the abomination of desolation. But she only said again:

"It makes my head swim."

"Too big?" he inquired.

"Too lonely. It makes my heart sink, too," she added in a low voice, as if confessing a secret.

"I'm afraid," said Heyst, "that you would be justified in reproaching me for these sensations. But what would you have?"

His tone was playful, but his eyes, directed at her face, were serious. She protested.

"I am not feeling lonely with you — not a bit. It is only when we come up to that place, and I look at all that water and all that light — "

"We will never come here again, then," he interrupted her.

She remained silent for a while, returning his gaze till he removed it.

"It seems as if everything that there is had gone under," she said.

"Reminds you of the story of the deluge," muttered the man, stretched at her feet and looking at them. "Are you frightened at it?"

"I should be rather frightened to be left behind alone. When I say, I, of course I mean we."

"Do you?" . . . Heyst remained silent for a while. "The vision of a world destroyed," he mused aloud. "Would you be sorry for it?"

"I should be sorry for the happy people in it," she said simply.

His gaze travelled up her figure and reached her face, where he seemed to detect the veiled glow of intelligence, as one gets a glimpse of the sun through the clouds.

"I should have thought it's they specially who ought to have been congratulated. Don't you?"

"Oh, yes — I understand what you mean; but there were forty days before it was all over."

"You seem to be in possession of all the details."

Heyst spoke just to say something rather than to gaze at her in silence. She was not looking at him.

"Sunday school," she murmured. "I went regularly from the time I was eight till I was thirteen. We lodged in the north of London, off Kingsland Road. It wasn't a bad time. Father was earning good money then. The woman of the house used to pack me off in the afternoon with her own girls. She was a good woman. Her husband was in the post office. Sorter or something. Such a quiet man. He used to go off after supper for night-duty, sometimes. Then one day they had a row, and broke up the home. I remember I cried when we had to pack up all of a sudden and go into other lodgings. I never knew what it was, though — "

"The deluge," muttered Heyst absently.

He felt intensely aware of her personality, as if this were the first moment of leisure he had found to look at her since they had come together. The peculiar timbre of

her voice, with its modulations of audacity and sadness, would have given interest to the most inane chatter. But she was no chatterer. She was rather silent, with a capacity for immobility, an upright stillness, as when resting on the concert platform between the musical numbers, her feet crossed, her hands reposing on her lap. But in the intimacy of their life her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force — or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender.

During a long pause she did not look at him. Then suddenly, as if the word “deluge” had stuck in her mind, she asked, looking up at the cloudless sky:

“Does it ever rain here?”

“There is a season when it rains almost every day,” said Heyst, surprised. “There are also thunderstorms. We once had a ‘mud-shower.’”

“Mud-shower?”

“Our neighbour there was shooting up ashes. He sometimes clears his red-hot gullet like that; and a thunderstorm came along at the same time. It was very messy; but our neighbour is generally well behaved — just smokes quietly, as he did that day when I first showed you the smudge in the sky from the schooner’s deck. He’s a good-natured, lazy fellow of a volcano.”

“I saw a mountain smoking like that before,” she said, staring at the slender stem of a tree-fern some dozen feet in front of her. “It wasn’t very long after we left England — some few days, though. I was so ill at first that I lost count of days. A smoking mountain — I can’t think how they called it.”

“Vesuvius, perhaps,” suggested Heyst.

“That’s the name.”

“I saw it, too, years, ages ago,” said Heyst.

“On your way here?”

“No, long before I ever thought of coming into this part of the world. I was yet a boy.”

She turned and looked at him attentively, as if seeking to discover some trace of that boyhood in the mature face of the man with the hair thin at the top and the long, thick moustaches. Heyst stood the frank examination with a playful smile, hiding the profound effect these veiled grey eyes produced — whether on his heart or on his nerves, whether sensuous or spiritual, tender or irritating, he was unable to say.

“Well, princess of Samburan,” he said at last, “have I found favour in your sight?”

She seemed to wake up, and shook her head.

“I was thinking,” she murmured very low.

“Thought, action — so many snares! If you begin to think you will be unhappy.”

“I wasn’t thinking of myself!” she declared with a simplicity which took Heyst aback somewhat.

“On the lips of a moralist this would sound like a rebuke,” he said, half seriously; “but I won’t suspect you of being one. Moralists and I haven’t been friends for many years.”

She had listened with an air of attention.

“I understood you had no friends,” she said. “I am pleased that there’s nobody to find fault with you for what you have done. I like to think that I am in no one’s way.”

Heyst would have said something, but she did not give him time. Unconscious of the movement he made she went on:

“What I was thinking to myself was, why are you here?”

Heyst let himself sink on his elbow again.

“If by ‘you’ you mean ‘we’ — well, you know why we are here.”

She bent her gaze down at him.

“No, it isn’t that. I meant before — all that time before you came across me and guessed at once that I was in trouble, with no one to turn to. And you know it was desperate trouble too.”

Her voice fell on the last words, as if she would end there; but there was something so expectant in Heyst’s attitude as he sat at her feet, looking up at her steadily, that she continued, after drawing a short, quick breath:

“It was, really. I told you I had been worried before by bad fellows. It made me unhappy, disturbed — angry, too. But oh, how I hated, hated, hated that man!”

“That man” was the florid Schomberg with the military bearing, benefactor of white men (‘decent food to eat in decent company’) — mature victim of belated passion. The girl shuddered. The characteristic harmoniousness of her face became, as it were, decomposed for an instant. Heyst was startled.

“Why think of it now?” he cried.

“It’s because I was cornered that time. It wasn’t as before. It was worse, ever so much. I wished I could die of my fright — and yet it’s only now that I begin to understand what a horror it might have been. Yes, only now, since we — ”

Heyst stirred a little.

“Came here,” he finished.

Her tenseness relaxed, her flushed face went gradually back to its normal tint.

“Yes,” she said indifferently, but at the same time she gave him a stealthy glance of passionate appreciation; and then her face took on a melancholy cast, her whole figure drooped imperceptibly.

“But you were coming back here anyhow?” she asked.

“Yes. I was only waiting for Davidson. Yes, I was coming back here, to these ruins — to Wang, who perhaps did not expect to see me again. It’s impossible to guess at the way that Chinaman draws his conclusions, and how he looks upon one.”

“Don’t talk about him. He makes me feel uncomfortable. Talk about yourself!”

“About myself? I see you are still busy with the mystery of my existence here; but it isn’t at all mysterious. Primarily the man with the quill pen in his hand in that picture you so often look at is responsible for my existence. He is also responsible for

what my existence is, or rather has been. He was a great man in his way. I don't know much of his history. I suppose he began like other people; took fine words for good, ringing coin and noble ideals for valuable banknotes. He was a great master of both, himself, by the way. Later he discovered — how am I to explain it to you? Suppose the world were a factory and all mankind workmen in it. Well, he discovered that the wages were not good enough. That they were paid in counterfeit money.”

“I see!” the girl said slowly.

“Do you?”

Heyst, who had been speaking as if to himself, looked up curiously.

“It wasn't a new discovery, but he brought his capacity for scorn to bear on it. It was immense. It ought to have withered this globe. I don't know how many minds he convinced. But my mind was very young then, and youth I suppose can be easily seduced — even by a negation. He was very ruthless, and yet he was not without pity. He dominated me without difficulty. A heartless man could not have done so. Even to fools he was not utterly merciless. He could be indignant, but he was too great for flouts and jeers. What he said was not meant for the crowd; it could not be; and I was flattered to find myself among the elect. They read his books, but I have heard his living word. It was irresistible. It was as if that mind were taking me into its confidence, giving me a special insight into its mastery of despair. Mistake, no doubt. There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough. But they don't say anything. They can't. They wouldn't know how, or perhaps, they wouldn't speak if they could. Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation. However, that particular man died as quietly as a child goes to sleep. But, after listening to him, I could not take my soul down into the street to fight there. I started off to wander about, an independent spectator — if that is possible.”

For a long time the girl's grey eyes had been watching his face. She discovered that, addressing her, he was really talking to himself. Heyst looked up, caught sight of her as it were, and caught himself up, with a low laugh and a change of tone.

“All this does not tell you why I ever came here. Why, indeed? It's like prying into inscrutable mysteries which are not worth scrutinizing. A man drifts. The most successful men have drifted into their successes. I don't want to tell you that this is a success. You wouldn't believe me if I did. It isn't; neither is it the ruinous failure it looks. It proves nothing, unless perhaps some hidden weakness in my character — and even that is not certain.”

He looked fixedly at her, and with such grave eyes that she felt obliged to smile faintly at him, since she did not understand what he meant. Her smile was reflected, still fainter, on his lips.

“This does not advance you much in your inquiry,” he went on. “And in truth your question is unanswerable; but facts have a certain positive value, and I will tell you a fact. One day I met a cornered man. I use the word because it expresses the man's situation exactly, and because you just used it yourself. You know what that means?”

“What do you say?” she whispered, astounded. “A man!”

Heyst laughed at her wondering eyes.

“No! No! I mean in his own way.”

“I knew very well it couldn’t be anything like that,” she observed under her breath.

“I won’t bother you with the story. It was a custom-house affair, strange as it may sound to you. He would have preferred to be killed outright — that is, to have his soul dispatched to another world, rather than to be robbed of his substance, his very insignificant substance, in this. I saw that he believed in another world because, being cornered, as I have told you, he went down on his knees and prayed. What do you think of that?”

Heyst paused. She looked at him earnestly.

“You didn’t make fun of him for that?” she said.

Heyst made a brusque movement of protest

“My dear girl, I am not a ruffian,” he cried. Then, returning to his usual tone: “I didn’t even have to conceal a smile. Somehow it didn’t look a smiling matter. No, it was not funny; it was rather pathetic; he was so representative of all the past victims of the Great Joke. But it is by folly alone that the world moves, and so it is a respectable thing upon the whole. And besides, he was what one would call a good man. I don’t mean especially because he had offered up a prayer. No! He was really a decent fellow, he was quite unfitted for this world, he was a failure, a good man cornered — a sight for the gods; for no decent mortal cares to look at that sort.” A thought seemed to occur to him. He turned his face to the girl. “And you, who have been cornered too — did you think of offering a prayer?”

Neither her eyes nor a single one of her features moved the least bit. She only let fall the words:

“I am not what they call a good girl.”

“That sounds evasive,” said Heyst after a short silence. “Well, the good fellow did pray and after he had confessed to it I was struck by the comicality of the situation. No, don’t misunderstand me — I am not alluding to his act, of course. And even the idea of Eternity, Infinity, Omnipotence, being called upon to defeat the conspiracy of two miserable Portuguese half-castes did not move my mirth. From the point of view of the supplicant, the danger to be conjured was something like the end of the world, or worse. No! What captivated my fancy was that I, Axel Heyst, the most detached of creatures in this earthly captivity, the veriest tramp on this earth, an indifferent stroller going through the world’s bustle — that I should have been there to step into the situation of an agent of Providence. I, a man of universal scorn and unbelief. . . .”

“You are putting it on,” she interrupted in her seductive voice, with a coaxing intonation.

“No. I am not like that, born or fashioned, or both. I am not for nothing the son of my father, of that man in the painting. I am he, all but the genius. And there is even less in me than I make out, because the very scorn is falling away from me year after year. I have never been so amused as by that episode in which I was suddenly called

to act such an incredible part. For a moment I enjoyed it greatly. It got him out of his corner, you know.”

“You saved a man for fun — is that what you mean? Just for fun?”

“Why this tone of suspicion?” remonstrated Heyst. “I suppose the sight of this particular distress was disagreeable to me. What you call fun came afterwards, when it dawned on me that I was for him a walking, breathing, incarnate proof of the efficacy of prayer. I was a little fascinated by it — and then, could I have argued with him? You don’t argue against such evidence, and besides it would have looked as if I had wanted to claim all the merit. Already his gratitude was simply frightful. Funny position, wasn’t it? The boredom came later, when we lived together on board his ship. I had, in a moment of inadvertence, created for myself a tie. How to define it precisely I don’t know. One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? I am not sure what it was. I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul.”

Heyst’s tone was light, with the flavour of playfulness which seasoned all his speeches and seemed to be of the very essence of his thoughts. The girl he had come across, of whom he had possessed himself, to whose presence he was not yet accustomed, with whom he did not yet know how to live; that human being so near and still so strange, gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life.

Chapter 4

With her knees drawn up, Lena rested her elbows on them and held her head in both her hands.

“Are you tired of sitting here?” Heyst asked.

An almost imperceptible negative movement of the head was all the answer she made.

“Why are you looking so serious?” he pursued, and immediately thought that habitual seriousness, in the long run, was much more bearable than constant gaiety. “However, this expression suits you exceedingly,” he added, not diplomatically, but because, by the tendency of his taste, it was a true statement. “And as long as I can be certain that it is not boredom which gives you this severe air, I am willing to sit here and look at you till you are ready to go.”

And this was true. He was still under the fresh sortilege of their common life, the surprise of novelty, the flattered vanity of his possession of this woman; for a man must feel that, unless he has ceased to be masculine. Her eyes moved in his direction, rested on him, then returned to their stare into the deeper gloom at the foot of the straight tree-trunks, whose spreading crowns were slowly withdrawing their shade. The warm air stirred slightly about her motionless head. She would not look at him, from some obscure fear of betraying herself. She felt in her innermost depths an irresistible desire to give herself up to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice. This was

something of which he did not seem to have an idea. He was a strange being without needs. She felt his eyes fixed upon her; and as he kept silent, she said uneasily — for she didn't know what his silences might mean:

“And so you lived with that friend — that good man?”

“Excellent fellow,” Heyst responded, with a readiness that she did not expect. “But it was a weakness on my part. I really didn't want to, only he wouldn't let me off, and I couldn't explain. He was the sort of man to whom you can't explain anything. He was extremely sensitive, and it would have been a tigerish thing to do to mangle his delicate feelings by the sort of plain speaking that would have been necessary. His mind was like a white-walled, pure chamber, furnished with, say, six straw-bottomed chairs, and he was always placing and displacing them in various combinations. But they were always the same chairs. He was extremely easy to live with; but then he got hold of this coal idea — or, rather, the idea got hold of him, it entered into that scantily furnished chamber of which I have just spoken, and sat on all the chairs. There was no dislodging it, you know! It was going to make his fortune, my fortune, everybody's fortune. In past years, in moments of doubt that will come to a man determined to remain free from absurdities of existence, I often asked myself, with a momentary dread, in what way would life try to get hold of me? And this was the way. He got it into his head that he could do nothing without me. And was I now, he asked me, to spurn and ruin him? Well, one morning — I wonder if he had gone down on his knees to pray that night! — one morning I gave in.”

Heyst tugged violently at a tuft of dried grass, and cast it away from him with a nervous gesture.

“I gave in,” he repeated.

Looking towards him with a movement of her eyes only, the girl noticed the strong feeling on his face with that intense interest which his person awakened in her mind and in her heart. But it soon passed away, leaving only a moody expression.

“It's difficult to resist where nothing matters,” he observed. “And perhaps there is a grain of freakishness in my nature. It amused me to go about uttering silly, commonplace phrases. I was never so well thought of in the islands till I began to jabber commercial gibberish like the veriest idiot. Upon my word, I believe that I was actually respected for a time. I was as grave as an owl over it; I had to be loyal to the man. I have been, from first to last, completely, utterly loyal to the best of my ability. I thought he understood something about coal. And if I had been aware that he knew nothing of it, as in fact he didn't, well — I don't know what I could have done to stop him. In one way or another I should have had to be loyal. Truth, work, ambition, love itself, may be only counters in the lamentable or despicable game of life, but when one takes a hand one must play the game. No, the shade of Morrison needn't haunt me. What's the matter? I say, Lena, why are you staring like that? Do you feel ill?”

Heyst made as if to get on his feet. The girl extended her arm to arrest him, and he remained staring in a sitting posture, propped on one arm, observing her indefinable expression of anxiety, as if she were unable to draw breath.

“What has come to you?” he insisted, feeling strangely unwilling to move, to touch her.

“Nothing!” She swallowed painfully. “Of course it can’t be. What name did you say? I didn’t hear it properly.”

“Name?” repeated Heyst dazedly. “I only mentioned Morrison. It’s the name of that man of whom I’ve been speaking. What of it?”

“And you mean to say that he was your friend?”

“You have heard enough to judge for yourself. You know as much of our connection as I know myself. The people in this part of the world went by appearances, and called us friends, as far as I can remember. Appearances — what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can’t have better. You can’t have anything else.”

“You are trying to confuse me with your talk,” she cried. “You can’t make fun of this.”

“Can’t? Well, no I can’t. It’s a pity. Perhaps it would have been the best way,” said Heyst, in a tone which for him could be called gloomy. “Unless one could forget the silly business altogether.” His faint playfulness of manner and speech returned, like a habit one has schooled oneself into, even before his forehead had cleared completely. “But why are you looking so hard at me? Oh, I don’t object, and I shall try not to flinch. Your eyes — ”

He was looking straight into them, and as a matter of fact had forgotten all about the late Morrison at that moment.

“No,” he exclaimed suddenly. “What an impenetrable girl you are Lena, with those grey eyes of yours! Windows of the soul, as some poet has said. The fellow must have been a glazier by vocation. Well, nature has provided excellently for the shyness of your soul.”

When he ceased speaking, the girl came to herself with a catch of her breath. He heard her voice, the varied charm of which he thought he knew so well, saying with an unfamiliar intonation:

“And that partner of yours is dead?”

“Morrison? Oh, yes, as I’ve told you, he — ”

“You never told me.”

“Didn’t I? I thought I did; or, rather, I thought you must know. It seems impossible that anybody with whom I speak should not know that Morrison is dead.”

She lowered her eyelids, and Heyst was startled by something like an expression of horror on her face.

“Morrison!” she whispered in an appalled tone. “Morrison!” Her head drooped. Unable to see her features, Heyst could tell from her voice that for some reason or other she was profoundly moved by the syllables of that unromantic name. A thought flashed through his head — could she have known Morrison? But the mere difference of their origins made it wildly improbable.

“This is very extraordinary!” he said. “Have you ever heard the name before?”

Her head moved quickly several times in tiny affirmative nods, as if she could not trust herself to speak, or even to look at him. She was biting her lower lip.

“Did you ever know anybody of that name?” he asked.

The girl answered by a negative sign; and then at last she spoke, jerkily, as if forcing herself against some doubt or fear. She had heard of that very man, she told Heyst.

“Impossible!” he said positively. “You are mistaken. You couldn’t have heard of him, it’s — ”

He stopped short, with the thought that to talk like this was perfectly useless; that one doesn’t argue against thin air.

“But I did hear of him; only I didn’t know then, I couldn’t guess, that it was your partner they were talking about.”

“Talking about my partner?” repeated Heyst slowly.

“No.” Her mind seemed almost as bewildered, as full of incredulity, as his. “No. They were talking of you really; only I didn’t know it.”

“Who were they?” Heyst raised his voice. “Who was talking of me? Talking where?”

With the first question he had lifted himself from his reclining position; at the last he was on his knees before her, their heads on a level.

“Why, in that town, in that hotel. Where else could it have been?” she said.

The idea of being talked about was always novel to Heyst’s simplified conception of himself. For a moment he was as much surprised as if he had believed himself to be a mere gliding shadow among men. Besides, he had in him a half-unconscious notion that he was above the level of island gossip.

“But you said first that it was of Morrison they talked,” he remarked to the girl, sinking on his heels, and no longer much interested. “Strange that you should have the opportunity to hear any talk at all! I was rather under the impression that you never saw anybody belonging to the town except from the platform.”

“You forget that I was not living with the other girls,” she said. “After meals they used to go back to the Pavilion, but I had to stay in the hotel and do my sewing, or what not, in the room where they talked.”

“I didn’t think of that. By the by, you never told me who they were.”

“Why, that horrible red-faced beast,” she said, with all the energy of disgust which the mere thought of the hotel-keeper provoked in her.

“Oh, Schomberg!” Heyst murmured carelessly.

“He talked to the boss — to Zangiaco, I mean. I had to sit there. That devil-woman sometimes wouldn’t let me go away. I mean Mrs. Zangiaco.”

“I guessed,” murmured Heyst. “She liked to torment you in a variety of ways. But it is really strange that the hotel-keeper should talk of Morrison to Zangiaco. As far as I can remember he saw very little of Morrison professionally. He knew many others much better.”

The girl shuddered slightly.

“That was the only name I ever overheard. I would get as far away from them as I could, to the other end of the room, but when that beast started shouting I could

not help hearing. I wish I had never heard anything. If I had got up and gone out of the room I don't suppose the woman would have killed me for it; but she would have rowed me in a nasty way. She would have threatened me and called me names. That sort, when they know you are helpless, there's nothing to stop them. I don't know how it is, but bad people, real bad people that you can see are bad, they get over me somehow. It's the way they set about downing one. I am afraid of wickedness."

Heyst watched the changing expressions of her face. He encouraged her, profoundly sympathetic, a little amused.

"I quite understand. You needn't apologize for your great delicacy in the perception of inhuman evil. I am a little like you."

"I am not very plucky," she said.

"Well! I don't know myself what I would do, what countenance I would have before a creature which would strike me as being evil incarnate. Don't you be ashamed!"

She sighed, looked up with her pale, candid gaze and a timid expression on her face, and murmured:

"You don't seem to want to know what he was saying."

"About poor Morrison? It couldn't have been anything bad, for the poor fellow was innocence itself. And then, you know, he is dead, and nothing can possibly matter to him now."

"But I tell you that it was of you he was talking!" she cried.

"He was saying that Morrison's partner first got all there was to get out of him, and then, and then — well, as good as murdered him — sent him out to die somewhere!"

"You believe that of me?" said Heyst, after a moment of perfect silence.

"I didn't know it had anything to do with you. Schomberg was talking of some Swede. How was I to know? It was only when you began telling me about how you came here — "

"And now you have my version." Heyst forced himself to speak quietly. "So that's how the business looked from outside!" he muttered.

"I remember him saying that everybody in these parts knew the story," the girl added breathlessly.

"Strange that it should hurt me!" mused Heyst to himself; "yet it does. I seem to be as much of a fool as those everybodies who know the story and no doubt believe it. Can you remember any more?" he addressed the girl in a grimly polite tone. "I've often heard of the moral advantages of seeing oneself as others see one. Let us investigate further. Can't you recall something else that everybody knows?"

"Oh! Don't laugh!" she cried.

"Did I laugh? I assure you I was not aware of it. I won't ask you whether you believe the hotel-keeper's version. Surely you must know the value of human judgement!"

She unclasped her hands, moved them slightly, and twined her fingers as before. Protest? Assent? Was there to be nothing more? He was relieved when she spoke in that warm and wonderful voice which in itself comforted and fascinated one's heart, which made her lovable.

"I heard this before you and I ever spoke to each other. It went out of my memory afterwards. Everything went out of my memory then; and I was glad of it. It was a fresh start for me, with you — and you know it. I wish I had forgotten who I was — that would have been best; and I very nearly did forget."

He was moved by the vibrating quality of the last words. She seemed to be talking low of some wonderful enchantment, in mysterious terms of special significance. He thought that if she only could talk to him in some unknown tongue, she would enslave him altogether by the sheer beauty of the sound, suggesting infinite depths of wisdom and feeling.

"But," she went on, "the name stuck in my head, it seems; and when you mentioned it — "

"It broke the spell," muttered Heyst in angry disappointment as if he had been deceived in some hope.

The girl, from her position a little above him, surveyed with still eyes the abstracted silence of the man on whom she now depended with a completeness of which she had not been vividly conscious before, because, till then, she had never felt herself swinging between the abysses of earth and heaven in the hollow of his arm. What if he should grow weary of the burden?

"And, moreover, nobody had ever believed that tale!"

Heyst came out with an abrupt burst of sound which made her open her steady eyes wider, with an effect of immense surprise. It was a purely mechanical effect, because she was neither surprised nor puzzled. In fact, she could understand him better than than at any moment since she first set eyes on him.

He laughed scornfully.

"What am I thinking of?" he cried. "As if it could matter to me what anybody had ever said or believed, from the beginning of the world till the crack of doom!"

"I never heard you laugh till today," she observed. "This is the second time!"

He scrambled to his feet and towered above her.

"That's because, when one's heart has been broken into in the way you have broken into mine, all sorts of weaknesses are free to enter — shame, anger, stupid indignation, stupid fears — stupid laughter, too. I wonder what interpretation you are putting on it?"

"It wasn't gay, certainly," she said. "But why are you angry with me? Are you sorry you took me away from those beasts? I told you who I was. You could see it."

"Heavens!" he muttered. He had regained his command of himself. "I assure you I could see much more than you could tell me. I could see quite a lot that you don't even suspect yet, but you can't be seen quite through."

He sank to the ground by her side and took her hand. She asked gently:

"What more do you want from me?"

He made no sound for a time.

"The impossible, I suppose," he said very low, as one makes a confidence, and pressing the hand he grasped.

It did not return the pressure. He shook his head as if to drive away the thought of this, and added in a louder, light tone:

“Nothing less. And it isn’t because I think little of what I’ve got already. Oh, no! It is because I think so much of this possession of mine that I can’t have it complete enough. I know it’s unreasonable. You can’t hold back anything — now.”

“Indeed I couldn’t,” she whispered, letting her hand lie passive in his tight grasp. “I only wish I could give you something more, or better, or whatever it is you want.”

He was touched by the sincere accent of these simple words.

“I tell you what you can do — you can tell me whether you would have gone with me like this if you had known of whom that abominable idiot of a hotel-keeper was speaking. A murderer — no less!”

“But I didn’t know you at all then,” she cried. “And I had the sense to understand what he was saying. It wasn’t murder, really. I never thought it was.”

“What made him invent such an atrocity?” Heyst exclaimed. “He seems a stupid animal. He is stupid. How did he manage to hatch that pretty tale? Have I a particularly vile countenance? Is black selfishness written all over my face? Or is that sort of thing so universally human that it might be said of anybody?”

“It wasn’t murder,” she insisted earnestly.

“I know. I understand. It was worse. As to killing a man, which would be a comparatively decent thing to do, well — I have never done that.”

“Why should you do it?” she asked in a frightened voice.

“My dear girl, you don’t know the sort of life I have been leading in unexplored countries, in the wilds; it’s difficult to give you an idea. There are men who haven’t been in such tight places as I have found myself in who have had to — to shed blood, as the saying is. Even the wilds hold prizes which tempt some people; but I had no schemes, no plans — and not even great firmness of mind to make me unduly obstinate. I was simply moving on, while the others, perhaps, were going somewhere. An indifference as to roads and purposes makes one meeker, as it were. And I may say truly, too, that I never did care, I won’t say for life — I had scorned what people call by that name from the first — but for being alive. I don’t know if that is what men call courage, but I doubt it very much.”

“You! You have no courage?” she protested.

“I really don’t know. Not the sort that always itches for a weapon, for I have never been anxious to use one in the quarrels that a man gets into in the most innocent way sometimes. The differences for which men murder each other are, like everything else they do, the most contemptible, the most pitiful things to look back upon. No, I’ve never killed a man or loved a woman — not even in my thoughts, not even in my dreams.”

He raised her hand to his lips, and let them rest on it for a space, during which she moved a little closer to him. After the lingering kiss he did not relinquish his hold.

“To slay, to love — the greatest enterprises of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either. You must forgive me anything that may have appeared to you awkward in my behaviour, inexpressive in my speeches, untimely in my silences.”

He moved uneasily, a little disappointed by her attitude, but indulgent to it, and feeling, in this moment of perfect quietness, that in holding her surrendered hand he had found a closer communion than they had ever achieved before. But even then there still lingered in him a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome — which, it seemed, nothing ever would overcome — the fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life, which makes of them a delusion and a snare.

All of a sudden he squeezed her hand angrily. His delicately playful equanimity, the product of kindness and scorn, had perished with the loss of his bitter liberty.

“Not murder, you say! I should think not. But when you led me to talk just now, when the name turned up, when you understood that it was of me that these things had been said, you showed a strange emotion. I could see it.”

“I was a bit startled,” she said.

“At the baseness of my conduct?” he asked.

“I wouldn’t judge you, not for anything.”

“Really?”

“It would be as if I dared to judge everything that there is.” With her other hand she made a gesture that seemed to embrace in one movement the earth and the heaven. “I wouldn’t do such a thing.”

Then came a silence, broken at last by Heyst:

“I! I! do a deadly wrong to my poor Morrison!” he cried. “I, who could not bear to hurt his feelings. I, who respected his very madness! Yes, this madness, the wreck of which you can see lying about the jetty of Diamond Bay. What else could I do? He insisted on regarding me as his saviour; he was always restraining the eternal obligation on the tip of his tongue, till I was burning with shame at his gratitude. What could I do? He was going to repay me with this infernal coal, and I had to join him as one joins a child’s game in a nursery. One would no more have thought of humiliating him than one would think of humiliating a child. What’s the use of talking of all this! Of course, the people here could not understand the truth of our relation to each other. But what business of theirs was it? Kill old Morrison! Well, it is less criminal, less base — I am not saying it is less difficult — to kill a man than to cheat him in that way. You understand that?”

She nodded slightly, but more than once and with evident conviction. His eyes rested on her, inquisitive, ready for tenderness.

“But it was neither one nor the other,” he went on. “Then, why your emotion? All you confess is that you wouldn’t judge me.”

She turned upon him her veiled, unseeing grey eyes in which nothing of her wonder could be read.

“I said I couldn’t,” she whispered.

“But you thought that there was no smoke without fire!” the playfulness of tone hardly concealed his irritation. “What power there must be in words, only imperfectly heard — for you did not listen with particular care, did you? What were they? What evil effort of invention drove them into that idiot’s mouth out of his lying throat? If you were to try to remember, they would perhaps convince me, too.”

“I didn’t listen,” she protested. “What was it to me what they said of anybody? He was saying that there never were such loving friends to look at as you two; then, when you got all you wanted out of him and got thoroughly tired of him, too, you kicked him out to go home and die.”

Indignation, with an undercurrent of some other feeling, rang in these quoted words, uttered in her pure and enchanting voice. She ceased abruptly and lowered her long, dark lashes, as if mortally weary, sick at heart.

“Of course, why shouldn’t you get tired of that or any other — company? You aren’t like anyone else, and — and the thought of it made me unhappy suddenly; but indeed, I did not believe anything bad of you. I — ”

A brusque movement of his arm, flinging her hand away, stopped her short. Heyst had again lost control of himself. He would have shouted, if shouting had been in his character.

“No, this earth must be the appointed hatching planet of calumny enough to furnish the whole universe. I feel a disgust at my own person, as if I had tumbled into some filthy hole. Pah! And you — all you can say is that you won’t judge me; that you — ”

She raised her head at this attack, though indeed he had not turned to her.

“I don’t believe anything bad of you,” she repeated. “I couldn’t.”

He made a gesture as if to say:

“That’s sufficient.”

In his soul and in his body he experienced a nervous reaction from tenderness. All at once, without transition, he detested her. But only for a moment. He remembered that she was pretty, and, more, that she had a special grace in the intimacy of life. She had the secret of individuality which excites — and escapes.

He jumped up and began to walk to and fro. Presently his hidden fury fell into dust within him, like a crazy structure, leaving behind emptiness, desolation, regret. His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself — that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing clearly the plot of plots and unconsolated by the lucidity of his mind.

He swerved and, stepping up to her, sank to the ground by her side. Before she could make a movement or even turn her head his way, he took her in his arms and kissed her lips. He tasted on them the bitterness of a tear fallen there. He had never seen her cry. It was like another appeal to his tenderness — a new seduction. The girl glanced round, moved suddenly away, and averted her face. With her hand she signed imperiously to him to leave her alone — a command which Heyst did not obey.

Chapter 5

When she opened her eyes at last and sat up, Heyst scrambled quickly to his feet and went to pick up her cork helmet, which had rolled a little way off. Meanwhile she busied herself in doing up her hair, plaited on the top of her head in two heavy, dark tresses, which had come loose. He tendered her the helmet in silence, and waited as if unwilling to hear the sound of his own voice.

“We had better go down now,” he suggested in a low tone.

He extended his hand to help her up. He had the intention to smile, but abandoned it at the nearer sight of her still face, in which was depicted the infinite lassitude of her soul. On their way to regain the forest path they had to pass through the spot from which the view of the sea could be obtained. The flaming abyss of emptiness, the liquid, undulating glare, the tragic brutality of the light, made her long for the friendly night, with its stars stilled by an austere spell; for the velvety dark sky and the mysterious great shadow of the sea, conveying peace to the day-weary heart. She put her hand to her eyes. Behind her back Heyst spoke gently.

“Let us get on, Lena.”

She walked ahead in silence. Heyst remarked that they had never been out before during the hottest hours. It would do her no good, he feared. This solicitude pleased and soothed her. She felt more and more like herself — a poor London girl playing in an orchestra, and snatched out from the humiliations, the squalid dangers of a miserable existence, by a man like whom there was not, there could not be, another in this world. She felt this with elation, with uneasiness, with an intimate pride — and with a peculiar sinking of the heart.

“I am not easily knocked out by any such thing as heat,” she said decisively.

“Yes, but I don’t forget that you’re not a tropical bird.”

“You weren’t born in these parts, either,” she returned.

“No, and perhaps I haven’t even your physique. I am a transplanted being. Transplanted! I ought to call myself uprooted — an unnatural state of existence; but a man is supposed to stand anything.”

She looked back at him and received a smile. He told her to keep in the shelter of the forest path, which was very still and close, full of heat if free from glare. Now and then they had glimpses of the company’s old clearing blazing with light, in which the black stumps of trees stood charred, without shadows, miserable and sinister. They crossed the open in a direct line for the bungalow. On the veranda they fancied they had a glimpse of the vanishing Wang, though the girl was not at all sure that she had seen anything move. Heyst had no doubts.

“Wang has been looking out for us. We are late.”

“Was he? I thought I saw something white for a moment, and then I did not see it any more.”

“That’s it — he vanishes. It’s a very remarkable gift in that Chinaman.”

“Are they all like that?” she asked with naive curiosity and uneasiness.

“Not in such perfection,” said Heyst, amused.

He noticed with approval that she was not heated by the walk. The drops of perspiration on her forehead were like dew on the cool, white petal of a flower. He looked at her figure of grace and strength, solid and supple, with an ever-growing appreciation.

“Go in and rest yourself for a quarter of an hour; and then Mr. Wang will give us something to eat,” he said.

They had found the table laid. When they came together again and sat down to it, Wang materialized without a sound, unheard, uncalled, and did his office. Which being accomplished, at a given moment he was not.

A great silence brooded over Samburan — the silence of the great heat that seems pregnant with fatal issues, like the silence of ardent thought. Heyst remained alone in the big room. The girl seeing him take up a book, had retreated to her chamber. Heyst sat down under his father’s portrait; and the abominable calumny crept back into his recollection. The taste of it came on his lips, nauseating and corrosive like some kinds of poison. He was tempted to spit on the floor, naively, in sheer unsophisticated disgust of the physical sensation. He shook his head, surprised at himself. He was not used to receive his intellectual impressions in that way — reflected in movements of carnal emotion. He stirred impatiently in his chair, and raised the book to his eyes with both hands. It was one of his father’s. He opened it haphazard, and his eyes fell on the middle of the page. The elder Heyst had written of everything in many books — of space and of time, of animals and of stars; analysing ideas and actions, the laughter and the frowns of men, and the grimaces of their agony. The son read, shrinking into himself, composing his face as if under the author’s eye, with a vivid consciousness of the portrait on his right hand, a little above his head; a wonderful presence in its heavy frame on the flimsy wall of mats, looking exiled and at home, out of place and masterful, in the painted immobility of profile.

And Heyst, the son, read:

Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love — the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams.

He turned the pages of the little volume, “Storm and Dust,” glancing here and there at the broken text of reflections, maxims, short phrases, enigmatical sometimes and sometimes eloquent. It seemed to him that he was hearing his father’s voice, speaking and ceasing to speak again. Startled at first, he ended by finding a charm in the illusion. He abandoned himself to the half-belief that something of his father dwelt yet on earth — a ghostly voice, audible to the ear of his own flesh and blood. With what strange serenity, mingled with terrors, had that man considered the universal nothingness! He had plunged into it headlong, perhaps to render death, the answer that faced one at every inquiry, more supportable.

Heyst stirred, and the ghostly voice ceased; but his eyes followed the words on the last page of the book:

Men of tormented conscience, or of a criminal imagination, are aware of much that minds of a peaceful, resigned cast do not even suspect. It is not poets alone who dare

descend into the abyss of infernal regions, or even who dream of such a descent. The most inexpressive of human beings must have said to himself, at one time or another: "Anything but this!" . . .

We all have our instants of clairvoyance. They are not very helpful. The character of the scheme does not permit that or anything else to be helpful. Properly speaking its character, judged by the standards established by its victims, is infamous. It excuses every violence of protest and at the same time never fails to crush it, just as it crushes the blindest assent. The so-called wickedness must be, like the so-called virtue, its own reward — to be anything at all . . .

Clairvoyance or no clairvoyance, men love their captivity. To the unknown force of negation they prefer the miserably tumbled bed of their servitude. Man alone can give one the disgust of pity; yet I find it easier to believe in the misfortune of mankind than in its wickedness.

These were the last words. Heyst lowered the book to his knees. Lena's voice spoke above his drooping head:

"You sit there as if you were unhappy."

"I thought you were asleep," he said.

"I was lying down right enough, but I never closed my eyes."

"The rest would have done you good after our walk. Didn't you try?"

"I was lying down, I tell you, but sleep I couldn't."

"And you made no sound! What want of sincerity. Or did you want to be alone for a time?"

"I — alone?" she murmured.

He noticed her eyeing the book, and got up to put it back in the bookcase. When he turned round, he saw that she had dropped into the chair — it was the one she always used — and looked as if her strength had suddenly gone from her, leaving her only her youth, which seemed very pathetic, very much at his mercy. He moved quickly towards the chair.

"Tired, are you? It's my fault, taking you up so high and keeping you out so long. Such a windless day, too!"

She watched his concern, her pose languid, her eyes raised to him, but as unreadable as ever. He avoided looking into them for that very reason. He forgot himself in the contemplation of those passive arms, of these defenceless lips, and — yes, one had to go back to them — of these wide-open eyes. Something wild in their grey stare made him think of sea-birds in the cold murkiness of high latitudes. He started when she spoke, all the charm of physical intimacy revealed suddenly in that voice.

"You should try to love me!" she said.

He made a movement of astonishment.

"Try," he muttered. "But it seems to me — " He broke off, saying to himself that if he loved her, he had never told her so in so many words. Simple words! They died on his lips. "What makes you say that?" he asked.

She lowered her eyelids and turned her head a little.

"I have done nothing," she said in a low voice. "It's you who have been good, helpful, and tender to me. Perhaps you love me for that — just for that; or perhaps you love me for company, and because — well! But sometimes it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever." Her head drooped. "Forever," she breathed out again; then, still more faintly, she added an entreating: "Do try!"

These last words went straight to his heart — the sound of them more than the sense. He did not know what to say, either from want of practice in dealing with women or simply from his innate honesty of thought. All his defences were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat. But he managed a smile, though she was not looking at him; yes, he did manage it — the well-known Heyst smile of playful courtesy, so familiar to all sorts and conditions of men in the islands.

"My dear Lena," he said, "it looks as if you were trying to pick a very unnecessary quarrel with me — of all people!"

She made no movement. With his elbows spread out he was twisting the ends of his long moustaches, very masculine and perplexed, enveloped in the atmosphere of femininity as in a cloud, suspecting pitfalls, and as if afraid to move.

"I must admit, though," he added, "that there is no one else; and I suppose a certain amount of quarrelling is necessary for existence in this world."

That girl, seated in her chair in graceful quietude, was to him like a script in an unknown language, or even more simply mysterious, like any writing to the illiterate. As far as women went he was altogether uninstructed and he had not the gift of intuition which is fostered in the days of youth by dreams and visions, exercises of the heart fitting it for the encounters of a world, in which love itself rests as much on antagonism as on attraction. His mental attitude was that of a man looking this way and that on a piece of writing which he is unable to decipher, but which may be big with some revelation. He didn't know what to say. All he found to add was:

"I don't even understand what I have done or left undone to distress you like this."

He stopped, struck afresh by the physical and moral sense of the imperfections of their relations — a sense which made him desire her constant nearness, before his eyes, under his hand, and which, when she was out of his sight, made her so vague, so elusive and illusory, a promise that could not be embraced and held.

"No! I don't see clearly what you mean. Is your mind turned towards the future?" he interpellated her with marked playfulness, because he was ashamed to let such a word pass his lips. But all his cherished negations were falling off him one by one.

"Because if it is so there is nothing easier than to dismiss it. In our future, as in what people call the other life, there is nothing to be frightened of."

She raised her eyes to him; and if nature had formed them to express anything else but blank candour he would have learned how terrified she was by his talk and the fact that her sinking heart loved him more desperately than ever. He smiled at her.

"Dismiss all thought of it," he insisted. "Surely you don't suspect after what I have heard from you, that I am anxious to return to mankind. I! I! murder my poor Morrison!"

It's possible that I may be really capable of that which they say I have done. The point is that I haven't done it. But it is an unpleasant subject to me. I ought to be ashamed to confess it — but it is! Let us forget it. There's that in you, Lena, which can console me for worse things, for uglier passages. And if we forget, there are no voices here to remind us."

She had raised her head before he paused.

"Nothing can break in on us here," he went on and, as if there had been an appeal or a provocation in her upward glance, he bent down and took her under the arms, raising her straight out of the chair into a sudden and close embrace. Her alacrity to respond, which made her seem as light as a feather, warmed his heart at that moment more than closer caresses had done before. He had not expected that ready impulse towards himself which had been dormant in her passive attitude. He had just felt the clasp of her arms round his neck, when, with a slight exclamation — "He's here!" — she disengaged herself and bolted, away into her room.

Chapter 6

Heyst was astounded. Looking all round, as if to take the whole room to witness of this outrage, he became aware of Wang materialized in the doorway. The intrusion was as surprising as anything could be, in view of the strict regularity with which Wang made himself visible. Heyst was tempted to laugh at first. This practical comment on his affirmation that nothing could break in on them relieved the strain of his feelings. He was a little vexed, too. The Chinaman preserved a profound silence.

"What do you want?" asked Heyst sternly.

"Boat out there," said the Chinaman.

"Where? What do you mean? Boat adrift in the straits?"

Some subtle change in Wang's bearing suggested his being out of breath; but he did not pant, and his voice was steady.

"No — row."

It was Heyst now who was startled and raised his voice.

"Malay man, eh?"

Wang made a slight negative movement with his head.

"Do you hear, Lena?" Heyst called out. "Wang says there is a boat in sight — somewhere near apparently. Where's that boat Wang?"

"Round the point," said Wang, leaping into Malay unexpectedly, and in a loud voice. "White men three."

"So close as that?" exclaimed Heyst, moving out on the veranda followed by Wang. "White men? Impossible!"

Over the clearing the shadows were already lengthening. The sun hung low; a ruddy glare lay on the burnt black patch in front of the bungalow, and slanted on the ground between the straight, tall, mast-like trees soaring a hundred feet or more without a

branch. The growth of bushes cut off all view of the jetty from the veranda. Far away to the right Wang's hut, or rather its dark roof of mats, could be seen above the bamboo fence which insured the privacy of the Alfuro woman. The Chinaman looked that way swiftly. Heyst paused, and then stepped back a pace into the room.

"White men, Lena, apparently. What are you doing?"

"I am just bathing my eyes a little," the girl's voice said from the inner room.

"Oh, yes; all right!"

"Do you want me?"

"No. You had better — I am going down to the jetty. Yes, you had better stay in. What an extraordinary thing!"

It was so extraordinary that nobody could possibly appreciate how extraordinary it was but himself. His mind was full of mere exclamations, while his feet were carrying him in the direction of the jetty. He followed the line of the rails, escorted by Wang.

"Where were you when you first saw the boat?" he asked over his shoulder.

Wang explained in Malay that he had gone to the shore end of the wharf, to get a few lumps of coal from the big heap, when, happening to raise his eyes from the ground, he saw the boat — a white man boat, not a canoe. He had good eyes. He had seen the boat, with the men at the oars; and here Wang made a particular gesture over his eyes, as if his vision had received a blow. He had turned at once and run to the house to report.

"No mistake, eh?" said Heyst, moving on. At the very outer edge of the belt he stopped short. Wang halted behind him on the path, till the voice of Number One called him sharply forward into the open. He obeyed.

"Where's that boat?" asked Heyst forcibly. "I say — where is it?"

Nothing whatever was to be seen between the point and the jetty. The stretch of Diamond Bay was like a piece of purple shadow, lustrous and empty, while beyond the land, the open sea lay blue and opaque under the sun. Heyst's eyes swept all over the offing till they met, far off, the dark cone of the volcano, with its faint plume of smoke broadening and vanishing everlastingly at the top, without altering its shape in the glowing transparency of the evening.

"The fellow has been dreaming," he muttered to himself.

He looked hard at the Chinaman. Wang seemed turned into stone. Suddenly, as if he had received a shock, he started, flung his arm out with a pointing forefinger, and made guttural noises to the effect that there, there, there, he had seen a boat.

It was very uncanny. Heyst thought of some strange hallucination. Unlikely enough; but that a boat with three men in it should have sunk between the point and the jetty, suddenly, like a stone, without leaving as much on the surface as a floating oar, was still more unlikely. The theory of a phantom boat would have been more credible than that.

"Confound it!" he muttered to himself.

He was unpleasantly affected by this mystery; but now a simple explanation occurred to him. He stepped hastily out on the wharf. The boat, if it had existed and had retreated, could perhaps be seen from the far end of the long jetty.

Nothing was to be seen. Heyst let his eyes roam idly over the sea. He was so absorbed in his perplexity that a hollow sound, as of somebody tumbling about in a boat, with a clatter of oars and spars, failed to make him move for a moment. When his mind seized its meaning, he had no difficulty in locating the sound. It had come from below — under the jetty!

He ran back for a dozen yards or so, and then looked over. His sight plunged straight into the stern-sheets of a big boat, the greater part of which was hidden from him by the planking of the jetty. His eyes fell on the thin back of a man doubled up over the tiller in a queer, uncomfortable attitude of drooping sorrow. Another man, more directly below Heyst, sprawled on his back from gunwale to gunwale, half off the after thwart, his head lower than his feet. This second man glared wildly upward, and struggled to raise himself, but to all appearance was much too drunk to succeed. The visible part of the boat contained also a flat, leather trunk, on which the first man's long legs were tucked up nervelessly. A large earthenware jug, with its wide mouth uncorked, rolled out on the bottom-boards from under the sprawling man.

Heyst had never been so much astonished in his life. He stared dumbly at the strange boat's crew. From the first he was positive that these men were not sailors. They wore the white drill-suit of tropical civilization; but their apparition in a boat Heyst could not connect with anything plausible. The civilization of the tropics could have had nothing to do with it. It was more like those myths, current in Polynesia, of amazing strangers, who arrive at an island, gods or demons, bringing good or evil to the innocence of the inhabitants — gifts of unknown things, words never heard before.

Heyst noticed a cork helmet floating alongside the boat, evidently fallen from the head of the man doubled over the tiller, who displayed a dark, bony poll. An oar, too, had been knocked overboard, probably by the sprawling man, who was still struggling, between the thwarts. By this time Heyst regarded the visitation no longer with surprise, but with the sustained attention demanded by a difficult problem. With one foot poised on the string-piece, and leaning on his raised knee, he was taking in everything. The sprawling man rolled off the thwart, collapsed, and, most unexpectedly, got on his feet. He swayed dizzily, spreading his arms out and uttered faintly a hoarse, dreamy "Hallo!" His upturned face was swollen, red, peeling all over the nose and cheeks. His stare was irrational. Heyst perceived stains of dried blood all over the front of his dirty white coat, and also on one sleeve.

"What's the matter? Are you wounded?"

The other glanced down, reeled — one of his feet was inside a large pith hat — and, recovering himself, let out a dismal, grating sound in the manner of a grim laugh.

"Blood — not mine. Thirst's the matter. Exhausted's the matter. Done up. Drink, man! Give us water!"

Thirst was in the very tone of his words, alternating a broken croak and a faint, throaty rustle which just reached Heyst's ears. The man in the boat raised his hands to be helped up on the jetty, whispering:

"I tried. I am too weak. I tumbled down."

Wang was coming along the jetty slowly, with intent, straining eyes.

"Run back and bring a crowbar here. There's one lying by the coal-heap," Heyst shouted to him.

The man standing in the boat sat down on the thwart behind him. A horrible coughing laugh came through his swollen lips.

"Crowbar? What's that for?" he mumbled, and his head dropped on his chest mournfully.

Meantime, Heyst, as if he had forgotten the boat, started kicking hard at a large brass tap projecting above the planks. To accommodate ships that came for coal and happened to need water as well, a stream had been tapped in the interior and an iron pipe led along the jetty. It terminated with a curved end almost exactly where the strangers' boat had been driven between the piles; but the tap was set fast.

"Hurry up!" Heyst yelled to the Chinaman, who was running with the crowbar in his hand.

Heyst snatched it from him and, obtaining a leverage against the string-piece, wrung the stiff tap round with a mighty jerk. "I hope that pipe hasn't got choked!" he muttered to himself anxiously.

It hadn't; but it did not yield a strong gush. The sound of a thin stream, partly breaking on the gunwale of the boat and partly splashing alongside, became at once audible. It was greeted by a cry of inarticulate and savage joy. Heyst knelt on the string-piece and peered down. The man who had spoken was already holding his open mouth under the bright trickle. Water ran over his eyelids and over his nose, gurgled down his throat, flowed over his chin. Then some obstruction in the pipe gave way, and a sudden thick jet broke on his face. In a moment his shoulders were soaked, the front of his coat inundated; he streamed and dripped; water ran into his pockets, down his legs, into his shoes; but he had clutched the end of the pipe, and, hanging on with both hands, swallowed, spluttered, choked, snorted with the noises of a swimmer. Suddenly a curious dull roar reached Heyst's ears. Something hairy and black flew from under the jetty. A dishevelled head, coming on like a cannonball, took the man at the pipe in flank, with enough force to tear his grip loose and fling him headlong into the stern-sheets. He fell upon the folded legs of the man at the tiller, who, roused by the commotion in the boat, was sitting up, silent, rigid, and very much like a corpse. His eyes were but two black patches, and his teeth glistened with a death's head grin between his retracted lips, no thicker than blackish parchment glued over the gums.

From him Heyst's eyes wandered to the creature who had replaced the first man at the end of the water-pipe. Enormous brown paws clutched it savagely; the wild, big head hung back, and in a face covered with a wet mass of hair there gaped crookedly a wide mouth full of fangs. The water filled it, welled up in hoarse coughs, ran down on

each side of the jaws and down the hairy throat, soaked the black pelt of the enormous chest, naked under a torn check shirt, heaving convulsively with a play of massive muscles carved in red mahogany.

As soon as the first man had recovered the breath knocked out of him by the irresistible charge, a scream of mad cursing issued from the stern-sheets. With a rigid, angular crooking of the elbow, the man at the tiller put his hand back to his hip.

“Don’t shoot him, sir!” yelled the first man. “Wait! Let me have that tiller. I will teach him to shove himself in front of a caballero!”

Martin Ricardo flourished the heavy piece of wood, leaped forward with astonishing vigour, and brought it down on Pedro’s head with a crash that resounded all over the quiet sweep of Black Diamond Bay. A crimson patch appeared on the matted hair, red veins appeared in the water flowing all over his face, and it dripped in rosy drops off his head. But the man hung on. Not till a second furious blow descended did the hairy paws let go their grip and the squirming body sink limply. Before it could touch the bottom-boards, a tremendous kick in the ribs from Ricardo’s foot shifted it forward out of sight, whence came the noise of a heavy thud, a clatter of spars, and a pitiful grunt. Ricardo stooped to look under the jetty.

“Aha, dog! This will teach you to keep back where you belong, you murdering brute, you slaughtering savage, you! You infidel, you robber of churches! Next time I will rip you open from neck to heel, you carrion-eater! Esclavo!”

He backed a little and straightened himself up.

“I don’t mean it really,” he remarked to Heyst, whose steady eyes met his from above. He ran aft briskly.

“Come along, sir. It’s your turn. I oughtn’t to have drunk first. ‘S truth, I forgot myself! A gentleman like you will overlook that, I know.” As he made these apologies, Ricardo extended his hand. “Let me steady you, sir.”

Slowly Mr. Jones unfolded himself in all his slenderness, rocked, staggered, and caught Ricardo’s shoulder. His henchman assisted him to the pipe, which went on gushing a clear stream of water, sparkling exceedingly against the black piles and the gloom under the jetty.

“Catch hold, sir,” Ricardo advised solicitously. “All right?”

He stepped back, and, while Mr. Jones revelled in the abundance of water, he addressed himself to Heyst with a sort of justificatory speech, the tone of which, reflecting his feelings, partook of purring and spitting. They had been thirty hours tugging at the oars, he explained, and they had been more than forty hours without water, except that the night before they had licked the dew off the gunwales.

Ricardo did not explain to Heyst how it happened. At that precise moment he had no explanation ready for the man on the wharf, who, he guessed, must be wondering much more at the presence of his visitors than at their plight.

Chapter 7

The explanation lay in the two simple facts that the light winds and strong currents of the Java Sea had drifted the boat about until they partly lost their bearings; and that by some extra-ordinary mistake one of the two jars put into the boat by Schomberg's man contained salt water. Ricardo tried to put some pathos into his tones. Pulling for thirty hours with eighteen-foot oars! And the sun! Ricardo relieved his feelings by cursing the sun. They had felt their hearts and lungs shrivel within them. And then, as if all that hadn't been trouble enough, he complained bitterly, he had had to waste his fainting strength in beating their servant about the head with a stretcher. The fool had wanted to drink sea water, and wouldn't listen to reason. There was no stopping him otherwise. It was better to beat him into insensibility than to have him go crazy in the boat, and to be obliged to shoot him. The preventive, administered with enough force to brain an elephant, boasted Ricardo, had to be applied on two occasions — the second time all but in sight of the jetty.

"You have seen the beauty," Ricardo went on expansively, hiding his lack of some sort of probable story under this loquacity. "I had to hammer him away from the spout. Opened afresh all the old broken spots on his head. You saw how hard I had to hit. He has no restraint, no restraint at all. If it wasn't that he can be made useful in one way or another, I would just as soon have let the governor shoot him."

He smiled up at Heyst in his peculiar lip-retracting manner, and added by way of afterthought:

"That's what will happen to him in the end, if he doesn't learn to restrain himself. But I've taught him to mind his manners for a while, anyhow!"

And again he addressed his quick grin up to the man on the wharf. His round eyes had never left Heyst's face ever since he began to deliver his account of the voyage.

"So that's how he looks!" Ricardo was saying to himself.

He had not expected Heyst to be like this. He had formed for himself a conception containing the helpful suggestion of a vulnerable point. These solitary men were often tipplers. But no! — this was not a drinking man's face; nor could he detect the weakness of alarm, or even the weakness of surprise, on these features, in those steady eyes.

"We were too far gone to climb out," Ricardo went on. "I heard you walking along though. I thought I shouted; I tried to. You didn't hear me shout?"

Heyst made an almost imperceptible negative sign, which the greedy eyes of Ricardo — greedy for all signs — did not miss.

"Throat too parched. We didn't even care to whisper to each other lately. Thirst chokes one. We might have died there under this wharf before you found us."

"I couldn't think where you had gone to." Heyst was heard at last, addressing directly the newcomers from the sea. "You were seen as soon as you cleared that point."

"We were seen, eh?" grunted Mr. Ricardo. "We pulled like machines — daren't stop. The governor sat at the tiller, but he couldn't speak to us. She drove in between the piles till she hit something, and we all tumbled off the thwarts as if we had been drunk."

Drunk — ha, ha! Too dry, by George! We fetched in here with the very last of our strength, and no mistake. Another mile would have done for us. When I heard your footsteps, above, I tried to get up, and I fell down.”

“That was the first sound I heard,” said Heyst.

Mr Jones, the front of his soiled white tunic soaked and plastered against his breast-bone, staggered away from the water-pipe. Steadying himself on Ricardo’s shoulder, he drew a long breath, raised his dripping head, and produced a smile of ghastly amiability, which was lost upon the thoughtful Heyst. Behind his back the sun, touching the water, was like a disc of iron cooled to a dull red glow, ready to start rolling round the circular steel plate of the sea, which, under the darkening sky, looked more solid than the high ridge of Samburan; more solid than the point, whose long outlined slope melted into its own unfathomable shadow blurring the dim sheen on the bay. The forceful stream from the pipe broke like shattered glass on the boat’s gunwale. Its loud, fitful, and persistent splashing revealed the depths of the world’s silence.

“Great notion, to lead the water out here,” pronounced Ricardo appreciatively.

Water was life. He felt now as if he could run a mile, scale a ten-foot wall, sing a song. Only a few minutes ago he was next door to a corpse, done up, unable to stand, to lift a hand; unable to groan. A drop of water had done that miracle.

“Didn’t you feel life itself running and soaking into you, sir?” he asked his principal, with deferential but forced vivacity.

Without a word, Mr. Jones stepped off the thwart and sat down in the stern-sheets.

“Isn’t that man of yours bleeding to death in the bows under there?” inquired Heyst.

Ricardo ceased his ecstasies over the life-giving water and answered in a tone of innocence:

“He? You may call him a man, but his hide is a jolly sight tougher than the toughest alligator he ever skinned in the good old days. You don’t know how much he can stand: I do. We have tried him a long time ago. Ola, there! Pedro! Pedro!” he yelled, with a force of lung testifying to the regenerative virtues of water.

A weak “Senor?” came from under the wharf.

“What did I tell you?” said Ricardo triumphantly. “Nothing can hurt him. He’s all right. But, I say, the boat’s getting swamped. Can’t you turn this water off before you sink her under us? She’s half full already.”

At a sign from Heyst, Wang hammered at the brass tap on the wharf, then stood behind Number One, crowbar in hand, motionless as before. Ricardo was perhaps not so certain of Pedro’s toughness as he affirmed; for he stooped, peering under the wharf, then moved forward out of sight. The gush of water ceasing suddenly, made a silence which became complete when the after-trickle stopped. Afar, the sun was reduced to a red spark, glowing very low in the breathless immensity of twilight. Purple gleams lingered on the water all round the boat. The spectral figure in the stern-sheets spoke in a languid tone:

“That — er — companion — er — secretary of mine is a queer chap. I am afraid we aren’t presenting ourselves in a very favourable light.”

Heyst listened. It was the conventional voice of an educated man, only strangely lifeless. But more strange yet was this concern for appearances, expressed, he did not know, whether in jest or in earnest. Earnestness was hardly to be supposed under the circumstances, and no one had ever jested in such dead tones. It was something which could not be answered, and Heyst said nothing. The other went on:

“Travelling as I do, I find a man of his sort extremely useful. He has his little weaknesses, no doubt.”

“Indeed!” Heyst was provoked into speaking. “Weakness of the arm is not one of them; neither is an exaggerated humanity, as far as I can judge.”

“Defects of temper,” explained Mr. Jones from the stern-sheets.

The subject of this dialogue, coming out just then from under the wharf into the visible part of the boat, made himself heard in his own defence, in a voice full of life, and with nothing languid in his manner on the contrary, it was brisk, almost jocose. He begged pardon for contradicting. He was never out of temper with “our Pedro.” The fellow was a Dago of immense strength and of no sense whatever. This combination made him dangerous, and he had to be treated accordingly, in a manner which he could understand. Reasoning was beyond him.

“And so” — Ricardo addressed Heyst with animation — “you mustn’t be surprised if — ”

“I assure you,” Heyst interrupted, “that my wonder at your arrival in your boat here is so great that it leaves no room for minor astonishments. But hadn’t you better land?”

“That’s the talk, sir!” Ricardo began to bustle about the boat, talking all the time. Finding himself unable to “size up” this man, he was inclined to credit him with extraordinary powers of penetration, which, it seemed to him, would be favoured by silence. Also, he feared some pointblank question. He had no ready-made story to tell. He and his patron had put off considering that rather important detail too long. For the last two days, the horrors of thirst, coming on them unexpectedly, had prevented consultation. They had had to pull for dear life. But the man on the wharf, were he in league with the devil himself, would pay for all their sufferings, thought Ricardo with an unholy joy.

Meantime, splashing in the water which covered the bottom-boards, Ricardo congratulated himself aloud on the luggage being out of the way of the wet. He had piled it up forward. He had roughly tied up Pedro’s head. Pedro had nothing to grumble about. On the contrary, he ought to be mighty thankful to him, Ricardo, for being alive at all.

“Well, now, let me give you a leg up, sir,” he said cheerily to his motionless principal in the stern-sheets. “All our troubles are over — for a time, anyhow. Ain’t it luck to find a white man on this island? I would have just as soon expected to meet an angel from heaven — eh, Mr. Jones? Now then — ready, sir? one, two, three, up you go!”

Helped from below by Ricardo, and from above by the man more unexpected than an angel, Mr. Jones scrambled up and stood on the wharf by the side of Heyst. He

swayed like a reed. The night descending on Samburan turned into dense shadow the point of land and the wharf itself, and gave a dark solidity to the unshimmering water extending to the last faint trace of light away to the west. Heyst stared at the guests whom the renounced world had sent him thus at the end of the day. The only other vestige of light left on earth lurked in the hollows of the thin man's eyes. They gleamed, mobile and languidly evasive. The eyelids fluttered.

"You are feeling weak," said Heyst.

"For the moment, a little," confessed the other.

With loud panting, Ricardo scrambled on his hands and knees upon the wharf, energetic and unaided. He rose up at Heyst's elbow and stamped his foot on the planks, with a sharp, provocative, double beat, such as is heard sometimes in fencing-schools before the adversaries engage their foils. Not that the renegade seaman Ricardo knew anything of fencing. What he called "shooting-irons," were his weapons, or the still less aristocratic knife, such as was even then ingeniously strapped to his leg. He thought of it, at that moment. A swift stooping motion, then, on the recovery, a ripping blow, a shove off the wharf, and no noise except a splash in the water that would scarcely disturb the silence. Heyst would have no time for a cry. It would be quick and neat, and immensely in accord with Ricardo's humour. But he repressed this gust of savagery. The job was not such a simple one. This piece had to be played to another tune, and in much slower time. He returned to his note of talkative simplicity.

"Ay; and I too don't feel as strong as I thought I was when the first drink set me up. Great wonder-worker water is! And to get it right here on the spot! It was heaven — hey, sir?"

Mr Jones, being directly addressed, took up his part in the concerted piece:

"Really, when I saw a wharf on what might have been an uninhabited island, I couldn't believe my eyes. I doubted its existence. I thought it was a delusion till the boat actually drove between the piles, as you see her lying now."

While he was speaking faintly, in a voice which did not seem to belong to the earth, his henchman, in extremely loud and terrestrial accents, was fussing about their belongings in the boat, addressing himself to Pedro:

"Come, now — pass up the dunnage there! Move, yourself, hombre, or I'll have to get down again and give you a tap on those bandages of yours, you growling bear, you!"

"Ah! You didn't believe in the reality of the wharf?" Heyst was saying to Mr. Jones.

"You ought to kiss my hands!"

Ricardo caught hold of an ancient Gladstone bag and swung it on the wharf with a thump.

"Yes! You ought to burn a candle before me as they do before the saints in your country. No saint has ever done so much for you as I have, you ungrateful vagabond. Now then! Up you get!"

Helped by the talkative Ricardo, Pedro scrambled up on the wharf, where he remained for some time on all fours, swinging to and fro his shaggy head tied up in white

rags. Then he got up clumsily, like a bulky animal in the dusk, balancing itself on its hind legs.

Mr Jones began to explain languidly to Heyst that they were in a pretty bad state that morning, when they caught sight of the smoke of the volcano. It nerved them to make an effort for their lives. Soon afterwards they made out the island.

"I had just wits enough left in my baked brain to alter the direction of the boat," the ghostly voice went on. "As to finding assistance, a wharf, a white man — nobody would have dreamed of it. Simply preposterous!"

"That's what I thought when my Chinaman came and told me he had seen a boat with white men pulling up," said Heyst.

"Most extraordinary luck," interjected Ricardo, standing by anxiously attentive to every word. "Seems a dream," he added. "A lovely dream!"

A silence fell on that group of three, as if everyone had become afraid to speak, in an obscure sense of an impending crisis. Pedro on one side of them and Wang on the other had the air of watchful spectators. A few stars had come out pursuing the ebbing twilight. A light draught of air tepid enough in the thickening twilight after the scorching day, struck a chill into Mr. Jones in his soaked clothes.

"I may infer, then, that there is a settlement of white people here?" he murmured, shivering visibly.

Heyst roused himself.

"Oh, abandoned, abandoned. I am alone here — practically alone; but several empty houses are still standing. No lack of accommodation. We may just as well — here, Wang, go back to the shore and run the trolley out here."

The last words having been spoken in Malay, he explained courteously that he had given directions for the transport of the luggage. Wang had melted into the night — in his soundless manner.

"My word! Rails laid down and all," exclaimed Ricardo softly, in a tone of admiration. "Well, I never!"

"We were working a coal-mine here," said the late manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company. "These are only the ghosts of things that have been."

Mr Jones's teeth were suddenly started chattering by another faint puff of wind, a mere sigh from the west, where Venus cast her rays on the dark edge of the horizon, like a bright lamp hung above the grave of the sun.

"We might be moving on," proposed Heyst. "My Chinaman and that — ah — ungrateful servant of yours, with the broken head, can load the things and come along after us."

The suggestion was accepted without words. Moving towards the shore, the three men met the trolley, a mere metallic rustle which whisked past them, the shadowy Wang running noiselessly behind. Only the sound of their footsteps accompanied them. It was a long time since so many footsteps had rung together on that jetty. Before they stepped on to the path trodden through the grass, Heyst said:

"I am prevented from offering you a share of my own quarters." The distant courtliness of this beginning arrested the other two suddenly, as if amazed by some manifest incongruity. "I should regret it more," he went on, "if I were not in a position to give you the choice of those empty bungalows for a temporary home."

He turned round and plunged into the narrow track, the two others following in single file.

"Queer start!" Ricardo took the opportunity for whispering, as he fell behind Mr. Jones, who swayed in the gloom, enclosed by the stalks of tropical grass, almost as slender as a stalk of grass himself.

In this order they emerged into the open space kept clear of vegetation by Wang's judicious system of periodic firing. The shapes of buildings, unlighted, high-roofed, looked mysteriously extensive and featureless against the increasing glitter of the stars. Heyst was pleased at the absence of light in his bungalow. It looked as uninhabited as the others. He continued to lead the way, inclining to the right. His equable voice was heard:

"This one would be the best. It was our counting-house. There is some furniture in it yet. I am pretty certain that you'll find a couple of camp bedsteads in one of the rooms."

The high-pitched roof of the bungalow towered up very close, eclipsing the sky.

"Here we are. Three steps. As you see, there's a wide veranda. Sorry to keep you waiting for a moment; the door is locked, I think."

He was heard trying it. Then he leaned against the rail, saying:

"Wang will get the keys."

The others waited, two vague shapes nearly mingled together in the darkness of the veranda, from which issued a sudden chattering of Mr. Jones's teeth, directly suppressed, and a slight shuffle of Ricardo's feet. Their guide and host, his back against the rail, seemed to have forgotten their existence. Suddenly he moved, and murmured:

"Ah, here's the trolley."

Then he raised his voice in Malay, and was answered, "Ya tuan," from an indistinct group that could be made out in the direction of the track.

"I have sent Wang for the key and a light," he said, in a voice that came out without any particular direction — a peculiarity which disconcerted Ricardo.

Wang did not tarry long on his mission. Very soon from the distant recesses of obscurity appeared the swinging lantern he carried. It cast a fugitive ray on the arrested trolley with the uncouth figure of the wild Pedro drooping over the load; then it moved towards the bungalow and ascended the stairs. After working at the stiff lock, Wang applied his shoulder to the door. It came open with explosive suddenness, as if in a passion at being thus disturbed after two years' repose. From the dark slope of a tall stand-up writing-desk a forgotten, solitary sheet of paper flew up and settled gracefully on the floor.

Wang and Pedro came and went through the offended door, bringing the things off the trolley, one flitting swiftly in and out, the other staggering heavily. Later, directed

by a few quiet words from Number One, Wang made several journeys with the lantern to the store-rooms, bringing in blankets, provisions in tins, coffee, sugar, and a packet of candles. He lighted one, and stuck it on the ledge of the stand-up desk. Meantime Pedro, being introduced to some kindling-wood and a bundle of dry sticks, had busied himself outside in lighting a fire, on which he placed a ready-filled kettle handed to him by Wang impassively, at arm's length, as if across a chasm. Having received the thanks of his guests, Heyst wished them goodnight and withdrew, leaving them to their repose.

Chapter 8

Heyst walked away slowly. There was still no light in his bungalow, and he thought that perhaps it was just as well. By this time he was much less perturbed. Wang had preceded him with the lantern, as if in a hurry to get away from the two white men and their hairy attendant. The light was not dancing along any more; it was standing perfectly still by the steps of the veranda.

Heyst, glancing back casually, saw behind him still another light — the light of the strangers' open fire. A black, uncouth form, stooping over it monstrosly, staggered away into the outlying shadows. The kettle had boiled, probably.

With that weird vision of something questionably human impressed upon his senses, Heyst moved on a pace or two. What could the people be who had such a creature for their familiar attendant? He stopped. The vague apprehension, of a distant future, in which he saw Lena unavoidably separated from him by profound and subtle differences; the sceptical carelessness which had accompanied every one of his attempts at action, like a secret reserve of his soul, fell away from him. He no longer belonged to himself. There was a call far more imperious and august. He came up to the bungalow, and at the very limit of the lantern's light, on the top step, he saw her feet and the bottom part of her dress. The rest of her person was suggested dimly as high as her waist. She sat on a chair, and the gloom of the low eaves descended upon her head and shoulders. She didn't stir.

"You haven't gone to sleep here?" he asked.

"Oh, no! I was waiting for you — in the dark."

Heyst, on the top step, leaned against a wooden pillar, after moving the lantern to one side.

"I have been thinking that it is just as well you had no light. But wasn't it dull for you to sit in the dark?"

"I don't need a light to think of you." Her charming voice gave a value to this banal answer, which had also the merit of truth. Heyst laughed a little, and said that he had had a curious experience. She made no remark. He tried to figure to himself the outlines of her easy pose. A spot of dim light here and there hinted at the unfailing grace of attitude which was one of her natural possessions.

She had thought of him, but not in connection with the strangers. She had admired him from the first; she had been attracted by his warm voice, his gentle eye, but she had felt him too wonderfully difficult to know. He had given to life a savour, a movement, a promise mingled with menaces, which she had not suspected were to be found in it — or, at any rate, not by a girl wedded to misery as she was. She said to herself that she must not be irritated because he seemed too self-contained, and as if shut up in a world of his own. When he took her in his arms, she felt that his embrace had a great and compelling force, that he was moved deeply, and that perhaps he would not get tired of her so very soon. She thought that he had opened to her the feelings of delicate joy, that the very uneasiness he caused her was delicious in its sadness, and that she would try to hold him as long as she could — till her fainting arms, her sinking soul, could cling to him no more.

“Wang’s not here, of course?” Heyst said suddenly. She answered as if in her sleep.

“He put this light down here without stopping, and ran.”

“Ran, did he? H’m! Well, it’s considerably later than his usual time to go home to his Alfuro wife; but to be seen running is a sort of degradation for Wang, who has mastered the art of vanishing. Do you think he was startled out of his perfection by something?”

“Why should he be startled?”

Her voice remained dreamy, a little uncertain.

“I have been startled,” Heyst said.

She was not listening to him. The lantern at their feet threw the shadows of her face upward. Her eyes glistened, as if frightened and attentive, above a lighted chin and a very white throat.

“Upon my word,” mused Heyst, “now that I don’t see them, I can hardly believe that those fellows exist!”

“And what about me?” she asked, so swiftly that he made a movement like somebody pounced upon from an ambush. “When you don’t see me, do you believe that I exist?”

“Exist? Most charmingly! My dear Lena, you don’t know your own advantages. Why, your voice alone would be enough to make you unforgettable!”

“Oh, I didn’t mean forgetting in that way. I dare say if I were to die you would remember me right enough. And what good would that be to anybody? It’s while I am alive that I want — ”

Heyst stood by her chair, a stalwart figure imperfectly lighted. The broad shoulders, the martial face that was like a disguise of his disarmed soul, were lost in the gloom above the plane of light in which his feet were planted. He suffered from a trouble with which she had nothing to do. She had no general conception of the conditions of the existence he had offered to her. Drawn into its peculiar stagnation she remained unrelated to it because of her ignorance.

For instance, she could never perceive the prodigious improbability of the arrival of that boat. She did not seem to be thinking of it. Perhaps she had already forgotten the fact herself. And Heyst resolved suddenly to say nothing more of it. It was not that he

shrank from alarming her. Not feeling anything definite himself he could not imagine a precise effect being produced on her by any amount of explanation. There is a quality in events which is apprehended differently by different minds or even by the same mind at different times. Any man living at all consciously knows that embarrassing truth. Heyst was aware that this visit could bode nothing pleasant. In his present soured temper towards all mankind he looked upon it as a visitation of a particularly offensive kind.

He glanced along the veranda in the direction of the other bungalow. The fire of sticks in front of it had gone out. No faint glow of embers, not the slightest thread of light in that direction, hinted at the presence of strangers. The darker shapes in the obscurity, the dead silence, betrayed nothing of that strange intrusion. The peace of Samburan asserted itself as on any other night. Everything was as before, except — Heyst became aware of it suddenly — that for a whole minute, perhaps, with his hand on the back of the girl's chair and within a foot of her person, he had lost the sense of her existence, for the first time since he had brought her over to share this invincible, this undefiled peace. He picked up the lantern, and the act made a silent stir all along the veranda. A spoke of shadow swung swiftly across her face, and the strong light rested on the immobility of her features, as of a woman looking at a vision. Her eyes were still, her lips serious. Her dress, open at the neck, stirred slightly to her even breathing.

“We had better go in, Lena,” suggested Heyst, very low, as if breaking a spell cautiously.

She rose without a word. Heyst followed her indoors. As they passed through the living-room, he left the lantern burning on the centre table.

Chapter 9

That night the girl woke up, for the first time in her new experience, with the sensation of having been abandoned to her own devices. She woke up from a painful dream of separation brought about in a way which she could not understand, and missed the relief of the waking instant. The desolate feeling of being alone persisted. She was really alone. A night-light made it plain enough, in the dim, mysterious manner of a dream; but this was reality. It startled her exceedingly.

In a moment she was at the curtain that hung in the doorway, and raised it with a steady hand. The conditions of their life in Samburan would have made peeping absurd; nor was such a thing in her character. This was not a movement of curiosity, but of downright alarm — the continued distress and fear of the dream. The night could not have been very far advanced. The light of the lantern was burning strongly, striping the floor and walls of the room with thick black bands. She hardly knew whether she expected to see Heyst or not; but she saw him at once, standing by the table in his sleeping-suit, his back to the doorway. She stepped in noiselessly with her bare feet,

and let the curtain fall behind her. Something characteristic in Heyst's attitude made her say, almost in a whisper:

"You are looking for something."

He could not have heard her before; but he didn't start at the unexpected whisper. He only pushed the drawer of the table in and, without even looking over his shoulder, asked quietly, accepting her presence as if he had been aware of all her movements:

"I say, are you certain that Wang didn't go through this room this evening?"

"Wang? When?"

"After leaving the lantern, I mean."

"Oh, no. He ran on. I watched him."

"Or before, perhaps — while I was with these boat people? Do you know? Can you tell?"

"I hardly think so. I came out as the sun went down, and sat outside till you came back to me."

"He could have popped in for an instant through the back veranda."

"I heard nothing in here," she said. "What is the matter?"

"Naturally you wouldn't hear. He can be as quiet as a shadow, when he likes. I believe he could steal the pillows from under our heads. He might have been here ten minutes ago."

"What woke you up? Was it a noise?"

"Can't say that. Generally one can't tell, but is it likely, Lena? You are, I believe, the lighter sleeper of us two. A noise loud enough to wake me up would have awakened you, too. I tried to be as quiet as I could. What roused you?"

"I don't know — a dream, perhaps. I woke up crying."

"What was the dream?"

Heyst, with one hand resting on the table, had turned in her direction, his round, uncovered head set on a fighter's muscular neck. She left his question unanswered, as if she had not heard it.

"What is it you have missed?" she asked in her turn, very grave.

Her dark hair, drawn smoothly back, was done in two thick tresses for the night. Heyst noticed the good form of her brow, the dignity of its width, its unshining whiteness. It was a sculptural forehead. He had a moment of acute appreciation intruding upon another order of thoughts. It was as if there could be no end of his discoveries about that girl, at the most incongruous moments.

She had on nothing but a hand-woven cotton sarong — one of Heyst's few purchases, years ago, in Celebes, where they are made. He had forgotten all about it till she came, and then had found it at the bottom of an old sandalwood trunk dating back to pre-Morrison days. She had quickly learned to wind it up under her armpits with a safe twist, as Malay village girls do when going down to bathe in a river. Her shoulders and arms were bare; one of her tresses, hanging forward, looked almost black against the white skin. As she was taller than the average Malay woman, the sarong ended a good way above her ankles. She stood poised firmly, half-way between the table

and the curtained doorway, the insteps of her bare feet gleaming like marble on the overshadowed matting of the floor. The fall of her lighted shoulders, the strong and fine modelling of her arms hanging down her sides, her immobility, too, had something statuesque, the charm of art tense with life. She was not very big — Heyst used to think of her, at first, as “that poor little girl,” — but revealed free from the shabby banality of a white platform dress, in the simple drapery of the sarong, there was that in her form and in the proportions of her body which suggested a reduction from a heroic size.

She moved forward a step.

“What is it you have missed?” she asked again.

Heyst turned his back altogether on the table. The black spokes of darkness over the floor and the walls, joining up on the ceiling in a path of shadow, were like the bars of a cage about them. It was his turn to ignore a question.

“You woke up in a fright, you say?” he said.

She walked up to him, exotic yet familiar, with her white woman’s face and shoulders above the Malay sarong, as if it were an airy disguise, but her expression was serious.

“No,” she replied. “It was distress, rather. You see, you weren’t there, and I couldn’t tell why you had gone away from me. A nasty dream — the first I’ve had, too, since — ”

“You don’t believe in dreams, do you?” asked Heyst.

“I once knew a woman who did. Leastwise, she used to tell people what dreams mean, for a shilling.”

“Would you go now and ask her what this dream means?” inquired Heyst jocularly.

“She lived in Camberwell. She was a nasty old thing!”

Heyst laughed a little uneasily.

“Dreams are madness, my dear. It’s things that happen in the waking world, while one is asleep, that one would be glad to know the meaning of.”

“You have missed something out of this drawer,” she said positively.

“This or some other. I have looked into every single one of them and come back to this again, as people do. It’s difficult to believe the evidence of my own senses; but it isn’t there. Now, Lena, are you sure that you didn’t — ”

“I have touched nothing in the house but what you have given me.”

“Lena!” he cried.

He was painfully affected by this disclaimer of a charge which he had not made. It was what a servant might have said — an inferior open to suspicion — or, at any rate, a stranger. He was angry at being so wretchedly misunderstood; disenchanted at her not being instinctively aware of the place he had secretly given her in his thoughts.

“After all,” he said to himself, “we are strangers to each other.”

And then he felt sorry for her. He spoke calmly:

“I was about to say, are you sure you have no reason to think that the Chinaman has been in this room tonight?”

“You suspect him?” she asked, knitting her eyebrows.

“There is no one else to suspect. You may call it a certitude.”

“You don’t want to tell me what it is?” she inquired, in the equable tone in which one takes a fact into account.

Heyst only smiled faintly.

“Nothing very precious, as far as value goes,” he replied.

“I thought it might have been money,” she said.

“Money!” exclaimed Heyst, as if the suggestion had been altogether preposterous. She was so visibly surprised that he hastened to add: “Of course, there is some money in the house — there, in that writing-desk, the drawer on the left. It’s not locked. You can pull it right out. There is a recess, and the board at the back pivots: a very simple hiding-place, when you know the way to it. I discovered it by accident, and I keep our store of sovereigns in there. The treasure, my dear, is not big enough to require a cavern.”

He paused, laughed very low, and returned her steady stare.

“The loose silver, some guilders and dollars, I have always kept in that unlocked left drawer. I have no doubt Wang knows what there is in it, but he isn’t a thief, and that’s why I — no, Lena, what I’ve missed is not gold or jewels; and that’s what makes the fact interesting — which the theft of money cannot be.”

She took a long breath, relieved to hear that it was not money. A great curiosity was depicted on her face, but she refrained from pressing him with questions. She only gave him one of her deep-gleaming smiles.

“It isn’t me so it must be Wang. You ought to make him give it back to you.”

Heyst said nothing to that naive and practical suggestion, for the object that he missed from the drawer was his revolver.

It was a heavy weapon which he had owned for many years and had never used in his life. Ever since the London furniture had arrived in Samburan, it had been reposing in the drawer of the table. The real dangers of life, for him, were not those which could be repelled by swords or bullets. On the other hand neither his manner nor his appearance looked sufficiently inoffensive to expose him to light-minded aggression.

He could not have explained what had induced him to go to the drawer in the middle of the night. He had started up suddenly — which was very unusual with him. He had found himself sitting up and extremely wide awake all at once, with the girl reposing by his side, lying with her face away from him, a vague, characteristically feminine form in the dim light. She was perfectly still.

At that season of the year there were no mosquitoes in Samburan, and the sides of the mosquito net were looped up. Heyst swung his feet to the floor, and found himself standing there, almost before he had become aware of his intention to get up.

Why he did this he did not know. He didn’t wish to wake her up, and the slight creak of the broad bedstead had sounded very loud to him. He turned round apprehensively and waited for her to move, but she did not stir. While he looked at her, he had a vision of himself lying there too, also fast asleep, and — it occurred to him for the first time in his life — very defenceless. This quite novel impression of the dangers of

slumber made him think suddenly of his revolver. He left the bedroom with noiseless footsteps. The lightness of the curtain he had to lift as he passed out, and the outer door, wide open on the blackness of the veranda — for the roof eaves came down low, shutting out the starlight — gave him a sense of having been dangerously exposed, he could not have said to what. He pulled the drawer open. Its emptiness cut his train of self-communion short. He murmured to the assertive fact:

“Impossible! Somewhere else!”

He tried to remember where he had put the thing; but those provoked whispers of memory were not encouraging. Foraging in every receptacle and nook big enough to contain a revolver, he came slowly to the conclusion that it was not in that room. Neither was it in the other. The whole bungalow consisted of the two rooms and a profuse allowance of veranda all round. Heyst stepped out on the veranda.

“It’s Wang, beyond a doubt,” he thought, staring into the night. “He has got hold of it for some reason.”

There was nothing to prevent that ghostly Chinaman from materializing suddenly at the foot of the stairs, or anywhere, at any moment, and toppling him over with a dead sure shot. The danger was so irremediable that it was not worth worrying about, any more than the general precariousness of human life. Heyst speculated on this added risk. How long had he been at the mercy of a slender yellow finger on the trigger? That is, if that was the fellow’s reason for purloining the revolver.

“Shoot and inherit,” thought Heyst. “Very simple.” Yet there was in his mind a marked reluctance to regard the domesticated grower of vegetables in the light of a murderer.

“No, it wasn’t that. For Wang could have done it any time this last twelve months or more — ”

Heyst’s mind had worked on the assumption that Wang had possessed himself of the revolver during his own absence from Samburan; but at that period of his speculation his point of view changed. It struck him with the force of manifest certitude that the revolver had been taken only late in the day, or on that very night. Wang, of course. But why? So there had been no danger in the past. It was all ahead.

“He has me at his mercy now,” thought Heyst, without particular excitement.

The sentiment he experienced was curiosity. He forgot himself in it: it was as if he were considering somebody else’s strange predicament. But even that sort of interest was dying out when, looking to his left, he saw the accustomed shapes of the other bungalows looming in the night, and remembered the arrival of the thirsty company in the boat. Wang would hardly risk such a crime in the presence of other white men. It was a peculiar instance of the “safety in numbers,” principle, which somehow was not much to Heyst’s taste.

He went in gloomily, and stood over the empty drawer in deep and unsatisfactory thought. He had just made up his mind that he must breathe nothing of this to the girl, when he heard her voice behind him. She had taken him by surprise, but he resisted the impulse to turn round at once under the impression that she might read his trouble

in his face. Yes, she had taken him by surprise, and for that reason the conversation which began was not exactly as he would have conducted it if he had been prepared for her pointblank question. He ought to have said at once: "I've missed nothing." It was a deplorable thing that he should have let it come so far as to have her ask what it was he missed. He closed the conversation by saying lightly:

"It's an object of very small value. Don't worry about it — it isn't worth while. The best you can do is to go and lie down again, Lena."

Reluctant she turned away, and only in the doorway asked: "And you?"

"I think I shall smoke a cheroot on the veranda. I don't feel sleepy for the moment."

"Well, don't be long."

He made no answer. She saw him standing there, very still, with a frown on his brow, and slowly dropped the curtain.

Heyst did really light a cheroot before going out again on the veranda. He glanced up from under the low eaves, to see by the stars how the night went on. It was going very slowly. Why it should have irked him he did not know, for he had nothing to expect from the dawn; but everything round him had become unreasonable, unsettled, and vaguely urgent, laying him under an obligation, but giving him no line of action. He felt contemptuously irritated with the situation. The outer world had broken upon him; and he did not know what wrong he had done to bring this on himself, any more than he knew what he had done to provoke the horrible calumny about his treatment of poor Morrison. For he could not forget this. It had reached the ears of one who needed to have the most perfect confidence in the rectitude of his conduct.

"And she only half disbelieves it," he thought, with hopeless humiliation.

This moral stab in the back seemed to have taken some of his strength from him, as a physical wound would have done. He had no desire to do anything — neither to bring Wang to terms in the matter of the revolver nor to find out from the strangers who they were, and how their predicament had come about. He flung his glowing cigar away into the night. But Samburan was no longer a solitude wherein he could indulge in all his moods. The fiery parabolic path the cast-out stump traced in the air was seen from another veranda at a distance of some twenty yards. It was noted as a symptom of importance by an observer with his faculties greedy for signs, and in a state of alertness tense enough almost to hear the grass grow.

Chapter 10

The observer was Martin Ricardo. To him life was not a matter of passive renunciation, but of a particularly active warfare. He was not mistrustful of it, he was not disgusted with it, still less was he inclined to be suspicious of its disenchantments; but he was vividly aware that it held many possibilities of failure. Though very far from being a pessimist, he was not a man of foolish illusions. He did not like failure, not only because of its unpleasant and dangerous consequences, but also because of its

damaging effect upon his own appreciation of Martin Ricardo. And this was a special job, of his own contriving, and of considerable novelty. It was not, so to speak, in his usual line of business — except, perhaps, from a moral standpoint, about which he was not likely to trouble his head. For these reasons Martin Ricardo was unable to sleep.

Mr Jones, after repeated shivering fits, and after drinking much hot tea, had apparently fallen into deep slumber. He had very peremptorily discouraged attempts at conversation on the part of his faithful follower. Ricardo listened to his regular breathing. It was all very well for the governor. He looked upon it as a sort of sport. A gentleman naturally would. But this ticklish and important job had to be pulled off at all costs, both for honour and for safety. Ricardo rose quietly, and made his way on the veranda. He could not lie still. He wanted to go out for air, and he had a feeling that by the force of his eagerness even the darkness and the silence could be made to yield something to his eyes and ears.

He noted the stars, and stepped back again into the dense darkness. He resisted the growing impulse to go out and steal towards the other bungalow. It would have been madness to start prowling in the dark on unknown ground. And for what end? Unless to relieve the oppression. Immobility lay on his limbs like a leaden garment. And yet he was unwilling to give up. He persisted in his objectless vigil. The man of the island was keeping quiet.

It was at that moment that Ricardo's eyes caught the vanishing red trail of light made by the cigar — a startling revelation of the man's wakefulness. He could not suppress a low "Hallo!" and began to sidle along towards the door, with his shoulders rubbing the wall. For all he knew, the man might have been out in front by this time, observing the veranda. As a matter of fact, after flinging away the cheroot, Heyst had gone indoors with the feeling of a man who gives up an unprofitable occupation. But Ricardo fancied he could hear faint footfalls on the open ground, and dodged quickly into the room. There he drew breath, and meditated for a while. His next step was to feel for the matches on the tall desk, and to light the candle. He had to communicate to his governor views and reflections of such importance that it was absolutely necessary for him to watch their effect on the very countenance of the hearer. At first he had thought that these matters could have waited till daylight; but Heyst's wakefulness, disclosed in that startling way, made him feel suddenly certain that there could be no sleep for him that night.

He said as much to his governor. When the little dagger-like flame had done its best to dispel the darkness, Mr. Jones was to be seen reposing on a camp bedstead, in a distant part of the room. A railway rug concealed his spare form up to his very head, which rested on the other railway rug rolled up for a pillow. Ricardo plumped himself down cross-legged on the floor, very close to the low bedstead; so that Mr. Jones — who perhaps had not been so very profoundly asleep — on opening his eyes found them conveniently levelled at the face of his secretary.

"Eh? What is it you say? No sleep for you tonight? But why can't you let me sleep? Confound your fussiness!"

“Because that there fellow can’t sleep — that’s why. Dash me if he hasn’t been doing a think just now! What business has he to think in the middle of the night?”

“How do you know?”

“He was out, sir — up in the middle of the night. My own eyes saw it.”

“But how do you know that he was up to think?” inquired Mr. Jones. “It might have been anything — toothache, for instance. And you may have dreamed it for all I know. Didn’t you try to sleep?”

“No, sir. I didn’t even try to go to sleep.”

Ricardo informed his patron of his vigil on the veranda, and of the revelation which put an end to it. He concluded that a man up with a cigar in the middle of the night must be doing a think.

Mr Jones raised himself on his elbow. This sign of interest comforted his faithful henchman.

“Seems to me it’s time we did a little think ourselves,” added Ricardo, with more assurance. Long as they had been together the moods of his governor were still a source of anxiety to his simple soul.

“You are always making a fuss,” remarked Mr. Jones, in a tolerant tone.

“Ay, but not for nothing, am I? You can’t say that, sir. Mine may not be a gentleman’s way of looking round a thing, but it isn’t a fool’s way, either. You’ve admitted that much yourself at odd times.”

Ricardo was growing warmly argumentative. Mr. Jones interrupted him without heat.

“You haven’t roused me to talk about yourself, I presume?”

“No, sir.” Ricardo remained silent for a minute, with the tip of his tongue caught between his teeth. “I don’t think I could tell you anything about myself that you don’t know,” he continued. There was a sort of amused satisfaction in his tone which changed completely as he went on. “It’s that man, over there, that’s got to be talked over. I don’t like him.”

He, failed to observe the flicker of a ghastly smile on his governor’s lips.

“Don’t you?” murmured Mr. Jones, whose face, as he reclined on his elbow, was on a level with the top of his follower’s head.

“No, sir,” said Ricardo emphatically. The candle from the other side of the room threw his monstrous black shadow on the wall. “He — I don’t know how to say it — he isn’t hearty-like.”

Mr Jones agreed languidly in his own manner:

“He seems to be a very self-possessed man.”

“Ay, that’s it. Self — ” Ricardo choked with indignation. “I would soon let out some of his self-possession through a hole between his ribs, if this weren’t a special job!”

Mr Jones had been making his own reflections, for he asked:

“Do you think he is suspicious?”

“I don’t see very well what he can be suspicious of,” pondered Ricardo. “Yet there he was doing a think. And what could be the object of it? What made him get out of his bed in the middle of the night. ‘Tain’t fleas, surely.”

“Bad conscience, perhaps,” suggested Mr. Jones jocularly.

His faithful secretary suffered from irritation, and did not see the joke. In a fretful tone he declared that there was no such thing as conscience. There was such a thing as funk; but there was nothing to make that fellow funky in any special way. He admitted, however, that the man might have been uneasy at the arrival of strangers, because of all that plunder of his put away somewhere.

Ricardo glanced here and there, as if he were afraid of being overheard by the heavy shadows cast by the dim light all over the room. His patron, very quiet, spoke in a calm whisper:

“And perhaps that hotel-keeper has been lying to you about him. He may be a very poor devil indeed.”

Ricardo shook his head slightly. The Schombergian theory of Heyst had become in him a profound conviction, which he had absorbed as naturally as a sponge takes up water. His patron’s doubts were a wanton denying of what was self-evident; but Ricardo’s voice remained as before, a soft purring with a snarling undertone.

“I am sup-prised at you, sir! It’s the very way them tame ones — the common ‘yporcrits of the world — get on. When it comes to plunder drifting under one’s very nose, there’s not one of them that would keep his hands off. And I don’t blame them. It’s the way they do it that sets my back up. Just look at the story of how he got rid of that pal of his! Send a man home to croak of a cold on the chest — that’s one of your tame tricks. And d’you mean to say, sir, that a man that’s up to it wouldn’t bag whatever he could lay his hands in his ‘yporcritical way? What was all that coal business? Tame citizen dodge; ‘yporcristy — nothing else. No, no, sir! The thing is to extract it from him as neatly as possible. That’s the job; and it isn’t so simple as it looks. I reckon you have looked at it all round, sir, before you took up the notion of this trip.”

“No.” Mr. Jones was hardly audible, staring far away from his couch. “I didn’t think about it much. I was bored.”

“Ay, that you were — bad. I was feeling pretty desperate that afternoon, when that bearded softy of a landlord got talking to me about this fellow here. Quite accidentally, it was. Well, sir, here we are after a mighty narrow squeak. I feel all limp yet; but never mind — his swag will pay for the lot!”

“He’s all alone here,” remarked Mr. Jones in a hollow murmur.

“Ye-es, in a way. Yes, alone enough. Yes, you may say he is.”

“There’s that Chinaman, though.”

“Ay, there’s the Chink,” assented Ricardo rather absentmindedly.

He was debating in his mind the advisability of making a clean breast of his knowledge of the girl’s existence. Finally he concluded he wouldn’t. The enterprise was difficult enough without complicating it with an upset to the sensibilities of the gen-

tleman with whom he had the honour of being associated. Let the discovery come of itself, he thought, and then he could swear that he had known nothing of that offensive presence.

He did not need to lie. He had only to hold his tongue.

“Yes,” he muttered reflectively, “there’s that Chink, certainly.”

At bottom, he felt a certain ambiguous respect for his governor’s exaggerated dislike of women, as if that horror of feminine presence were a sort of depraved morality; but still morality, since he counted it as an advantage. It prevented many undesirable complications. He did not pretend to understand it. He did not even try to investigate this idiosyncrasy of his chief. All he knew was that he himself was differently inclined, and that it did not make him any happier or safer. He did not know how he would have acted if he had been knocking about the world on his own. Luckily he was a subordinate, not a wage-slave but a follower — which was a restraint. Yes! The other sort of disposition simplified matters in general; it wasn’t to be gainsaid. But it was clear that it could also complicate them — as in this most important and, in Ricardo’s view, already sufficiently delicate case. And the worst of it was that one could not tell exactly in what precise manner it would act.

It was unnatural, he thought somewhat peevishly. How was one to reckon up the unnatural? There were no rules for that. The faithful henchman of plain Mr. Jones, foreseeing many difficulties of a material order, decided to keep the girl out of the governor’s knowledge, out of his sight, too, for as long a time as it could be managed. That, alas, seemed to be at most a matter of a few hours; whereas Ricardo feared that to get the affair properly going would take some days. Once well started, he was not afraid of his gentleman failing him. As is often the case with lawless natures, Ricardo’s faith in any given individual was of a simple, unquestioning character. For man must have some support in life.

Cross-legged, his head drooping a little and perfectly still, he might have been meditating in a bonze-like attitude upon the sacred syllable “Om.” It was a striking illustration of the untruth of appearances, for his contempt for the world was of a severely practical kind. There was nothing oriental about Ricardo but the amazing quietness of his pose. Mr. Jones was also very quiet. He had let his head sink on the rolled-up rug, and lay stretched out on his side with his back to the light. In that position the shadows gathered in the cavities of his eyes made them look perfectly empty. When he spoke, his ghostly voice had only to travel a few inches straight into Ricardo’s left ear.

“Why don’t you say something, now that you’ve got me awake?”

“I wonder if you were sleeping as sound as you are trying to make out, sir,” said the unmoved Ricardo.

“I wonder,” repeated Mr. Jones. “At any rate, I was resting quietly!”

“Come, sir!” Ricardo’s whisper was alarmed. “You don’t mean to say you’re going to be bored?”

“No.”

“Quite right!” The secretary was very much relieved. “There’s no occasion to be, I can tell you, sir,” he whispered earnestly. “Anything but that! If I didn’t say anything for a bit, it ain’t because there isn’t plenty to talk about. Ay, more than enough.”

“What’s the matter with you?” breathed out his patron. “Are you going to turn pessimist?”

“Me turn? No, sir! I ain’t of those that turn. You may call me hard names, if you like, but you know very well that I ain’t a croaker.” Ricardo changed his tone. “If I said nothing for a while, it was because I was meditating over the Chink, sir.”

“You were? Waste of time, my Martin. A Chinaman is unfathomable.”

Ricardo admitted that this might be so. Anyhow, a Chink was neither here nor there, as a general thing, unfathomable as he might be; but a Swedish baron wasn’t — couldn’t be! The woods were full of such barons.

“I don’t know that he is so tame,” was Mr. Jones’s remark, in a sepulchral undertone.

“How do you mean, sir? He ain’t a rabbit, of course. You couldn’t hypnotize him, as I saw you do to more than one Dago, and other kinds of tame citizens, when it came to the point of holding them down to a game.”

“Don’t you reckon on that,” murmured plain Mr. Jones seriously.

“No, sir, I don’t, though you have a wonderful power of the eye. It’s a fact.”

“I have a wonderful patience,” remarked Mr. Jones dryly.

A dim smile flitted over the lips of the faithful Ricardo who never raised his head.

“I don’t want to try you too much, sir, but this is like no other job we ever turned our minds to.”

“Perhaps not. At any rate let us think so.”

A weariness with the monotony of life was reflected in the tone of this qualified assent. It jarred on the nerves of the sanguine Ricardo.

“Let us think of the way to go to work,” he retorted a little impatiently. “He’s a deep one. Just look at the way he treated that chum of his. Did you ever hear of anything so low? And the artfulness of the beast — the dirty, tame artfulness!”

“Don’t you start moralizing, Martin,” said Mr. Jones warningly. “As far as I can make out the story that German hotel-keeper told you, it seems to show a certain amount of character; — and independence from common feelings which is not usual. It’s very remarkable, if true.”

“Ay, ay! Very remarkable. It’s mighty low down, all the same,” muttered, Ricardo obstinately. “I must say I am glad to think he will be paid off for it in a way that’ll surprise him!”

The tip of his tongue appeared lively for an instant, as if trying for the taste of that ferocious retribution on his compressed lips. For Ricardo was sincere in his indignation before the elementary principle of loyalty to a chum violated in cold blood, slowly, in a patient duplicity of years. There are standards in villainy as in virtue, and the act as he pictured it to himself acquired an additional horror from the slow pace of that treachery so atrocious and so tame. But he understood too the educated judgement

of his governor, a gentleman looking on all this with the privileged detachment of a cultivated mind, of an elevated personality.

“Ay, he’s deep — he’s artful,” he mumbled between his sharp teeth.

“Confound you!” Mr. Jones’s calm whisper crept into his ear. “Come to the point.”

Obedient, the secretary shook off his thoughtfulness. There was a similarity of mind between these two — one the outcast of his vices, the other inspired by a spirit of scornful defiance, the aggressiveness of a beast of prey looking upon all the tame creatures of the earth as its natural victim. Both were astute enough, however, and both were aware that they had plunged into this adventure without a sufficient scrutiny of detail. The figure of a lonely man far from all assistance had loomed up largely, fascinating and defenceless in the middle of the sea, filling the whole field of their vision. There had not seemed to be any need for thinking. As Schomberg had been saying: “Three to one.”

But it did not look so simple now in the face of that solitude which was like an armour for this man. The feeling voiced by the henchman in his own way — “We don’t seem much forwarder now we are here” was acknowledged by the silence of the patron. It was easy enough to rip a fellow up or drill a hole in him, whether he was alone or not, Ricardo reflected in low, confidential tones, but —

“He isn’t alone,” Mr. Jones said faintly, in his attitude of a man composed for sleep. “Don’t forget that Chinaman.” Ricardo started slightly.

“Oh, ay — the Chink!”

Ricardo had been on the point of confessing about the girl; but no! He wanted his governor to be unperturbed and steady. Vague thoughts, which he hardly dared to look in the face, were stirring his brain in connection with that girl. She couldn’t be much account, he thought. She could be frightened. And there were also other possibilities. The Chink, however, could be considered openly.

“What I was thinking about it, sir,” he went on earnestly, “is this — here we’ve got a man. He’s nothing. If he won’t be good, he can be made quiet. That’s easy. But then there’s his plunder. He doesn’t carry it in his pocket.”

“I hope not,” breathed Mr. Jones.

“Same here. It’s too big, we know, but if he were alone, he would not feel worried about it overmuch — I mean the safety of the pieces. He would just put the lot into any box or drawer that was handy.”

“Would he?”

“Yes, sir. He would keep it under his eye, as it were. Why not? It is natural. A fellow doesn’t put his swag underground, unless there’s a very good reason for it.”

“A very good reason, eh?”

“Yes, sir. What do you think a fellow is — a mole?”

From his experience, Ricardo declared that man was not a burrowing beast. Even the misers very seldom buried their hoard, unless for exceptional reasons. In the given situation of a man alone on an island, the company of a Chink was a very good reason.

Drawers would not be safe, nor boxes, either, from a prying, slant-eyed Chink. No, sir, unless a safe — a proper office safe. But the safe was there in the room.

“Is there a safe in this room? I didn’t notice it,” whispered Mr. Jones.

That was because the thing was painted white, like the walls of the room; and besides, it was tucked away in the shadows of a corner. Mr. Jones had been too tired to observe anything on his first coming ashore; but Ricardo had very soon spotted the characteristic form. He only wished he could believe that the plunder of treachery, duplicity, and all the moral abominations of Heyst had been there. But no; the blamed thing was open.

“It might have been there at one time or another,” he commented gloomily, “but it isn’t there now.”

“The man did not elect to live in this house,” remarked Mr. Jones. “And by the by, what could he have meant by speaking of circumstances which prevented him lodging us in the other bungalow? You remember what he said, Martin? Sounded cryptic.”

Martin, who remembered and understood the phrase as directly motivated by the existence of the girl, waited a little before saying:

“Some of his artfulness, sir; and not the worst of it either. That manner of his to us, this asking no questions, is some more of his artfulness. A man’s bound to be curious, and he is; yet he goes on as if he didn’t care. He does care — or else what was he doing up with a cigar in the middle of the night, doing a think? I don’t like it.”

“He may be outside, observing the light here, and saying the very same thing to himself of our own wakefulness,” gravely suggested Ricardo’s governor.

“He may be, sir; but this is too important to be talked over in the dark. And the light is all right, it can be accounted for. There’s a light in this bungalow in the middle of the night because — why, because you are not well. Not well, sir — that’s what’s the matter, and you will have to act up to it.”

The consideration had suddenly occurred to the faithful henchman, in the light of a felicitous expedient to keep his governor and the girl apart as long as possible. Mr. Jones received the suggestion without the slightest stir, even in the deep sockets of his eyes, where a steady, faint gleam was the only thing telling of life and attention in his attenuated body. But Ricardo, as soon as he had enunciated his happy thought, perceived in it other possibilities more to the point and of greater practical advantage.

“With your looks, sir, it will be easy enough,” he went on evenly, as if no silence had intervened, always respectful, but frank, with perfect simplicity of purpose. “All you’ve got to do is just to lie down quietly. I noticed him looking sort of surprised at you on the wharf, sir.”

At these words, a naive tribute to the aspect of his physique, even more suggestive of the grave than of the sick-bed, a fold appeared on that side of the governor’s face which was exposed to the dim light — a deep, shadowy, semicircular fold from the side of the nose to bottom of the chin — a silent smile. By a side-glance Ricardo had noted this play of features. He smiled, too, appreciative, encouraged.

“And you as hard as nails all the time,” he went on. “Hang me if anybody would believe you aren’t sick, if I were to swear myself black in the face! Give us a day or two to look into matters and size up that ‘yporcrit.’”

Ricardo’s eyes remained fixed on his crossed shins. The chief, in his lifeless accents, approved.

“Perhaps it would be a good idea.”

“The Chink, he’s nothing. He can be made quiet any time.”

One of Ricardo’s hands, reposing palm upwards on his folded legs, made a swift thrusting gesture, repeated by the enormous darting shadow of an arm very low on the wall. It broke the spell of perfect stillness in the room. The secretary eyed moodily the wall from which the shadow had gone. Anybody could be made quiet, he pointed out. It was not anything that the Chink could do; no, it was the effect that his company must have produced on the conduct of the doomed man. A man! What was a man? A Swedish baron could be ripped up, or else holed by a shot, as easily as any other creature; but that was exactly what was to be avoided, till one knew where he had hidden his plunder.

“I shouldn’t think it would be some sort of hole in his bungalow,” argued Ricardo with real anxiety.

No. A house can be burnt — set on fire accidentally, or on purpose, while a man’s asleep. Under the house — or in some crack, cranny, or crevice? Something told him it wasn’t that. The anguish of mental effort contracted Ricardo’s brow. The skin of his head seemed to move in this travail of vain and tormenting suppositions.

“What did you think a fellow is, sir — a baby?” he said, in answer to Mr. Jones’s objections. “I am trying to find out what I would do myself. He wouldn’t be likely to be cleverer than I am.”

“And what do you know about yourself?”

Mr Jones seemed to watch his follower’s perplexities with amusement concealed in a death-like composure.

Ricardo disregarded the question. The material vision of the spoil absorbed all his faculties. A great vision! He seemed to see it. A few small canvas bags tied up with thin cord, their distended rotundity showing the inside pressure of the disk-like forms of coins — gold, solid, heavy, eminently portable. Perhaps steel cash-boxes with a chased design, on the covers; or perhaps a black and brass box with a handle on the top, and full of goodness knows what. Bank notes? Why not? The fellow had been going home; so it was surely something worth going home with.

“And he may have put it anywhere outside — anywhere!” cried Ricardo in a deadened voice, “in the forest — ”

That was it! A temporary darkness replaced the dim light of the room. The darkness of the forest at night and in it the gleam of a lantern, by which a figure is digging at the foot of a tree-trunk. As likely as not, another figure holding that lantern — ha, feminine! The girl!

The prudent Ricardo stifled a picturesque and profane exclamation, partly joy, partly dismay. Had the girl been trusted or mistrusted by that man? Whatever it was, it was bound to be wholly! With women there could be no half-measures. He could not imagine a fellow half-trusting a woman in that intimate relation to himself, and in those particular circumstances of conquest and loneliness where no confidences could appear dangerous since, apparently, there could be no one she could give him away to. Moreover, in nine cases out of ten the woman would be trusted. But, trusted or mistrusted, was her presence a favourable or unfavourable condition of the problem? That was the question!

The temptation to consult his chief, to talk over the weighty fact, and get his opinion on it, was great indeed. Ricardo resisted it; but the agony of his solitary mental conflict was extremely sharp. A woman in a problem is an incalculable quantity, even if you have something to go upon in forming your guess. How much more so when you haven't even once caught sight of her.

Swift as were his mental processes, he felt that a longer silence was inadvisable. He hastened to speak:

"And do you see us, sir, you and I, with a couple of spades having to tackle this whole confounded island?"

He allowed himself a slight movement of the arm. The shadow enlarged it into a sweeping gesture.

"This seems rather discouraging, Martin," murmured the unmoved governor.

"We mustn't be discouraged — that's all!" retorted his henchman. "And after what we had to go through in that boat too! Why it would be — "

He couldn't find the qualifying words. Very calm, faithful, and yet astute, he expressed his new-born hopes darkly.

"Something's sure to turn up to give us a hint; only this job can't be rushed. You may depend on me to pick up the least little bit of a hint; but you, sir — you've got to play him very gently. For the rest you can trust me."

"Yes; but I ask myself what YOU are trusting to."

"Our luck," said the faithful Ricardo. "Don't say a word against that. It might spoil the run of it."

"You are a superstitious beggar. No, I won't say anything against it."

"That's right, sir. Don't you even think lightly of it. Luck's not to be played with."

"Yes, luck's a delicate thing," assented Mr. Jones in a dreamy whisper.

A short silence ensued, which Ricardo ended in a discreet and tentative voice.

"Talking of luck, I suppose he could be made to take a hand with you, sir — two-handed picket or ekkarty, you being seedy and keeping indoors — just to pass the time. For all we know, he may be one of them hot ones once they start — "

"Is it likely?" came coldly from the principal. "Considering what we know of his history — say with his partner."

"True, sir. He's a cold-blooded beast; a cold-blooded, inhuman — "

“And I’ll tell you another thing that isn’t likely. He would not be likely to let himself be stripped bare. We haven’t to do with a young fool that can be led on by chaff or flattery, and in the end simply overawed. This is a calculating man.”

Ricardo recognized that clearly. What he had in his mind was something on a small scale, just to keep the enemy busy while he, Ricardo, had time to nose around a bit.

“You could even lose a little money to him, sir,” he suggested.

“I could.”

Ricardo was thoughtful for a moment.

“He strikes me, too, as the sort of man to start prancing when one didn’t expect it. What do you think, sir? Is he a man that would prance? That is, if something startled him. More likely to prance than to run — what?”

The answer came at once, because Mr. Jones understood the peculiar idiom of his faithful follower.

“Oh, without doubt! Without doubt!”

“It does me good to hear that you think so. He’s a prancing beast, and so we mustn’t startle him — not till I have located the stuff. Afterwards — ”

Ricardo paused, sinister in the stillness of his pose. Suddenly he got up with a swift movement and gazed down at his chief in moody abstraction. Mr. Jones did not stir.

“There’s one thing that’s worrying me,” began Ricardo in a subdued voice.

“Only one?” was the faint comment from the motionless body on the bedstead.

“I mean more than all the others put together.”

“That’s grave news.”

“Ay, grave enough. It’s this — how do you feel in yourself, sir? Are you likely to get bored? I know them fits come on you suddenly; but surely you can tell — ”

“Martin, you are an ass.”

The moody face of the secretary brightened up.

“Really, sir? Well, I am quite content to be on these terms — I mean as long as you don’t get bored. It wouldn’t do, sir.”

For coolness, Ricardo had thrown open his shirt and rolled up his sleeves. He moved stealthily across the room, bare-footed, towards the candle, the shadow of his head and shoulders growing bigger behind him on the opposite wall, to which the face of plain Mr. Jones was turned. With a feline movement, Ricardo glanced over his shoulder at the thin back of the spectre reposing on the bed, and then blew out the candle.

“In fact, I am rather amused, Martin,” Mr. Jones said in the dark.

He heard the sound of a slapped thigh and the jubilant exclamation of his henchman:

“Good! That’s the way to talk, sir!”

Part 4

Chapter 1

Ricardo advanced prudently by short darts from one tree-trunk to another, more in the manner of a squirrel than a cat. The sun had risen some time before. Already the sparkle of open sea was encroaching rapidly on the dark, cool, early-morning blue of Diamond Bay; but the deep dusk lingered yet under the mighty pillars of the forest, between which the secretary dodged.

He was watching Number One's bungalow with an animal-like patience, if with a very human complexity of purpose. This was the second morning of such watching. The first one had not been rewarded by success. Well, strictly speaking, there was no hurry.

The sun, swinging above the ridge all at once, inundated with light the space of burnt grass in front of Ricardo and the face of the bungalow, on which his eyes were fixed, leaving only the one dark spot of the doorway. To his right, to his left, and behind him, splashes of gold appeared in the deep shade of the forest, thinning the gloom under the ragged roof of leaves.

This was not a very favourable circumstance for Ricardo's purpose. He did not wish to be detected in his patient occupation. For what he was watching for was a sight of the girl — that girl! just a glimpse across the burnt patch to see what she was like. He had excellent eyes, and the distance was not so great. He would be able to distinguish her face quite easily if she only came out on the veranda; and she was bound to do that sooner or later. He was confident that he could form some opinion about her — which, he felt, was very necessary, before venturing on some steps to get in touch with her behind that Swedish baron's back. His theoretical view of the girl was such that he was quite prepared, on the strength of that distant examination, to show himself discreetly — perhaps even make a sign. It all depended on his reading of the face. She couldn't be much. He knew that sort!

By protruding his head a little he commanded, through the foliage of a festooning creeper, a view of the three bungalows. Irregularly disposed along a flat curve, over the veranda rail of the farthest one hung a dark rug of a tartan pattern, amazingly conspicuous. Ricardo could see the very checks. A brisk fire of sticks was burning on the ground in front of the steps, and in the sunlight the thin, fluttering flame had paled almost to invisibility — a mere rosy stir under a faint wreath of smoke. He could see the white bandage on the head of Pedro bending over it, and the wisps of black hair

standing up weirdly. He had wound that bandage himself, after breaking that shaggy and enormous head. The creature balanced it like a load, staggering towards the steps. Ricardo could see a small, long-handled saucepan at the end of a great hairy paw.

Yes, he could see all that there was to be seen, far and near. Excellent eyes! The only thing they could not penetrate was the dark oblong of the doorway on the veranda under the low eaves of the bungalow's roof. And that was vexing. It was an outrage. Ricardo was easily outraged. Surely she would come out presently! Why didn't she? Surely the fellow did not tie her up to the bedpost before leaving the house!

Nothing appeared. Ricardo was as still as the leafy cables of creepers depending in a convenient curtain from the mighty limb sixty feet above his head. His very eyelids were still, and this unblinking watchfulness gave him the dreamy air of a cat posed on a hearth-rug contemplating the fire. Was he dreaming? There, in plain sight, he had before him a white, blouse-like jacket, short blue trousers, a pair of bare yellow calves, a pigtail, long and slender —

"The confounded Chink!" he muttered, astounded.

He was not conscious of having looked away; and yet right there, in the middle of the picture, without having come round the right-hand corner or the left-hand corner of the house, without falling from the sky or surging up from the ground, Wang had become visible, large as life, and engaged in the young-ladyish occupation of picking flowers. Step by step, stooping repeatedly over the flower-beds at the foot of the veranda, the startlingly materialized Chinaman passed off the scene in a very commonplace manner, by going up the steps and disappearing in the darkness of the doorway.

Only then the yellow eyes of Martin Ricardo lost their intent fixity. He understood that it was time for him to be moving. That bunch of flowers going into the house in the hand of a Chinaman was for the breakfast-table. What else could it be for?

"I'll give you flowers!" he muttered threateningly. "You wait!"

Another moment, just for a glance towards the Jones bungalow, whence he expected Heyst to issue on his way to that breakfast so offensively decorated, and Ricardo began his retreat. His impulse, his desire, was for a rush into the open, face to face with the appointed victim, for what he called a "ripping up," visualized greedily, and always with the swift preliminary stooping movement on his part — the forerunner of certain death to his adversary. This was his impulse; and as it was, so to speak, constitutional, it was extremely difficult to resist when his blood was up. What could be more trying than to have to skulk and dodge and restrain oneself, mentally and physically, when one's blood was up? Mr. Secretary Ricardo began his retreat from his post of observation behind a tree opposite Heyst's bungalow, using great care to remain unseen. His proceedings were made easier by the declivity of the ground, which sloped sharply down to the water's edge. There, his feet feeling the warmth of the island's rocky foundation already heated by the sun, through the thin soles of his straw slippers he was, as it were, sunk out of sight of the houses. A short scramble of some twenty feet brought him up again to the upper level, at the place where the jetty had its root in the shore. He leaned his back against one of the lofty uprights

which still held up the company's signboard above the mound of derelict coal. Nobody could have guessed how much his blood was up. To contain himself he folded his arms tightly on his breast.

Ricardo was not used to a prolonged effort of self-control. His craft, his artfulness, felt themselves always at the mercy of his nature, which was truly feral and only held in subjection by the influence of the "governor," the prestige of a gentleman. It had its cunning too, but it was being almost too severely tried since the feral solution of a growl and a spring was forbidden by the problem. Ricardo dared not venture out on the cleared ground. He dared not.

"If I meet the beggar," he thought, "I don't know what I mayn't do. I daren't trust myself."

What exasperated him just now was his inability to understand Heyst. Ricardo was human enough to suffer from the discovery of his limitations. No, he couldn't size Heyst up. He could kill him with extreme ease — a growl and a spring — but that was forbidden! However, he could not remain indefinitely under the funereal blackboard.

"I must make a move," he thought.

He moved on, his head swimming a little with the repressed desire of violence, and came out openly in front of the bungalows, as if he had just been down to the jetty to look at the boat. The sunshine enveloped him, very brilliant, very still, very hot. The three buildings faced him. The one with the rug on the balustrade was the most distant; next to it was the empty bungalow; the nearest, with the flower-beds at the foot of its veranda, contained that bothersome girl, who had managed so provokingly to keep herself invisible. That was why Ricardo's eyes lingered on that building. The girl would surely be easier to "size up" than Heyst. A sight of her, a mere glimpse, would have been something to go by, a step nearer to the goal — the first real move, in fact. Ricardo saw no other move. And any time she might appear on that veranda!

She did not appear; but, like a concealed magnet, she exercised her attraction. As he went on, he deviated towards the bungalow. Though his movements were deliberate, his feral instincts had such sway that if he had met Heyst walking towards him, he would have had to satisfy his need of violence. But he saw nobody. Wang was at the back of the house, keeping the coffee hot against Number One's return for breakfast. Even the simian Pedro was out of sight, no doubt crouching on the door-step, his red little eyes fastened with animal-like devotion on Mr. Jones, who was in discourse with Heyst in the other bungalow — the conversation of an evil spectre with a disarmed man, watched by an ape.

His will having very little to do with it, Ricardo, darting swift glances in all directions, found himself at the steps of the Heyst bungalow. Once there, falling under an uncontrollable force of attraction, he mounted them with a savage and stealthy action of his limbs, and paused for a moment under the eaves to listen to the silence. Presently he advanced over the threshold one leg — it seemed to stretch itself, like a limb of india-rubber — planted his foot within, brought up the other swiftly, and stood inside the room, turning his head from side to side. To his eyes, brought in there from the

dazzling sunshine, all was gloom for a moment. His pupils, like a cat's, dilating swiftly, he distinguished an enormous quantity of books. He was amazed; and he was put off too. He was vexed in his astonishment. He had meant to note the aspect and nature of things, and hoped to draw some useful inference, some hint as to the man. But what guess could one make out of a multitude of books? He didn't know what to think; and he formulated his bewilderment in the mental exclamation:

“What the devil has this fellow been trying to set up here — a school?”

He gave a prolonged stare to the portrait of Heyst's father, that severe profile ignoring the vanities of this earth. His eyes gleamed sideways at the heavy silver candlesticks — signs of opulence. He prowled as a stray cat entering a strange place might have done, for if Ricardo had not Wang's miraculous gift of materializing and vanishing, rather than coming and going, he could be nearly as noiseless in his less elusive movements. He noted the back door standing just ajar; and all the time his slightly pointed ears, at the utmost stretch of watchfulness, kept in touch with the profound silence outside enveloping the absolute stillness of the house.

He had not been in the room two minutes when it occurred to him that he must be alone in the bungalow. The woman, most likely, had sneaked out and was walking about somewhere in the grounds at the back. She had been probably ordered to keep out of sight. Why? Because the fellow mistrusted his guests; or was it because he mistrusted her?

Ricardo reflected that from a certain point of view it amounted nearly to the same thing. He remembered Schomberg's story. He felt that running away with somebody only to get clear of that beastly, tame, hotel-keeper's attention was no proof of hopeless infatuation. She could be got in touch with.

His moustaches stirred. For some time he had been looking at a closed door. He would peep into that other room, and perhaps see something more informing than a confounded lot of books. As he crossed over, he thought recklessly:

“If the beggar comes in suddenly, and starts to prance, I'll rip him up and be done with it!”

He laid his hand on the handle, and felt the door come unlatched. Before he pulled it open, he listened again to the silence. He felt it all about him, complete, without a flaw.

The necessity of prudence had exasperated his self-restraint. A mood of ferocity woke up in him, and, as always at such times, he became physically aware of the sheeted knife strapped to his leg. He pulled at the door with fierce curiosity. It came open without a squeak of hinge, without a rustle, with no sound at all; and he found himself glaring at the opaque surface of some rough blue stuff, like serge. A curtain was fitted inside, heavy enough and long enough not to stir.

A curtain! This unforeseen veil, baffling his curiosity checked his brusqueness. He did not fling it aside with an impatient movement; he only looked at it closely, as if its texture had to be examined before his hand could touch such stuff. In this interval of hesitation, he seemed to detect a flaw in the perfection of the silence, the faintest

possible rustle, which his ears caught and instantly, in the effort of conscious listening, lost again. No! Everything was still inside and outside the house, only he had no longer the sense of being alone there.

When he put out his hand towards the motionless folds it was with extreme caution, and merely to push the stuff aside a little, advancing his head at the same time to peep within. A moment of complete immobility ensued. Then, without anything else of him stirring, Ricardo's head shrank back on his shoulders, his arm descended slowly to his side. There was a woman in there. The very woman! Lighted dimly by the reflection of the outer glare, she loomed up strangely big and shadowy at the other end of the long, narrow room. With her back to the door, she was doing her hair with bare arms uplifted. One of them gleamed pearly white; the other detached its perfect form in black against the unshuttered, uncurtained square window-hole. She was there, her fingers busy with her dark hair, utterly unconscious, exposed and defenceless — and tempting.

Ricardo drew back one foot and pressed his elbows close to his sides; his chest started heaving convulsively as if he were wrestling or running a race; his body began to sway gently back and forth. The self-restraint was at an end: his psychology must have its way. The instinct for the feral spring could no longer be denied. Ravish or kill — it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long. After a quick glance over his shoulder, which hunters of big game tell us no lion or tiger omits to give before charging home, Ricardo charged, head down, straight at the curtain. The stuff, tossed up violently by his rush, settled itself with a slow, floating descent into vertical folds, motionless, without a shudder even, in the still, warm air.

Chapter 2

The clock — which once upon a time had measured the hours of philosophic meditation — could not have ticked away more than five seconds when Wang materialized within the living-room. His concern primarily was with the delayed breakfast, but at once his slanting eyes became immovably fixed upon the unstirring curtain. For it was behind it that he had located the strange, deadened scuffling sounds which filled the empty room. The slanting eyes of his race could not achieve a round, amazed stare, but they remained still, dead still, and his impassive yellow face grew all at once careworn and lean with the sudden strain of intense, doubtful, frightened watchfulness. Contrary impulses swayed his body, rooted to the floor-mats. He even went so far as to extend his hand towards the curtain. He could not reach it, and he didn't make the necessary step forward.

The mysterious struggle was going on with confused thuds of bare feet, in a mute wrestling match, no human sound, hiss, groan, murmur, or exclamation coming through the curtain. A chair fell over, not with a crash but lightly, as if just grazed, and a faint

metallic ring of the tin bath succeeded. Finally the tense silence, as of two adversaries locked in a deadly grip, was ended by the heavy, dull thump of a soft body flung against the inner partition of planks. It seemed to shake the whole bungalow. By that time, walking backward, his eyes, his very throat, strained with fearful excitement, his extended arm still pointing at the curtain, Wang had disappeared through the back door. Once out in the compound, he bolted round the end of the house. Emerging innocently between the two bungalows he lingered and lounged in the open, where anybody issuing from any of the dwellings was bound to see him — a self-possessed Chinaman idling there, with nothing but perhaps an unserved breakfast on his mind.

It was at this time that Wang made up his mind to give up all connection with Number One, a man not only disarmed but already half vanquished. Till that morning he had had doubts as to his course of action, but this overheard scuffle decided the question. Number One was a doomed man — one of those beings whom it is unlucky to help. Even as he walked in the open with a fine air of unconcern, Wang wondered that no sound of any sort was to be heard inside the house. For all he knew, the white woman might have been scuffling in there with an evil spirit, which had of course killed her. For nothing visible came out of the house he watched out of the slanting corner of his eye. The sunshine and the silence outside the bungalow reigned undisturbed.

But in the house the silence of the big room would not have struck an acute ear as perfect. It was troubled by a stir so faint that it could hardly be called a ghost of whispering from behind the curtain.

Ricardo, feeling his throat with tender care, breathed out admiringly:

“You have fingers like steel. Jimminy! You have muscles like a giant!”

Luckily for Lena, Ricardo’s onset had been so sudden — she was winding her two heavy tresses round her head — that she had no time to lower her arms. This, which saved them from being pinned to her sides, gave her a better chance to resist. His spring had nearly thrown her down. Luckily, again, she was standing so near the wall that, though she was driven against it headlong, yet the shock was not heavy enough to knock all the breath out of her body. On the contrary, it helped her first instinctive attempt to drive her assailant backward.

After the first gasp of a surprise that was really too over-powering for a cry, she was never in doubt of the nature of her danger. She defended herself in the full, clear knowledge of it, from the force of instinct which is the true source of every great display of energy, and with a determination which could hardly have been expected from a girl who, cornered in a dim corridor by the red-faced, stammering Schomberg, had trembled with shame, disgust, and fear; had drooped, terrified, before mere words spluttered out odiously by a man who had never in his life laid his big paw on her.

This new enemy’s attack was simple, straightforward violence. It was not the slimy, underhand plotting to deliver her up like a slave, which had sickened her heart and had made her feel in her loneliness that her oppressors were too many for her. She was no longer alone in the world now. She resisted without a moment of faltering, because she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who

counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her — the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path.

She had defended herself principally by maintaining a desperate, murderous clutch on Ricardo's windpipe, till she felt a sudden relaxation of the terrific hug in which he stupidly and ineffectually persisted to hold her. Then with a supreme effort of her arms and of her suddenly raised knee, she sent him flying against the partition. The cedar-wood chest stood in the way, and Ricardo, with a thump which boomed hollow through the whole bungalow, fell on it in a sitting posture, half strangled, and exhausted not so much by the efforts as by the emotions of the struggle.

With the recoil of her exerted strength, she too reeled, staggered back, and sat on the edge of the bed. Out of breath, but calm and unabashed, she busied herself in readjusting under her arms the brown and yellow figured Celebes sarong, the tuck of which had come undone during the fight. Then, folding her bare arms tightly on her breast, she leaned forward on her crossed legs, determined and without fear.

Ricardo, leaning forward too, his nervous force gone, crestfallen like a beast of prey that has missed its spring, met her big grey eyes looking at him — wide open, observing, mysterious — from under the dark arches of her courageous eyebrows. Their faces were not a foot apart. He ceased feeling about his aching throat and dropped the palms of his hands heavily on his knees. He was not looking at her bare shoulders, at her strong arms; he was looking down at the floor. He had lost one of his straw slippers. A chair with a white dress on it had been overturned. These, with splashes of water on the floor out of a brusquely misplaced sponge-bath, were the only traces of the struggle.

Ricardo swallowed twice consciously, as if to make sure of his throat before he spoke again:

“All right. I never meant to hurt you — though I am no joker when it comes to it.”

He pulled up the leg of his pyjamas to exhibit the strapped knife. She glanced at it without moving her head, and murmured with scornful bitterness:

“Ah, yes — with that thing stuck in my side. In no other way.”

He shook his head with a shamefaced smile.

“Listen! I am quiet now. Straight — I am. I don't need to explain why — you know how it is. And I can see, now, this wasn't the way with you.”

She made no sound. Her still, upward gaze had a patient, mournfulness which troubled him like a suggestion of an inconceivable depth. He added thoughtfully:

“You are not going to make a noise about this silly try of mine?”

She moved her head the least bit.

“Jee-miny! You are a wonder — ” he murmured earnestly, relieved more than she could have guessed.

Of course, if she had attempted to run out, he would have stuck the knife between her shoulders, to stop her screaming; but all the fat would have been in the fire, the business utterly spoiled, and the rage of the governor — especially when he learned the cause — boundless. A woman that does not make a noise after an attempt of that

kind has tacitly condoned the offence. Ricardo had no small vanities. But clearly, if she would pass it over like this, then he could not be so utterly repugnant to her. He felt flattered. And she didn't seem afraid of him either. He already felt almost tender towards the girl — that plucky, fine girl who had not tried to run screaming from him.

"We shall be friends yet. I don't give you up. Don't think it. Friends as friends can be!" he whispered confidently. "Jee-miny! You aren't a tame one. Neither am I. You will find that out before long."

He could not know that if she had not run out, it was because that morning, under the stress of growing uneasiness at the presence of the incomprehensible visitors, Heyst had confessed to her that it was his revolver he had been looking for in the night; that it was gone, that he was a disarmed, defenceless man. She had hardly comprehended the meaning of his confession. Now she understood better what it meant. The effort of her self-control, her stillness, impressed Ricardo. Suddenly she spoke:

"What are you after?"

He did not raise his eyes. His hands reposing on his knees, his drooping head, something reflective in his pose, suggested the weariness of a simple soul, the fatigue of a mental rather than physical contest. He answered the direct question by a direct statement, as if he were too tired to dissemble:

"After the swag."

The word was strange to her. The veiled ardour of her grey gaze from under the dark eyebrows never left Ricardo's.

"A swag?" she murmured quietly. "What's that?"

"Why, swag, plunder — what your gentleman has been pinching right and left for years — the pieces. Don't you know? This!"

Without looking up, he made the motion of counting money into the palm of his hand. She lowered her eyes slightly to observe this bit of pantomime, but returned them to his face at once. Then, in a mere breath:

"How do you know anything about him?" she asked, concealing her puzzled alarm. "What has it got to do with you?"

"Everything," was Ricardo's concise answer, in a low, emphatic whisper. He reflected that this girl was really his best hope. Out of the unfaded impression of past violence there was growing the sort of sentiment which prevents a man from being indifferent to a woman he has once held in his arms — if even against her will — and still more so if she has pardoned the outrage. It becomes then a sort of bond. He felt positively the need to confide in her — a subtle trait of masculinity, this almost physical need of trust which can exist side by side with the most brutal readiness of suspicion.

"It's a game of grab — see?" he went on, with a new inflection of intimacy in his murmur. He was looking straight at her now.

"That fat, tame slug of a gin-slinger, Schomberg, put us up to it."

So strong is the impression of helpless and persecuted misery, that the girl who had fought down a savage assault without faltering could not completely repress a shudder at the mere sound of the abhorred name.

Ricardo became more rapid and confidential:

“He wants to pay him off — pay both of you, at that; so he told me. He was hot after you. He would have given all he had into those hands of yours that have nearly strangled me. But you couldn’t, eh? Nohow — what?” He paused. “So, rather than — you followed a gentleman?”

He noticed a slight movement of her head and spoke quickly.

“Same here — rather than be a wage-slave. Only these foreigners aren’t to be trusted. You’re too good for him. A man that will rob his best chum?” She raised her head. He went on, well pleased with his progress, whispering hurriedly: “Yes. I know all about him. So you may guess how he’s likely to treat a woman after a bit!”

He did not know that he was striking terror into her breast now. Still the grey eyes remained fixed on him unmovably watchful, as if sleepy under the white forehead. She was beginning to understand. His words conveyed a definite, dreadful meaning to her mind, which he proceeded to enlighten further in a convinced murmur.

“You and I are made to understand each other. Born alike, bred alike, I guess. You are not tame. Same here! You have been chucked out into this rotten world of ‘yporcrits. Same here!”

Her stillness, her appalled stillness, wore to him an air of fascinated attention. He asked abruptly:

“Where is it?”

She made an effort to breathe out:

“Where’s what?”

His tone expressed excited secrecy.

“The swag — plunder — pieces. It’s a game of grab. We must have it; but it isn’t easy, and so you will have to lend a hand. Come! is it kept in the house?”

As often with women, her wits were sharpened by the very terror of the glimpsed menace. She shook her head negatively.

“No.”

“Sure?”

“Sure,” she said.

“Ay! Thought so. Does your gentleman trust you?”

Again she shook her head.

“Blamed ‘yporcrit,” he said feelingly, and then reflected: “He’s one of the tame ones, ain’t he?”

“You had better find out for yourself,” she said.

“You trust me. I don’t want to die before you and I have made friends.” This was said with a strange air of feline gallantry. Then, tentatively: “But he could be brought to trust you, couldn’t he?”

“Trust me?” she said, in a tone which bordered on despair, but which he mistook for derision.

“Stand in with us,” he urged. “Give the chuck to all this blamed ‘yporcristy. Perhaps, without being trusted, you have managed to find out something already, eh?”

“Perhaps I have,” she uttered with lips that seemed to her to be freezing fast.

Ricardo now looked at her calm face with something like respect. He was even a little awed by her stillness, by her economy of words. Womanlike, she felt the effect she had produced, the effect of knowing much and of keeping all her knowledge in reserve. So far, somehow, this had come, about of itself. Thus encouraged, directed in the way of duplicity, the refuge of the weak, she made a heroically conscious effort and forced her stiff, cold lips into a smile.

Duplicity — the refuge of the weak and the cowardly, but of the disarmed, too! Nothing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting there before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world. She was not ashamed of her duplicity. With a woman’s frank courage, as soon as she saw that opening she threw herself into it without reserve, with only one doubt — that of her own strength. She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own.

Chapter 3

To Ricardo the girl had been so unforeseen that he was unable to bring upon her the light of his critical faculties. Her smile appeared to him full of promise. He had not expected her to be what she was. Who, from the talk he had heard, could expect to meet a girl like this? She was a blooming miracle, he said to himself, familiarly, yet with a tinge of respect. She was no meat for the likes of that tame, respectable gin-slinger. Ricardo grew hot with indignation. Her courage, her physical strength, demonstrated at the cost of his discomfiture, commanded his sympathy. He felt himself drawn to her by the proofs of her amazing spirit. Such a girl! She had a strong soul; and her reflective disposition to throw over her connection proved that she was no hypocrite.

“Is your gentleman a good shot?” he said, looking down on the floor again, as if indifferent.

She hardly understood the phrase; but in its form it suggested some accomplishment. It was safe to whisper an affirmative.

“Yes.”

“Mine, too — and better than good,” Ricardo murmured, and then, in a confidential burst: “I am not so good at it, but I carry a pretty deadly thing about me, all the same!”

He tapped his leg. She was past the stage of shudders now. Stiff all over, unable even to move her eyes, she felt an awful mental tension which was like blank forgetfulness. Ricardo tried to influence her in his own way.

“And my gentleman is not the sort that would drop me. He ain’t no foreigner; whereas you, with your baron, you don’t know what’s before you — or, rather, being a

woman, you know only too well. Much better not to wait for the chuck. Pile in with us and get your share — of the plunder, I mean. You have some notion about it already.”

She felt that if she as much as hinted by word or sign that there was no such thing on the island, Heyst’s life wouldn’t be worth half an hour’s purchase; but all power of combining words had vanished in the tension of her mind. Words themselves were too difficult to think of — all except the word “yes,” the saving word! She whispered it with not a feature of her face moving. To Ricardo the faint and concise sound proved a cool, reserved assent, more worth having from that amazing mistress of herself than a thousand words from any other woman. He thought with exultation that he had come upon one in a million — in ten millions! His whisper became frankly entreating.

“That’s good! Now all you’ve got to do is to make sure where he keeps his swag. Only do be quick about it! I can’t stand much longer this crawling-on-the-stomach business so as not to scare your gentleman. What do you think a fellow is — a reptile?”

She stared without seeing anyone, as a person in the night sits staring and listening to deadly sounds, to evil incantations. And always in her head there was that tension of the mind trying to get hold of something, of a saving idea which seemed to be so near and could not be captured. Suddenly she seized it. Yes — she had to get that man out of the house. At that very moment, raised outside, not very near, but heard distinctly, Heyst’s voice uttered the words:

“Have you been looking out for me, Wang?”

It was for her like a flash of lightning framed in the darkness which had beset her on all sides, showing a deadly precipice right under her feet. With a convulsive movement she sat up straight, but had no power to rise. Ricardo, on the contrary, was on his feet on the instant, as noiseless as a cat. His yellow eyes gleamed, gliding here and there; but he too seemed unable to make another movement. Only his moustaches stirred visibly, like the feelers of some animal.

Wang’s answer, “Ya tuan,” was heard by the two in the room, but more faintly. Then Heyst again:

“All right! You may bring the coffee in. Mem Putih out in the room yet?”

To this question Wang made no answer.

Ricardo’s and the girl’s eyes met, utterly without expression, all their faculties being absorbed in listening for the first sound of Heyst’s footsteps, for any sound outside which would mean that Ricardo’s retreat was cut off. Both understood perfectly well that Wang must have gone round the house, and that he was now at the back, making it impossible for Ricardo to slip out unseen that way before Heyst came in at the front.

A darkling shade settled on the face of the devoted secretary. Here was the business utterly spoiled! It was the gloom of anger, and even of apprehension. He would perhaps have made a dash for it through the back door, if Heyst had not been heard ascending the front steps. He climbed them slowly, very slowly, like a man who is discouraged or weary — or simply thoughtful; and Ricardo had a mental vision of his face, with its martial moustache, the lofty forehead, the impassive features, and the quiet, meditative eyes. Trapped! Confound it! After all, perhaps the governor was right. Women had to be

shunned. Fooling with this one had apparently ruined the whole business. For, trapped as he was he might just as well kill, since, anyhow, to be seen was to be unmasked. But he was too fair-minded to be angry with the girl.

Heyst had paused on the veranda, or in the very doorway.

“I shall be shot down like a dog if I ain’t quick,” Ricardo muttered excitedly to the girl.

He stooped to get hold of his knife; and the next moment would have hurled himself out through the curtain, nearly, as prompt and fully as deadly to Heyst as an unexpected thunderbolt. The feel more than the strength of the girl’s hand, clutching at his shoulder, checked him. He swung round, crouching with a yellow upward glare. Ah! Was she turning against him?

He would have stuck his knife into the hollow of her bare throat if he had not seen her other hand pointing to the window. It was a long opening, high up, close under the ceiling almost, with a single pivoting shutter.

While he was still looking at it she moved noiselessly away, picking up the overturned chair, and placed it under the wall. Then she looked round; but he didn’t need to be beckoned to. In two long, tiptoeing strides he was at her side.

“Be quick!” she gasped.

He seized her hand and wrung it with all the force of his dumb gratitude, as a man does to a chum when there is no time for words. Then he mounted the chair. Ricardo was short — too short to get over without a noisy scramble. He hesitated an instant; she, watchful, bore rigidly on the seat with her beautiful bare arms, while, light and sure, he used the back of the chair as a ladder. The masses of her brown hair fell all about her face.

Footsteps resounded in the next room, and Heyst’s voice, not very loud, called her by name.

“Lena!”

“Yes! In a minute,” she answered with a particular intonation which she knew would prevent Heyst from coming in at once.

When she looked up, Ricardo had vanished, letting himself down outside so lightly that she had not heard the slightest noise. She stood up then, bewildered, frightened, as if awakened from a drugged sleep, with heavy, downcast, unseeing eyes, her fortitude tired out, her imagination as if dead within her and unable to keep her fear alive.

Heyst moved about aimlessly in the other room. This sound roused her exhausted wits. At once she began to think, hear, see; and what she saw — or rather recognized, for her eyes had been resting on it all the time — was Ricardo’s straw slipper, lost in the scuffle, lying near the bath. She had just time to step forward and plant her foot on it when the curtains shook, and, pushed aside, disclosed Heyst in the doorway.

Out of the appeased enchantment of the senses she had found with him, like a sort of bewitched state, his danger brought a sensation of warmth to her breast. She felt something stir in there, something profound, like a new sort of life.

The room was in partial darkness, Ricardo having accidentally swung the pivoted shutter as he went out of the window. Heyst peered from the doorway.

“Why, you haven’t done your hair yet,” he said.

“I won’t stop to do it now. I shan’t be long,” she replied steadily, and remained still, feeling Ricardo’s slipper under the sole of her foot.

Heyst, with a movement of retreat, let the curtain drop slowly. On the instant she stooped for the slipper, and, with it in her hand, spun round wildly, looking for some hiding-place; but there was no such spot in the bare room. The chest, the leather bunk, a dress or two of hers hanging on pegs — there was no place where the merest hazard might not guide Heyst’s hand at any moment. Her wildly roaming eyes were caught by the half-closed window. She ran to it, and by raising herself on her toes was able to reach the shutter with her fingertips. She pushed it square, stole back to the middle of the room, and, turning about, swung her arm, regulating the force of the throw so as not to let the slipper fly too far out and hit the edge of the overhanging eaves. It was a task of the nicest judgement for the muscles of those round arms, still quivering from the deadly wrestle with a man, for that brain, tense with the excitement of the situation and for the unstrung nerves flickering darkness before her eyes. At last the slipper left her hand. As soon as it passed the opening, it was out of her sight. She listened. She did not hear it strike anything; it just vanished, as if it had wings to fly on through the air. Not a sound! It had gone clear.

Her valiant arms hanging close against her side, she stood as if turned into stone. A faint whistle reached her ears. The forgetful Ricardo, becoming very much aware of his loss, had been hanging about in great anxiety, which was relieved by the appearance of the slipper flying from under the eaves; and now, thoughtfully, he had ventured a whistle to put her mind at ease.

Suddenly the girl reeled forward. She saved herself from a fall only by embracing with both arms one of the tall, roughly carved posts holding the mosquito net above the bed. For a long time she clung to it, with her forehead leaning against the wood. One side of her loosened sarong had slipped down as low as her hip. The long brown tresses of her hair fell in lank wisps, as if wet, almost black against her white body. Her uncovered flank, damp with the sweat of anguish and fatigue, gleamed coldly with the immobility of polished marble in the hot, diffused light falling through the window above her head — a dim reflection of the consuming, passionate blaze of sunshine outside, all aquiver with the effort to set the earth on fire, to burn it to ashes.

Chapter 4

Heyst, seated at the table with his chin on his breast, raised his head at the faint rustle of Lena’s dress. He was startled by the dead pallor of her cheeks, by something lifeless in her eyes, which looked at him strangely, without recognition. But to his anxious inquiries she answered reassuringly that there was nothing the matter with

her, really. She had felt giddy on rising. She had even had a moment of faintness, after her bath. She had to sit down to wait for it to pass. This had made her late dressing.

“I didn’t try to do my hair. I didn’t want to keep you waiting any longer,” she said.

He was unwilling to press her with questions about her health, since she seemed to make light of this indisposition. She had not done her hair, but she had brushed it, and had tied it with a ribbon behind. With her forehead uncovered, she looked very young, almost a child, a careworn child; a child with something on its mind.

What surprised Heyst was the non-appearance of Wang. The Chinaman had always materialized at the precise moment of his service, neither too soon nor too late. This time the usual miracle failed. What was the meaning of this?

Heyst raised his voice — a thing he disliked doing. It was promptly answered from the compound:

“Ada tuan!”

Lena, leaning on her elbow, with her eyes on her plate, did not seem to hear anything. When Wang entered with a tray, his narrow eyes, tilted inward by the prominence of salient cheek-bones, kept her under stealthy observation all the time. Neither the one nor the other of that white couple paid the slightest attention to him and he withdrew without having heard them exchange a single word. He squatted on his heels on the back veranda. His Chinaman’s mind, very clear but not far-reaching, was made up according to the plain reason of things, such as it appeared to him in the light of his simple feeling for self-preservation, untrammelled by any notions of romantic honour or tender conscience. His yellow hands, lightly clasped, hung idly between his knees. The graves of Wang’s ancestors were far away, his parents were dead, his elder brother was a soldier in the yamen of some Mandarin away in Formosa. No one near by had a claim on his veneration or his obedience. He had been for years a labouring restless vagabond. His only tie in the world was the Alfuro woman, in exchange for whom he had given away some considerable part of his hard-earned substance; and his duty, in reason, could be to no one but himself.

The scuffle behind the curtain was a thing of bad augury for that Number One for whom the Chinaman had neither love nor dislike. He had been awed enough by that development to hang back with the coffee-pot till at last the white man was induced to call him in. Wang went in with curiosity. Certainly, the white woman looked as if she had been wrestling with a spirit which had managed to tear half her blood out of her before letting her go. As to the man, Wang had long looked upon him as being in some sort bewitched; and now he was doomed. He heard their voices in the room. Heyst was urging the girl to go and lie down again. He was extremely concerned. She had eaten nothing.

“The best thing for you. You really must!”

She sat listless, shaking her head from time to time negatively, as if nothing could be any good. But he insisted; she saw the beginning of wonder in his eyes, and suddenly gave way.

“Perhaps I had better.”

She did not want to arouse his wonder, which would lead him straight to suspicion. He must not suspect!

Already, with the consciousness of her love for this man, of that something rapturous and profound going beyond the mere embrace, there was born in her a woman's innate mistrust of masculinity, of that seductive strength allied to an absurd, delicate shrinking from the recognition of the naked necessity of facts, which never yet frightened a woman worthy of the name. She had no plan; but her mind, quieted down somewhat by the very effort to preserve outward composure for his sake, perceived that her behaviour had secured, at any rate, a short period of safety. Perhaps because of the similarity of their miserable origin in the dregs of mankind, she had understood Ricardo perfectly. He would keep quiet for a time now. In this momentarily soothing certitude her bodily fatigue asserted itself, the more overpoweringly since its cause was not so much the demand on her strength as the awful suddenness of the stress she had had to meet. She would have tried to overcome it from the mere instinct of resistance, if it had not been for Heyst's alternate pleadings and commands. Before this eminently masculine fussing she felt the woman's need to give way, the sweetness of surrender.

"I will do anything you like," she said.

Getting up, she was surprised by a wave of languid weakness that came over her, embracing and enveloping her like warm water, with a noise in her ears as of a breaking sea.

"You must help me along," she added quickly.

While he put his arm round her waist — not by any means an uncommon thing for him to do — she found a special satisfaction in the feeling of being thus sustained. She abandoned all her weight to that encircling and protecting pressure, while a thrill went through her at the sudden thought that it was she who would have to protect him, to be the defender of a man who was strong enough to lift her bodily, as he was doing even then in his two arms. For Heyst had done this as soon as they had crept through the doorway of the room. He thought it was quicker and simpler to carry her the last step or two. He had grown really too anxious to be aware of the effort. He lifted her high and deposited her on the bed, as one lays a child on its side in a cot. Then he sat down on the edge, masking his concern with a smile which obtained no response from the dreamy immobility of her eyes. But she sought his hand, seized it eagerly; and while she was pressing it with all the force of which she was capable, the sleep she needed overtook her suddenly, overwhelmingly, as it overtakes a child in a cot, with her lips parted for a safe, endearing word which she had thought of but had no time to utter.

The usual flaming silence brooded over Samburan.

"What in the world is this new mystery?" murmured Heyst to himself, contemplating her deep slumber.

It was so deep, this enchanted sleep, that when some time afterwards he gently tried to open her fingers and free his hand, he succeeded without provoking the slightest stir.

"There is some very simple explanation, no doubt," he thought, as he stole out into the living-room.

Absent-mindedly he pulled a book out of the top shelf, and sat down with it; but even after he had opened it on his knee, and had been staring at the pages for a time, he had not the slightest idea of what it was about. He stared and stared at the crowded, parallel lines. It was only when, raising his eyes for no particular reason, he saw Wang standing motionless on the other side of the table, that he regained complete control of his faculties.

"Oh, yes," he said, as if suddenly reminded of a forgotten appointment of a not particularly welcome sort.

He waited a little, and then, with reluctant curiosity, forced himself to ask the silent Wang what he had to say. He had some idea that the matter of the vanished revolver would come up at last; but the guttural sounds which proceeded from the Chinaman did not refer to that delicate subject. His speech was concerned with cups, saucers, plates, forks, and knives. All these things had been put away in the cupboards on the back veranda, where they belonged, perfectly clean, "all plopel." Heyst wondered at the scrupulosity of a man who was about to abandon him; for he was not surprised to hear Wang conclude the account of his stewardship with the words:

"I go now."

"Oh! You go now?" said Heyst, leaning back, his book on his knees.

"Yes. Me no likee. One man, two man, three man — no can do! Me go now."

"What's frightening you away like this?" asked Heyst, while through his mind flashed the hope that something enlightening might come from that being so unlike himself, taking contact with the world with a simplicity and directness of which his own mind was not capable. "Why?" he went on. "You are used to white men. You know them well."

"Yes. Me savee them," assented Wang inscrutably. "Me savee plenty."

All that he really knew was his own mind. He had made it up to withdraw himself and the Alfuro woman from the uncertainties of the relations which were going to establish themselves between those white men. It was Pedro who had been the first cause of Wang's suspicion and fear. The Chinaman had seen wild men. He had penetrated, in the train of a Chinese pedlar, up one or two of the Bornean rivers into the country of the Dyaks. He had also been in the interior of Mindanao, where there are people who live in trees — savages, no better than animals; but a hairy brute like Pedro, with his great fangs and ferocious growls, was altogether beyond his conception of anything that could be looked upon as human. The strong impression made on him by Pedro was the prime inducement which had led Wang to purloin the revolver. Reflection on the general situation, and on the insecurity of Number One, came later, after he had obtained possession of the revolver and of the box of cartridges out of the table drawer in the living-room.

"Oh, you savee plenty about white men," Heyst went on in a slightly bantering tone, after a moment of silent reflection in which he had confessed to himself that the

recovery of the revolver was not to be thought of, either by persuasion or by some more forcible means. "You speak in that fashion, but you are frightened of those white men over there."

"Me no flightened," protested Wang raucously, throwing up his head — which gave to his throat a more strained, anxious appearance than ever. "Me no likee," he added in a quieter tone. "Me velly sick."

He put his hand over the region under the breast-bone.

"That," said Heyst, serenely positive, "belong one piecee lie. That isn't proper man-talk at all. And after stealing my revolver, too!"

He had suddenly decided to speak about it, because this frankness could not make the situation much worse than it was. He did not suppose for a moment that Wang had the revolver anywhere about his person; and after having thought the matter over, he had arrived at the conclusion that the Chinaman never meant to use the weapon against him. After a slight start, because the direct charge had taken him unawares, Wang tore open the front of his jacket with a convulsive show of indignation.

"No hab got. Look see!" he mouthed in pretended anger.

He slapped his bare chest violently; he uncovered his very ribs, all astir with the panting of outraged virtue; his smooth stomach heaved with indignation. He started his wide blue breeches flapping about his yellow calves. Heyst watched him quietly.

"I never said you had it on you," he observed, without raising his voice; "but the revolver is gone from where I kept it."

"Me no savee levelvel," Wang said obstinately.

The book lying open on Heyst's knee slipped suddenly and he made a sharp movement to catch it up. Wang was unable to see the reason of this because of the table, and leaped away from what seemed to him a threatening symptom. When Heyst looked up, the Chinaman was already at the door facing the room, not frightened, but alert.

"What's the matter?" asked Heyst.

Wang nodded his shaven head significantly at the curtain closing the doorway of the bedroom.

"Me no likee," he repeated.

"What the devil do you mean?" Heyst was genuinely amazed. "Don't like what?"

Wang pointed a long lemon-coloured finger at the motionless folds.

"Two," he said.

"Two what? I don't understand."

"Suppose you savee, you no like that fashion. Me savee plenty. Me go now."

Heyst had risen from his chair, but Wang kept his ground in the doorway for a little longer. His almond-shaped eyes imparted to his face an expression of soft and sentimental melancholy. The muscles of his throat moved visibly while he uttered a distinct and guttural "Goodbye" and vanished from Number One's sight.

The Chinaman's departure altered the situation. Heyst reflected on what would be best to do in view of that fact. For a long time he hesitated; then, shrugging his shoulders wearily, he walked out on the veranda, down the steps, and continued at a

steady gait, with a thoughtful mien, in the direction of his guests' bungalow. He wanted to make an important communication to them, and he had no other object — least of all to give them the shock of a surprise call. Nevertheless, their brutish henchman not being on watch, it was Heyst's fate to startle Mr. Jones and his secretary by his sudden appearance in the doorway. Their conversation must have been very interesting to prevent them from hearing the visitor's approach. In the dim room — the shutters were kept constantly closed against the heat — Heyst saw them start apart. It was Mr. Jones who spoke:

“Ah, here you are again! Come in, come in!”

Heyst, taking his hat off in the doorway, entered the room.

Chapter 5

Waking up suddenly, Lena looked, without raising her head from the pillow, at the room in which she was alone. She got up quickly, as if to counteract the awful sinking of her heart by the vigorous use of her limbs. But this sinking was only momentary. Mistress of herself from pride, from love, from necessity, and also because of a woman's vanity in self-sacrifice, she met Heyst, returning from the strangers' bungalow, with a clear glance and a smile.

The smile he managed to answer, but, noticing that he avoided her eyes, she composed her lips and lowered her gaze. For the same reason she hastened to speak to him in a tone of indifference, which she put on without effort, as if she had grown adept in duplicity since sunrise.

“You have been over there again?”

“I have. I thought — but you had better know first that we have lost Wang for good.”

She repeated “For good?” as if she had not understood.

“For good or evil — I shouldn't know which if you were to ask me. He has dismissed himself. He's gone.”

“You expected him to go, though, didn't you?”

Heyst sat down on the other side of the table.

“Yes. I expected it as soon as I discovered that he had annexed my revolver. He says he hasn't taken it. That's untrue of course. A Chinaman would not see the sense of confessing under any circumstances. To deny any charge is a principle of right conduct; but he hardly expected to be believed. He was a little enigmatic at the last, Lena. He startled me.”

Heyst paused. The girl seemed absorbed in her own thoughts.

“He startled me,” repeated Heyst. She noted the anxiety in his tone, and turned her head slightly to look at him across the table.

“It must have been something — to startle you,” she said. In the depth of her parted lips, like a ripe pomegranate, there was a gleam of white teeth.

“It was only a single word — and some of his gestures. He had been making a good deal of noise. I wonder we didn’t wake you up. How soundly you can sleep! I say, do you feel all right now?”

“As fresh as can be,” she said, treating him to another deep gleam of a smile. “I heard no noise, and I’m glad of it. The way he talks in his harsh voice frightens me. I don’t like all these foreign people.”

“It was just before he went away — bolted out, I should say. He nodded and pointed at the curtain to our room. He knew you were there, of course. He seemed to think — he seemed to try to give me to understand that you were in special — well, danger. You know how he talks.”

She said nothing; she made no sound, only the faint tinge of colour ebbed out of her cheek.

“Yes,” Heyst went on. “He seemed to try to warn me. That must have been it. Did he imagine I had forgotten your existence? The only word he said was ‘two’. It sounded so, at least. Yes, ‘two’ — and that he didn’t like it.”

“What does that mean?” she whispered.

“We know what the word two means, don’t we, Lena? We are two. Never were such a lonely two out of the world, my dear! He might have tried to remind me that he himself has a woman to look after. Why are you so pale, Lena?”

“Am I pale?” she asked negligently.

“You are.” Heyst was really anxious.

“Well, it isn’t from fright,” she protested truthfully.

Indeed, what she felt was a sort of horror which left her absolutely in the full possession of all her faculties; more difficult to bear, perhaps, for that reason, but not paralysing to her fortitude.

Heyst in his turn smiled at her.

“I really don’t know that there is any reason to be frightened.”

“I mean I am not frightened for myself.”

“I believe you are very plucky,” he said. The colour had returned to her face. “I” continued Heyst, “am so rebellious to outward impressions that I can’t say that much about myself. I don’t react with sufficient distinctness.” He changed his tone. “You know I went to see those men first thing this morning.”

“I know. Be careful!” she murmured.

“I wonder how one can be careful! I had a long talk with — but I don’t believe you have seen them. One of them is a fantastically thin, long person, apparently ailing; I shouldn’t wonder if he were really so. He makes rather a point of it in a mysterious manner. I imagine he must have suffered from tropical fevers, but not so much as he tries to make out. He’s what people would call a gentleman. He seemed on the point of volunteering a tale of his adventures — for which I didn’t ask him — but remarked that it was a long story; some other time, perhaps.

“I suppose you would like to know who I am?” he asked me.

“I told him I would leave it to him, in a tone which, between gentlemen, could have left no doubt in his mind. He raised himself on his elbow — he was lying down on the camp-bed — and said:

“‘I am he who is — ’”

Lena seemed not to be listening; but when Heyst paused, she turned her head quickly to him. He took it for a movement of inquiry, but in this he was wrong. A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman’s sublime faculty; altogether on herself, every bit of it, leaving him nothing, not even the knowledge of what she did, if that were possible. She would have liked to lock him up by some stratagem. Had she known of some means to put him to sleep for days she would have used incantations or philtres without misgivings. He seemed to her too good for such contacts, and not sufficiently equipped. This last feeling had nothing to do with the material fact of the revolver being stolen. She could hardly appreciate that fact at its full value.

Observing her eyes fixed and as if sightless — for the concentration on her purpose took all expression out of them — Heyst imagined it to be the effect of a great mental effort.

“No use asking me what he meant, Lena; I don’t know, and I did not ask him. The gentleman, as I have told you before, seems devoted to mystification. I said nothing, and he laid down his head again on the bundle of rugs he uses for a pillow. He affects a state of great weakness, but I suspect that he’s perfectly capable of leaping to his feet if he likes. Having been ejected, he said, from his proper social sphere because he had refused to conform to certain usual conventions, he was a rebel now, and was coming and going up and down the earth. As I really did not want to listen to all this nonsense, I told him that I had heard that sort of story about somebody else before. His grin is really ghastly. He confessed that I was very far from the sort of man he expected to meet. Then he said:

“‘As to me, I am no blacker than the gentleman you are thinking of, and I have neither more nor less determination.’”

Heyst looked across the table at Lena. Propped on her elbows, and holding her head in both hands, she moved it a little with an air of understanding.

“Nothing could be plainer, eh?” said Heyst grimly. “Unless, indeed, this is his idea of a pleasant joke; for, when he finished speaking, he burst into a loud long laugh. I didn’t join him!”

“I wish you had,” she breathed out.

“I didn’t join him. It did not occur to me. I am not much of a diplomatist. It would probably have been wise, for, indeed, I believe he had said more than he meant to say, and was trying to take it back by this affected jocularly. Yet when one thinks of it, diplomacy without force in the background is but a rotten reed to lean upon. And I don’t know whether I could have done it if I had thought of it. I don’t know. It would have been against the grain. Could I have done it? I have lived too long within myself,

watching the mere shadows and shades of life. To deceive a man on some issue which could be decided quicker, by his destruction while one is disarmed, helpless, without even the power to run away — no! That seems to me too degrading. And yet I have you here. I have your very existence in my keeping. What do you say, Lena? Would I be capable of throwing you to the lions to save my dignity?”

She got up, walked quickly round the table, posed herself on his knees lightly, throwing one arm round his neck, and whispered in his ear:

“You may if you like. And may be that’s the only way I would consent to leave you. For something like that. If it were something no bigger than your little finger.”

She gave him a light kiss on the lips and was gone before he could detain her. She regained her seat and propped her elbows again on the table. It was hard to believe that she had moved from the spot at all. The fleeting weight of her body on his knees, the hug round his neck, the whisper in his ear, the kiss on his lips, might have been the unsubstantial sensations of a dream invading the reality of waking life; a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts. He hesitated to speak till she said, businesslike:

“Well. And what then?”

Heyst gave a start.

“Oh, yes. I didn’t join him. I let him have his laugh out by himself. He was shaking all over, like a merry skeleton, under a cotton sheet he was covered with — I believe in order to conceal the revolver that he had in his right hand. I didn’t see it, but I have a distinct impression it was there in his fist. As he had not been looking at me for some time, but staring into a certain part of the room, I turned my head and saw a hairy, wild sort of creature which they take about with them, squatting on its heels in the angle of the walls behind me. He wasn’t there when I came in. I didn’t like the notion of that watchful monster behind my back. If I had been less at their mercy, I should certainly have changed my position. As things are now, to move would have been a mere weakness. So I remained where I was. The gentleman on the bed said he could assure me of one thing; and that was that his presence here was no more morally reprehensible than mine.

“‘We pursue the same ends,’ he said, ‘only perhaps I pursue them with more openness than you — with more simplicity.’

“That’s what he said,” Heyst went on, after looking at Lena in a sort of inquiring silence. “I asked him if he knew beforehand that I was living here; but he only gave me a ghastly grin. I didn’t press him for an answer, Lena. I thought I had better not.”

On her smooth forehead a ray of light always seemed to rest. Her loose hair, parted in the middle, covered the hands sustaining her head. She seemed spellbound by the interest of the narrative. Heyst did not pause long. He managed to continue his relation smoothly enough, beginning afresh with a piece of comment.

“He would have lied impudently — and I detest being told a lie. It makes me uncomfortable. It’s pretty clear that I am not fitted for the affairs of the wide world. But I did not want him to think that I accepted his presence too meekly, so I said that

his comings or goings on the earth were none of my business, of course, except that I had a natural curiosity to know when he would find it convenient to resume them.

“He asked me to look at the state he was in. Had I been all alone here, as they think I am, I should have laughed at him. But not being alone — I say, Lena, you are sure you haven’t shown yourself where you could be seen?”

“Certain,” she said promptly.

He looked relieved.

“You understand, Lena, that when I ask you to keep so strictly out of sight, it is because you are not for them to look at — to talk about. My poor Lena! I can’t help that feeling. Do you understand it?”

She moved her head slightly in a manner that was neither affirmative nor negative.

“People will have to see me some day,” she said.

“I wonder how long it will be possible for you to keep out of sight?” murmured Heyst thoughtfully. He bent over the table. “Let me finish telling you. I asked him point blank what it was he wanted with me; he appeared extremely unwilling to come to the point. It was not really so pressing as all that, he said. His secretary, who was in fact his partner, was not present, having gone down to the wharf to look at their boat. Finally the fellow proposed that he should put off a certain communication he had to make till the day after tomorrow. I agreed; but I also told him that I was not at all anxious to hear it. I had no conception in what way his affairs could concern me.

“‘Ah, Mr. Heyst,’ he said, ‘you and I have much more in common than you think.’”

Heyst struck the table with his fist unexpectedly.

“It was a jeer; I am sure it was!”

He seemed ashamed of this outburst and smiled faintly into the motionless eyes of the girl.

“What could I have done — even if I had had my pockets full of revolvers?”

She made an appreciative sign.

“Killing’s a sin, sure enough,” she murmured.

“I went away,” Heyst continued. “I left him there, lying on his side with his eyes shut. When I got back here, I found you looking ill. What was it, Lena? You did give me a scare! Then I had the interview with Wang while you rested. You were sleeping quietly. I sat here to consider all these things calmly, to try to penetrate their inner meaning and their outward bearing. It struck me that the two days we have before us have the character of a sort of truce. The more I thought of it, the more I felt that this was tacitly understood between Jones and myself. It was to our advantage, if anything can be of advantage to people caught so completely unawares as we are. Wang was gone. He, at any rate, had declared himself, but as I did not know what he might take it into his head to do, I thought I had better warn these people that I was no longer responsible for the Chinaman. I did not want Mr. Wang making some move which would precipitate the action against us. Do you see my point of view?”

She made a sign that she did. All her soul was wrapped in her passionate determination, in an exalted belief in herself — in the contemplation of her amazing opportunity to win the certitude, the eternity, of that man's love.

"I never saw two men," Heyst was saying, "more affected by a piece of information than Jones and his secretary, who was back in the bungalow by then. They had not heard me come up. I told them I was sorry to intrude.

"Not at all! Not at all," said Jones.

"The secretary backed away into a corner and watched me like a wary cat. In fact, they both were visibly on their guard.

"I am come," I told them, "to let you know that my servant has deserted — gone off."

"At first they looked at each other as if they had not understood what I was saying; but very soon they seemed quite concerned.

"You mean to say your Chink's cleared out?" said Ricardo, coming forward from his corner. "Like this — all at once? What did he do it for?"

"I said that a Chinaman had always a simple and precise reason for what he did, but that to get such a reason out of him was not so easy. All he told me, I said, was that he 'didn't like'.

"They were extremely disturbed at this. Didn't like what, they wanted to know.

"The looks of you and your party," I told Jones.

"Nonsense!" he cried out, and immediately Ricardo, the short man, struck in.

"Told you that? What did he take you for, sir — an infant? Or do you take us for kids? — meaning no offence. Come, I bet you will tell us next that you've missed something."

"I didn't mean to tell you anything of the sort," I said, "but as a matter of fact it is so."

"He slapped his thigh.

"Thought so. What do you think of this trick, governor?"

"Jones made some sort of sign to him, and then that extraordinary cat-faced associate proposed that he and their servant should come out and help me catch or kill the Chink.

"My object, I said, was not to get assistance. I did not intend to chase the Chinaman. I had come only to warn them that he was armed, and that he really objected to their presence on the island. I wanted them to understand that I was not responsible for anything that might happen.

"Do you mean to tell us," asked Ricardo, "that there is a crazy Chink with a six-shooter broke loose on this island, and that you don't care?"

"Strangely enough they did not seem to believe my story. They were exchanging significant looks all the time. Ricardo stole up close to his principal; they had a confabulation together, and then something happened which I did not expect. It's rather awkward, too.

“Since I would not have their assistance to get hold of the Chink and recover my property, the least they could do was to send me their servant. It was Jones who said that, and Ricardo backed up the idea.

“‘Yes, yes — let our Pedro cook for all hands in your compound! He isn’t so bad as he looks. That’s what we will do!’

“He bustled out of the room to the veranda, and let out an ear-splitting whistle for their Pedro. Having heard the brute’s answering howl, Ricardo ran back into the room.

“‘Yes, Mr. Heyst. This will do capitally, Mr. Heyst. You just direct him to do whatever you are accustomed to have done for you in the way of attendance. See?’

“Lena, I confess to you that I was taken completely by surprise. I had not expected anything of the sort. I don’t know what I expected. I am so anxious about you that I can’t keep away from these infernal scoundrels. And only two months ago I would not have cared. I would have defied their scoundrelism as much as I have scorned all the other intrusions of life. But now I have you! You stole into my life, and — ”

Heyst drew a deep breath. The girl gave him a quick, wide-eyed glance.

“Ah! That’s what you are thinking of — that you have me!”

It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words, and even her embraces. He used to come out of her very arms with the feeling of a baffled man.

“If I haven’t you, if you are not here, then where are you?” cried Heyst. “You understand me very well.”

She shook her head a little. Her red lips, at which he looked now, her lips as fascinating as the voice that came out of them, uttered the words:

“I hear what you say; but what does it mean?”

“It means that I could lie and perhaps cringe for your sake.”

“No! No! Don’t you ever do that,” she said in haste, while her eyes glistened suddenly. “You would hate me for it afterwards!”

“Hate you?” repeated Heyst, who had recalled his polite manner. “No! You needn’t consider the extremity of the improbable — as yet. But I will confess to you that I — how shall I call it? — that I dissembled. First I dissembled my dismay at the unforeseen result of my idiotic diplomacy. Do you understand, my dear girl?”

It was evident that she did not understand the word. Heyst produced his playful smile, which contrasted oddly with the worried character of his whole expression. His temples seemed to have sunk in, his face looked a little leaner.

“A diplomatic statement, Lena, is a statement of which everything is true, but the sentiment which seems to prompt it. I have never been diplomatic in my relation with mankind — not from regard for its feelings, but from a certain regard for my own. Diplomacy doesn’t go well with consistent contempt. I cared little for life and still less for death.”

“Don’t talk like that!”

“I dissembled my extreme longing to take these wandering scoundrels by their throats,” he went on. “I have only two hands — I wish I had a hundred to defend you — and there were three throats. By that time their Pedro was in the room too. Had he seen me engaged with their two throats, he would have been at mine like a fierce dog, or any other savage and faithful brute. I had no difficulty in dissembling my longing for the vulgar, stupid, and hopeless argument of fight. I remarked that I really did not want a servant. I couldn’t think of depriving them of their man’s services; but they would not hear me. They had made up their minds.

“‘We shall send him over at once,’ Ricardo said, ‘to start cooking dinner for everybody. I hope you won’t mind me coming to eat it with you in your bungalow; and we will send the governor’s dinner over to him here.’

“I could do nothing but hold my tongue or bring on a quarrel — some manifestation of their dark purpose, which we have no means to resist. Of course, you may remain invisible this evening; but with that atrocious-brute prowling all the time at the back of the house, how long can your presence be concealed from these men?”

Heyst’s distress could be felt in his silence. The girl’s head, sustained by her hands buried in the thick masses of her hair, had a perfect immobility.

“You are certain you have not been seen so far?” he asked suddenly.

The motionless head spoke.

“How can I be certain? You told me you wanted me to keep out of the way. I kept out of the way. I didn’t ask your reason. I thought you didn’t want people to know that you had a girl like me about you.”

“What? Ashamed?” cried Heyst.

“It isn’t what’s right, perhaps — I mean for you — is it?”

Heyst lifted his hands, reproachfully courteous.

“I look upon it as so very much right that I couldn’t bear the idea of any other than sympathetic, respectful eyes resting on you. I disliked and mistrusted these fellows from the first. Didn’t you understand?”

“Yes; I did keep out of sight,” she said.

A silence fell. At last Heyst stirred slightly.

“All this is of very little importance now,” he said with a sigh. “This is a question of something infinitely worse than mere looks and thoughts, however base and contemptible. As I have told you, I met Ricardo’s suggestions by silence. As I was turning away he said:

“‘If you happen to have the key of that store-room of yours on you, Mr. Heyst, you may just as well let me have it; I will give it to our Pedro.’

“I had it on me, and I tendered it to him without speaking. The hairy creature was at the door by then, and caught the key, which Ricardo threw to him, better than any trained ape could have done. I came away. All the time I had been thinking anxiously of you, whom I had left asleep, alone here, and apparently ill.”

Heyst interrupted himself, with a listening turn of his head. He had heard the faint sound of sticks being snapped in the compound. He rose and crossed the room to look out of the back door.

“And here the creature is,” he said, returning to the table. “Here he is, already attending to the fire. Oh, my dear Lena!”

She had followed him with her eyes. She watched him go out on the front veranda cautiously. He lowered stealthily a couple of screens that hung between the column, and remained outside very still, as if interested by something on the open ground. Meantime she had risen in her turn, to take a peep into the compound. Heyst, glancing over his shoulder, saw her returning to her seat. He beckoned to her, and she continued to move, crossing the shady room, pure and bright in her white dress, her hair loose, with something of a sleep-walker in her unhurried motion, in her extended hand, in the sightless effect of her grey eyes luminous in the half-light. He had never seen such an expression in her face before. It had dreaminess in it, intense attention, and something like sternness. Arrested in the doorway by Heyst’s extended arm, she seemed to wake up, flushed faintly — and this flush, passing off, carried away with it the strange transfiguring mood. With a courageous gesture she pushed back the heavy masses of her hair. The light clung to her forehead. Her delicate nostrils quivered. Heyst seized her arm and whispered excitedly:

“Slip out here, quickly! The screens will conceal you. Only you must mind the stair-space. They are actually out — I mean the other two. You had better see them before you — ”

She made a barely perceptible movement of recoil, checked at once, and stood still. Heyst released her arm.

“Yes, perhaps I had better,” she said with unnatural deliberation, and stepped out on the veranda to stand close by his side.

Together, one on each side of the screen, they peeped between the edge of the canvas and the veranda-post entwined with creepers. A great heat ascended from the sun-smitten ground, in an ever-rising wave, as if from some secret store of earth’s fiery heart; for the sky was growing cooler already, and the sun had declined sufficiently for the shadows of Mr. Jones and his henchman to be projected towards the bungalow side by side — one infinitely slender, the other short and broad.

The two visitors stood still and gazed. To keep up the fiction of his invalidism, Mr. Jones, the gentleman, leaned on the arm of Ricardo, the secretary, the top of whose hat just came up to his governor’s shoulder.

“Do you see them?” Heyst whispered into the girl’s ear. “Here they are, the envoys of the outer world. Here they are before you — evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back. A trio of fitting envoys perhaps — but what about the welcome? Suppose I were armed, could I shoot these two down where they stand? Could I?”

Without moving her head, the girl felt for Heyst’s hand, pressed it and thereafter did not let it go. He continued, bitterly playful:

"I don't know. I don't think so. There is a strain in me which lays me under an insensate obligation to avoid even the appearance of murder. I have never pulled a trigger or lifted my hand on a man, even in self-defence."

The suddenly tightened grip of her hand checked him.

"They are making a move," she murmured.

"Can they be thinking of coming here?" Heyst wondered anxiously.

"No, they aren't coming this way," she said; and there was another pause. "They are going back to their house," she reported finally.

After watching them a little longer, she let go Heyst's hand and moved away from the screen. He followed her into the room.

"You have seen them now," he began. "Think what it was to me to see them land in the dusk, fantasies from the sea — apparitions, chimeras! And they persist. That's the worst of it — they persist. They have no right to be — but they are. They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time — anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust. Since you have told me of that abominable calumny, it has become immense — it extends even to myself." He looked up at her.

"But luckily I have you. And if only Wang had not carried off that miserable revolver — yes, Lena, here we are, we two!"

She put both her hands on his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes. He returned her penetrating gaze. It baffled him. He could not pierce the grey veil of her eyes; but the sadness of her voice thrilled him profoundly.

"You are not reproaching me?" she asked slowly.

"Reproach? What a word between us! It could only be myself — but the mention of Wang has given me an idea. I have been, not exactly cringing, not exactly lying, but still dissembling. You have been hiding yourself, to please me, but still you have been hiding. All this is very dignified. Why shouldn't we try begging now? A noble art? Yes. Lena, we must go out together. I couldn't think of leaving you alone, and I must — yes, I must speak to Wang. We shall go and seek that man, who knows what he wants and how to secure what he wants. We will go at once!"

"Wait till I put my hair up," she agreed instantly, and vanished behind the curtain.

When the curtain had fallen behind her, she turned her head back with an expression of infinite and tender concern for him — for him whom she could never hope to understand, and whom she was afraid she could never satisfy, as if her passion were of a hopelessly lower quality, unable to appease some exalted and delicate desire of his superior soul. In a couple of minutes she reappeared. They left the house by the door of the compound, and passed within three feet of the thunderstruck Pedro, without even looking in his direction. He rose from stooping over a fire of sticks, and, balancing himself clumsily, uncovered his enormous fangs in gaping astonishment. Then suddenly he set off rolling on his bandy legs to impart to his masters the astonishing discovery of a woman.

Chapter 6

As luck would have it, Ricardo was lounging alone on the veranda of the former counting-house. He scented some new development at once, and ran down to meet the trotting, bear-like figure. The deep, growling noises it made, though they had only a very remote resemblance to the Spanish language, or indeed to any sort of human speech, were from long practice quite intelligible to Mr. Jones's secretary. Ricardo was rather surprised. He had imagined that the girl would continue to keep out of sight. That line apparently was given up. He did not mistrust her. How could he? Indeed, he could not think of her existence calmly.

He tried to keep her image out of his mind so that he should be able to use its powers with some approach to that coolness which the complex nature of the situation demanded from him, both for his own sake and as the faithful follower of plain Mr. Jones, gentleman.

He collected his wits and thought. This was a change of policy, probably on the part of Heyst. If so, what could it mean? A deep fellow! Unless it was her doing; in which case — h'm — all right. Must be. She would know what she was doing. Before him Pedro, lifting his feet alternately, swayed to and fro sideways — his usual attitude of expectation. His little red eyes, lost in the mass of hair, were motionless. Ricardo stared into them with calculated contempt and said in a rough, angry voice:

"Woman! Of course there is. We know that without you!" He gave the tame monster a push. "Git! Vamos! Waddle! Get back and cook the dinner. Which way did they go, then?"

Pedro extended a huge, hairy forearm to show the direction, and went off on his bandy legs. Advancing a few steps, Ricardo was just in time to see, above some bushes, two white helmets moving side by side in the clearing. They disappeared. Now that he had managed to keep Pedro from informing the governor that there was a woman on the island, he could indulge in speculation as to the movements of these people. His attitude towards Mr. Jones had undergone a spiritual change, of which he himself was not yet fully aware.

That morning, before tiffin, after his escape from the Heyst bungalow, completed in such an inspiring way by the recovery of the slipper, Ricardo had made his way to their allotted house, reeling as he ran, his head in a whirl. He was wildly excited by visions of inconceivable promise. He waited to compose himself before he dared to meet the governor. On entering the room, he found Mr. Jones sitting on the camp bedstead like a tailor on his board, cross-legged, his long back against the wall.

"I say, sir. You aren't going to tell me you are bored?"

"Bored! No! Where the devil have you been all this time?"

"Observing — watching — nosing around. What else? I knew you had company. Have you talked freely, sir?"

"Yes, I have," muttered Mr. Jones.

"Not downright plain, sir?"

“No. I wished you had been here. You loaf all the morning, and now you come in out of breath. What’s the matter?”

“I haven’t been wasting my time out there,” said Ricardo. “Nothing’s the matter. I — I — might have hurried a bit.” He was in truth still panting; only it was not with running, but with the tumult of thoughts and sensations long repressed, which had been set free by the adventure of the morning. He was almost distracted by them now. He forgot himself in the maze of possibilities threatening and inspiring. “And so you had a long talk?” he said, to gain time.

“Confound you! The sun hasn’t affected your head, has it? Why are you staring at me like a basilisk?”

“Beg pardon, sir. Wasn’t aware I stared,” Ricardo apologized good-humouredly. “The sun might well affect a thicker skull than mine. It blazes. Phew! What do you think a fellow is, sir — a salamander?”

“You ought to have been here,” observed Mr. Jones.

“Did the beast give any signs of wanting to prance?” asked Ricardo quickly, with absolutely genuine anxiety. “It wouldn’t do, sir. You must play him easy for at least a couple of days, sir. I have a plan. I have a notion that I can find out a lot in a couple of days.”

“You have? In what way?”

“Why, by watching,” Ricardo answered slowly.

Mr Jones grunted.

“Nothing new, that. Watch, eh? Why not pray a little, too?”

“Ha, ha, ha! That’s a good one,” burst out the secretary, fixing Mr. Jones with mirthless eyes.

The latter dropped the subject indolently.

“Oh, you may be certain of at least two days,” he said.

Ricardo recovered himself. His eyes gleamed voluptuously.

“We’ll pull this off yet — clean — whole — right through, if you will only trust me, sir.”

“I am trusting you right enough,” said Mr. Jones. “It’s your interest, too.”

And, indeed, Ricardo was truthful enough in his statement. He did absolutely believe in success now. But he couldn’t tell his governor that he had intelligences in the enemy’s camp. It wouldn’t do to tell him of the girl. Devil only knew what he would do if he learned there was a woman about. And how could he begin to tell of it? He couldn’t confess his sudden escapade.

“We’ll pull it off, sir,” he said, with perfectly acted cheerfulness. He experienced gusts of awful joy expanding in his heart and hot like a fanned flame.

“We must,” pronounced Mr. Jones. “This thing, Martin, is not like our other tries. I have a peculiar feeling about this. It’s a different thing. It’s a sort of test.”

Ricardo was impressed by the governor’s manner; for the first time a hint of passion could be detected in him. But also a word he used, the word “test,” had struck him as particularly significant somehow. It was the last word uttered during that morning’s

conversation. Immediately afterwards Ricardo went out of the room. It was impossible for him to keep still. An elation in which an extraordinary softness mingled with savage triumph would not allow it. It prevented his thinking, also. He walked up and down the veranda far into the afternoon, eyeing the other bungalow at every turn. It gave no sign of being inhabited. Once or twice he stopped dead short and looked down at his left slipper. Each time he chuckled audibly. His restlessness kept on increasing till at last it frightened him. He caught hold of the balustrade of the veranda and stood still, smiling not at his thought but at the strong sense of life within him. He abandoned himself to it carelessly, even recklessly. He cared for no one, friend or enemy. At that moment Mr. Jones called him by name from within. A shadow fell on the secretary's face.

"Here, sir," he answered; but it was a moment before he could make up his mind to go in.

He found the governor on his feet. Mr. Jones was tired of lying down when there was no necessity for it. His slender form, gliding about the room, came to a standstill.

"I've been thinking, Martin, of something you suggested. At the time it did not strike me as practical; but on reflection it seems to me that to propose a game is as good a way as any to let him understand that the time has come to disgorge. It's less — how should I say? — vulgar. He will know what it means. It's not a bad form to give to the business — which in itself is crude, Martin, crude."

"Want to spare his feelings?" jeered the secretary in such a bitter tone that Mr. Jones was really surprised.

"Why, it was your own notion, confound you!"

"Who says it wasn't?" retorted Ricardo sulkily. "But I am fairly sick of this crawling. No! No! Get the exact bearings of his swag and then a rip up. That's plenty good enough for him."

His passions being thoroughly aroused, a thirst for blood was allied in him with a thirst for tenderness — yes, tenderness. A sort of anxious, melting sensation pervaded and softened his heart when he thought of that girl — one of his own sort. And at the same time jealousy started gnawing at his breast as the image of Heyst intruded itself on his fierce anticipation of bliss.

"The crudeness of your ferocity is positively gross, Martin," Mr. Jones said disdainfully. "You don't even understand my purpose. I mean to have some sport out of him. Just try to imagine the atmosphere of the game — the fellow handling the cards — the agonizing mockery of it! Oh, I shall appreciate this greatly. Yes, let him lose his money instead of being forced to hand it over. You, of course, would shoot him at once, but I shall enjoy the refinement and the jest of it. He's a man of the best society. I've been hounded out of my sphere by people very much like that fellow. How enraged and humiliated he will be! I promise myself some exquisite moments while watching his play."

"Ay, and suppose he suddenly starts prancing. He may not appreciate the fun."

"I mean you to be present," Mr. Jones remarked calmly.

“Well, as long as I am free to plug him or rip him up whenever I think the time has come, you are welcome to your bit of sport, sir. I shan’t spoil it.”

Chapter 7

It was at this precise moment of their conversation that Heyst had intruded on Mr. Jones and his secretary with his warning about Wang, as he had related to Lena. When he left them, the two looked at each other in wondering silence. My Jones was the first to break it.

“I say, Martin!”

“Yes, sir.”

“What does this mean?”

“It’s some move. Blame me if I can understand.”

“Too deep for you?” Mr. Jones inquired dryly.

“It’s nothing but some of his infernal impudence,” growled the secretary. “You don’t believe all that about the Chink, do you, sir? ‘Tain’t true.”

“It isn’t necessary for it to be true to have a meaning for us. It’s the why of his coming to tell us this tale that’s important.”

“Do you think he made it up to frighten us?” asked Ricardo.

Mr Jones scowled at him thoughtfully.

“The man looked worried,” he muttered, as if to himself. “Suppose that Chinaman has really stolen his money! The man looked very worried.”

“Nothing but his artfulness, sir,” protested Ricardo earnestly, for the idea was too disconcerting to entertain. “Is it likely that he would have trusted a Chink with enough knowledge to make it possible?” he argued warmly. “Why, it’s the very thing that he would keep close about. There’s something else there. Ay, but what?”

“Ha, ha, ha!” Mr. Jones let out a ghostly, squeaky laugh. “I’ve never been placed in such a ridiculous position before,” he went on, with a sepulchral equanimity of tone. “It’s you, Martin, who dragged me into it. However, it’s my own fault too. I ought to — but I was really too bored to use my brain, and yours is not to be trusted. You are a hothead!”

A blasphemous exclamation of grief escaped from Ricardo. Not to be trusted! Hot-head! He was almost tearful.

“Haven’t I heard you, sir, saying more than twenty times since we got fired out from Manila that we should want a lot of capital to work the East Coast with? You were always telling me that to prime properly all them officials and Portuguese scallywags we should have to lose heavily at first. Weren’t you always worrying about some means of getting hold of a good lot of cash? It wasn’t to be got hold of by allowing yourself to become bored in that rotten Dutch town and playing a two-penny game with confounded beggarly bank clerks and such like. Well, I’ve brought you here, where there is cash to be got — and a big lot, to a moral,” he added through his set teeth.

Silence fell. Each of them was staring into a different corner of the room. Suddenly, with a slight stamp of his foot, Mr. Jones made for the door. Ricardo caught him up outside.

“Put an arm through mine, sir,” he begged him gently but firmly. “No use giving the game away. An invalid may well come out for a breath of fresh air after the sun’s gone down a bit. That’s it, sir. But where do you want to go? Why did you come out, sir?”

Mr Jones stopped short.

“I hardly know myself,” he confessed in a hollow mutter, staring intently at the Number One bungalow. “It’s quite irrational,” he declared in a still lower tone.

“Better go in, sir,” suggested Ricardo. “What’s that? Those screens weren’t down before. He’s spying from behind them now, I bet — the dodging, artful, plotting beast!”

“Why not go over there and see if we can’t get to the bottom of this game?” was the unexpected proposal uttered by Mr. Jones. “He will have to talk to us.”

Ricardo repressed a start of dismay, but for a moment could not speak. He only pressed the governor’s hand to his side instinctively.

“No, sir. What could you say? Do you expect to get to the bottom of his lies? How could you make him talk? It isn’t time yet to come to grips with that gent. You don’t think I would hang back, do you? His Chink, of course, I’ll shoot like a dog the moment I catch sight of him; but as to that Mr. Blasted Heyst, the time isn’t yet. My head’s cooler just now than yours. Let’s go in again. Why, we are exposed here. Suppose he took it into his head to let off a gun on us! He’s an unaccountable, ‘yporcritical skunk.”

Allowing himself to be persuaded, Mr. Jones returned to his seclusion. The secretary, however, remained on the veranda — for the purpose, he said, of seeing whether that Chink wasn’t sneaking around; in which case he proposed to take a long shot at the galoot and chance the consequences. His real reason was that he wanted to be alone, away from the governor’s deep-sunk eyes. He felt a sentimental desire to indulge his fancies in solitude. A great change had come over Mr. Ricardo since that morning. A whole side of him which from prudence, from necessity, from loyalty, had been kept dormant, was aroused now, colouring his thoughts and disturbing his mental poise by the vision of such staggering consequences as, for instance, the possibility of an active conflict with the governor. The appearance of the monstrous Pedro with his news drew Ricardo out of a feeling of dreaminess wrapped up in a sense of impending trouble. A woman? Yes, there was one; and it made all the difference. After driving away Pedro, and watching the white helmets of Heyst and Lena vanishing among the bushes he stood lost in meditation.

“Where could they be off to like this?” he mentally asked himself.

The answer found by his speculative faculties on their utmost stretch was — to meet that Chink. For in the desertion of Wang Ricardo did not believe. It was a lying yarn, the organic part of a dangerous plot. Heyst had gone to combine some fresh move. But then Ricardo felt sure that the girl was with him — the girl full of pluck, full of sense, full of understanding; an ally of his own kind!

He went indoors briskly. Mr. Jones had resumed his cross-legged pose at the head of the bed, with his back against the wall.

“Anything new?”

“No, sir.”

Ricardo walked about the room as if he had no care in the world. He hummed snatches of song. Mr. Jones raised his waspish eyebrows, at the sound. The secretary got down on his knees before an old leather trunk, and, rummaging in there, brought out a small looking-glass. He fell to examining his physiognomy in it with silent absorption.

“I think I’ll shave,” he decided, getting up.

He gave a sidelong glance to the governor, and repeated it several times during the operation, which did not take long, and even afterwards, when after putting away the implements, he resumed his walking, humming more snatches of unknown songs. Mr. Jones preserved a complete immobility, his thin lips compressed, his eyes veiled. His face was like a carving.

“So you would like to try your hand at cards with that skunk, sir?” said Ricardo, stopping suddenly and rubbing his hands.

Mr. Jones gave no sign of having heard anything.

“Well, why not? Why shouldn’t he have the experience? You remember in that Mexican town — what’s its name? — the robber fellow they caught in the mountains and condemned to be shot? He played cards half the night with the jailer and the sheriff. Well, this fellow is condemned, too. He must give you your game. Hang it all, a gentleman ought to have some little relaxation! And you have been uncommonly patient, sir.”

“You are uncommonly volatile all of a sudden,” Mr. Jones remarked in a bored voice. “What’s come to you?”

The secretary hummed for a while, and then said:

“I’ll try to get him over here for you tonight, after dinner. If I ain’t here myself, don’t you worry, sir. I shall be doing a bit of nosing around — see?”

“I see,” sneered Mr. Jones languidly. “But what do you expect to see in the dark?”

Ricardo made no answer, and after another turn or two slipped out of the room. He no longer felt comfortable alone with the governor.

Chapter 8

Meantime Heyst and Lena, walking rather fast, approached Wang’s hut. Asking the girl to wait, Heyst ascended the little ladder of bamboos giving access to the door. It was as he had expected. The smoky interior was empty, except for a big chest of sandalwood too heavy for hurried removal. Its lid was thrown up, but whatever it might have contained was no longer there. All Wang’s possessions were gone. Without tarrying in the hut, Heyst came back to the girl, who asked no questions, with her strange air of knowing or understanding everything.

“Let us push on,” he said.

He went ahead, the rustle of her white skirt following him into the shades of the forest, along the path of their usual walk. Though the air lay heavy between straight denuded trunks, the sunlit patches moved on the ground, and raising her eyes Lena saw far above her head the flutter of the leaves, the surface shudder on the mighty limbs extended horizontally in the perfect immobility of patience. Twice Heyst looked over his shoulder at her. Behind the readiness of her answering smile there was a fund of devoted, concentrated passion, burning with the hope of a more perfect satisfaction. They passed the spot where it was their practice to turn towards the barren summit of the central hill. Heyst held steadily on his way towards the upper limit of the forest. The moment they left its shelter, a breeze enveloped them, and a great cloud, racing over the sun, threw a peculiar sombre tint over everything. Heyst pointed up a precipitous, rugged path clinging to the side of the hill. It ended in a barricade of felled trees, a primitively conceived obstacle which must have cost much labour to erect at just that spot.

“This,” Heyst, explained in his urbane tone, “is a barrier against the march of civilization. The poor folk over there did not like it, as it appeared to them in the shape of my company — a great step forward, as some people used to call it with mistaken confidence. The advanced foot has been drawn back, but the barricade remains.”

They went on climbing slowly. The cloud had driven over, leaving an added brightness on the face of the world.

“It’s a very ridiculous thing,” Heyst went on; “but then it is the product of honest fear — fear of the unknown, of the incomprehensible. It’s pathetic, too, in a way. And I heartily wish, Lena, that we were on the other side of it.”

“Oh, stop, stop!” she cried, seizing his arm.

The face of the barricade they were approaching had been piled up with a lot of fresh-cut branches. The leaves were still green. A gentle breeze, sweeping over the top, stirred them a little; but what had startled the girl was the discovery of several spear-blades protruding from the mass of foliage. She had made them out suddenly. They did not gleam, but she saw them with extreme distinctness, very still, very vicious to look at.

“You had better let me go forward alone, Lena,” said Heyst.

She tugged, persistently at his arm, but after a time, during which he never ceased to look smilingly into her terrified eyes, he ended by disengaging himself.

“It’s a sign rather than a demonstration,” he argued, persuasively. “Just wait here a moment. I promise not to approach near enough to be stabbed.”

As in a nightmare she watched Heyst go up the few yards of the path as if he never meant to stop; and she heard his voice, like voices heard in dreams, shouting unknown words in an unearthly tone. Heyst was only demanding to see Wang. He was not kept waiting very long. Recovering from the first flurry of her fright, Lena noticed a commotion in the green top-dressing of the barricade. She exhaled a sigh of relief when the spear-blades retreated out of sight, sliding inward — the horrible

things! in a spot facing Heyst a pair of yellow hands parted the leaves, and a face filled the small opening — a face with very noticeable eyes. It was Wang's face, of course, with no suggestion of a body belonging to it, like those cardboard faces at which she remembered gazing as a child in the window of a certain dim shop kept by a mysterious little man in Kingsland Road. Only this face, instead of mere holes, had eyes which blinked. She could see the beating of the eyelids. The hands on each side of the face, keeping the boughs apart, also did not look as if they belonged to any real body. One of them was holding a revolver — a weapon which she recognized merely by intuition, never having seen such an object before.

She leaned her shoulders against the rock of the perpendicular hillside and kept her eyes on Heyst, with comparative composure, since the spears were not menacing him any longer. Beyond the rigid and motionless back he presented to her, she saw Wang's unreal cardboard face moving its thin lips and grimacing artificially. She was too far down the path to hear the dialogue, carried on in an ordinary voice. She waited patiently for its end. Her shoulders felt the warmth of the rock; now and then a whiff of cooler air seemed to slip down upon her head from above; the ravine at her feet, choked full of vegetation, emitted the faint, drowsy hum of insect life. Everything was very quiet. She failed to notice the exact moment when Wang's head vanished from the foliage, taking the unreal hands away with it. To her horror, the spear-blades came gliding slowly out. The very hair on her head stirred; but before she had time to cry out, Heyst, who seemed rooted to the ground, turned round abruptly and began to move towards her. His great moustaches did not quite hide an ugly but irresolute smile; and when he had come down near enough to touch her, he burst out into a harsh laugh:

“Ha, ha, ha!”

She looked at him, uncomprehending. He cut short his laugh and said curtly:

“We had better go down as we came.”

She followed him into the forest. The advance of the afternoon had filled it with gloom. Far away a slant of light between the trees closed the view. All was dark beyond. Heyst stopped.

“No reason to hurry, Lena,” he said in his ordinary, serenely polite tones. “We return unsuccessful. I suppose you know, or at least can guess, what was my object in coming up there?”

“No, I can't guess, dear,” she said, and smiled, noticing with emotion that his breast was heaving as if he had been out of breath. Nevertheless, he tried to command his speech, pausing only a little between the words.

“No? I went up to find Wang. I went up” — he gasped again here, but this was for the last time — “I made you come with me because I didn't like to leave you unprotected in the proximity of those fellows.” Suddenly he snatched his cork helmet off his head and dashed it on the ground. “No!” he cried roughly. “All this is too unreal altogether. It isn't to be borne! I can't protect you! I haven't the power.”

He glared at her for a moment, then hastened after his hat which had bounded away to some distance. He came back looking at her face, which was very white.

"I ought to beg your pardon for these antics," he said, adjusting his hat. "A movement of childish petulance! Indeed, I feel very much like a child in my ignorance, in my powerlessness, in my want of resource, in everything except in the dreadful consciousness of some evil hanging over your head — yours!"

"It's you they are after," she murmured.

"No doubt, but unfortunately — "

"Unfortunately — what?"

"Unfortunately, I have not succeeded with Wang," he said. "I failed to move his Celestial heart — that is, if there is such a thing. He told me with horrible Chinese reasonableness that he could not let us pass the barrier, because we should be pursued. He doesn't like fights. He gave me to understand that he would shoot me with my own revolver without any sort of compunction, rather than risk a rude and distasteful contest with the strange barbarians for my sake. He has preached to the villagers. They respect him. He is the most remarkable man they have ever seen, and their kinsman by marriage. They understand his policy. And anyway only women and children and a few old fellows are left in the village. This is the season when the men are away in trading vessels. But it would have been all the same. None of them have a taste for fighting — and with white men too! They are peaceable, kindly folk and would have seen me shot with extreme satisfaction. Wang seemed to think my insistence — for I insisted, you know — very stupid and tactless. But a drowning man clutches at straws. We were talking in such Malay as we are both equal to.

"Your fears are foolish,' I said to him.

"Foolish? of course I am foolish,' he replied. 'If I were a wise man, I would be a merchant with a big hong in Singapore, instead of being a mine coolie turned houseboy. But if you don't go away in time, I will shoot you before it grows too dark to take aim. Not till then, Number One, but I will do it then. Now — finish!'

"All right,' I said. 'Finish as far as I am concerned; but you can have no objections to the mem putih coming over to stay with the Orang Kaya's women for a few days. I will make a present in silver for it.' Orang Kaya, is the head man of the village, Lena," added Heyst.

She looked at him in astonishment.

"You wanted me to go to that village of savages?" she gasped. "You wanted me to leave you?"

"It would have given me a freer hand."

Heyst stretched out his hands and looked at them for a moment, then let them fall by his side. Indignation was expressed more in the curve of her lips than in her clear eyes, which never wavered.

"I believe Wang laughed," he went on. "He made a noise like a turkey-cock."

"That would be worse than anything,' he told me.

"I was taken aback. I pointed out to him that he was talking nonsense. It could not make any difference to his security where you were, because the evil men, as he calls them, did not know of your existence. I did not lie exactly, Lena, though I did stretch

the truth till it cracked; but the fellow seems to have an uncanny insight. He shook his head. He assured me they knew all about you. He made a horrible grimace at me."

"It doesn't matter," said the girl. "I didn't want — I would not have gone."

Heyst raised his eyes.

"Wonderful intuition! As I continued to press him, Wang made that very remark about you. When he smiles, his face looks like a conceited death's head. It was his very last remark that you wouldn't want to. I went away then."

She leaned back against a tree. Heyst faced her in the same attitude of leisure, as if they had done with time and all the other concerns of the earth. Suddenly, high above their heads the roof of leaves whispered at them tumultuously and then ceased.

"That was a strange notion of yours, to send me away," she said. "Send me away? What for? Yes, what for?"

"You seem indignant," he remarked listlessly.

"To these savages, too!" she pursued. "And you think I would have gone? You can do what you like with me — but not that, not that!"

Heyst looked into the dim aisles of the forest. Everything was so still now that the very ground on which they stood seemed to exhale silence into the shade.

"Why be indignant?" he remonstrated. "It has not happened. I gave up pleading with Wang. Here we are, repulsed! Not only without power to resist the evil, but unable to make terms for ourselves with the worthy envoys, the envoys extraordinary of the world we thought we had done with for years and years. And that's bad, Lena, very bad."

"It's funny," she said thoughtfully. "Bad? I suppose it is. I don't know that it is. But do you? Do you? You talk as if you didn't believe in it."

She gazed at him earnestly.

"Do I? Ah! That's it. I don't know how to talk. I have managed to refine everything away. I've said to the Earth that bore me: 'I am I and you are a shadow.' And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impunity. Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities . . . Lena, give me your hand."

She looked at him surprised, uncomprehending.

"Your hand," he cried.

She obeyed; he seized it with avidity as if eager to raise it to his lips, but halfway up released his grasp. They looked at each other for a time.

"What's the matter, dear?" she whispered timidly.

"Neither force nor conviction," Heyst muttered wearily to himself. "How am I to meet this charmingly simple problem?"

"I am sorry," she murmured.

"And so am I," he confessed quickly. "And the bitterest of this humiliation is its complete uselessness — which I feel, I feel!"

She had never before seen him give such signs of feeling. Across his ghastly face the long moustaches flamed in the shade. He spoke suddenly:

“I wonder if I could find enough courage to creep among them in the night, with a knife, and cut their throats one after another, as they slept! I wonder — ”

She was frightened by his unwonted appearance more than by the words in his mouth, and said earnestly:

“Don’t you try to do such a thing! Don’t you think of it!”

“I don’t possess anything bigger than a penknife. As to thinking of it, Lena, there’s no saying what one may think of. I don’t think. Something in me thinks — something foreign to my nature. What is the matter?”

He noticed her parted lips, and the peculiar stare in her eyes, which had wandered from his face.

“There’s somebody after us. I saw something white moving,” she cried.

Heyst did not turn his head; he only glanced at her out-stretched arm.

“No doubt we are followed; we are watched.”

“I don’t see anything now,” she said.

“And it does not matter,” Heyst went on in his ordinary voice. “Here we are in the forest. I have neither strength nor persuasion. Indeed, it’s extremely difficult to be eloquent before a Chinaman’s head stuck at one out of a lot of brushwood. But can we wander among these big trees indefinitely? Is this a refuge? No! What else is left to us? I did think for a moment of the mine; but even there we could not remain very long. And then that gallery is not safe. The props were too weak to begin with. Ants have been at work there — ants after the men. A death-trap, at best. One can die but once, but there are many manners of death.”

The girl glanced about fearfully, in search of the watcher or follower whom she had glimpsed once among the trees; but if he existed, he had concealed himself. Nothing met her eyes but the deepening shadows of the short vistas between the living columns of the still roof of leaves. She looked at the man beside her expectantly, tenderly, with suppressed affright and a sort of awed wonder.

“I have also thought of these people’s boat,” Heyst went on. “We could get into that, and — only they have taken everything out of her. I have seen her oars and mast in a corner of their room. To shove off in an empty boat would be nothing but a desperate expedient, supposing even that she would drift out a good distance between the islands before the morning. It would only be a complicated manner of committing suicide — to be found dead in a boat, dead from sun and thirst. A sea mystery. I wonder who would find us! Davidson, perhaps; but Davidson passed westward ten days ago. I watched him steaming past one early morning, from the jetty.”

“You never told me,” she said.

“He must have been looking at me through his big binoculars. Perhaps, if I had raised my arm — but what did we want with Davidson then, you and I? He won’t be back this way for three weeks or more, Lena. I wish I had raised my arm that morning.”

“What would have been the good of it?” she sighed out.

“What good? No good, of course. We had no forebodings. This seemed to be an inexpugnable refuge, where we could live untroubled and learn to know each other.”

“It’s perhaps in trouble that people get to know each other,” she suggested.

“Perhaps,” he said indifferently. “At any rate, we would not have gone away from here with him; though I believe he would have come in eagerly enough, and ready for any service he could render. It’s that fat man’s nature — a delightful fellow. You would not come on the wharf that time I sent the shawl back to Mrs. Schomberg through him. He has never seen you.”

“I didn’t know that you wanted anybody ever to see me,” she said.

He had folded his arms on his breast and hung his head.

“And I did not know that you cared to be seen as yet. A misunderstanding evidently. An honourable misunderstanding. But it does not matter now.”

He raised his head after a silence.

“How gloomy this forest has grown! Yet surely the sun cannot have set already.”

She looked round; and as if her eyes had just been opened, she perceived the shades of the forest surrounding her, not so much with gloom, but with a sullen, dumb, menacing hostility. Her heart sank in the engulfing stillness, at that moment she felt the nearness of death, breathing on her and on the man with her. If there had been a sudden stir of leaves, the crack of a dry branch, the faintest rustle, she would have screamed aloud. But she shook off the unworthy weakness. Such as she was, a fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy, she would try to rise above herself, triumphant and humble; and then happiness would burst on her like a torrent, flinging at her feet the man whom she loved.

Heyst stirred slightly.

“We had better be getting back, Lena, since we can’t stay all night in the woods — or anywhere else, for that matter. We are the slaves of this infernal surprise which has been sprung on us by — shall I say fate? — your fate, or mine.”

It was the man who had broken the silence, but it was the woman who led the way. At the very edge of the forest she stopped, concealed by a tree. He joined her cautiously.

“What is it? What do you see, Lena?” he whispered.

She said that it was only a thought that had come into her head. She hesitated for a moment giving him over her shoulder a shining gleam in her grey eyes. She wanted to know whether this trouble, this danger, this evil, whatever it was, finding them out in their retreat, was not a sort of punishment.

“Punishment?” repeated Heyst. He could not understand what she meant. When she explained, he was still more surprised. “A sort of retribution, from an angry Heaven?” he said in wonder. “On us? What on earth for?”

He saw her pale face darken in the dusk. She had blushed. Her whispering flowed very fast. It was the way they lived together — that wasn’t right, was it? It was a guilty life. For she had not been forced into it, driven, scared into it. No, no — she had come to him of her own free will, with her whole soul yearning unlawfully.

He was so profoundly touched that he could not speak for a moment. To conceal his trouble, he assumed his best Heystian manner.

“What? Are our visitors then messengers of morality, avengers of righteousness, agents of Providence? That’s certainly an original view. How flattered they would be if they could hear you!”

“Now you are making fun of me,” she said in a subdued voice which broke suddenly.

“Are you conscious of sin?” Heyst asked gravely. She made no answer. “For I am not,” he added; “before Heaven, I am not!”

“You! You are different. Woman is the tempter. You took me up from pity. I threw myself at you.”

“Oh, you exaggerate, you exaggerate. It was not so bad as that,” he said playfully, keeping his voice steady with an effort.

He considered himself a dead man already, yet forced to pretend that he was alive for her sake, for her defence. He regretted that he had no Heaven to which he could recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust — warm, living sentient his own — and exposed helplessly to insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body.

She had averted her face from him and was still. He suddenly seized her passive hand.

“You will have it so?” he said. “Yes? Well, let us then hope for mercy together.”

She shook her head without looking at him, like an abashed child.

“Remember,” he went on incorrigible with his delicate raillery, “that hope is a Christian virtue, and surely you can’t want all the mercy for yourself.”

Before their eyes the bungalow across the cleared ground stood bathed in a sinister light. An unexpected chill gust of wind made a noise in the tree-tops. She snatched her hand away and stepped out into the open; but before she had advanced more than three yards, she stood still and pointed to the west.

“Oh look there!” she exclaimed.

Beyond the headland of Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark red sun showing at the bottom. Heyst cast an indifferent glance at the ill-omened chaos of the sky.

“Thunderstorm making up. We shall hear it all night, but it won’t visit us, probably. The clouds generally gather round the volcano.”

She was not listening to him. Her eyes reflected the sombre and violent hues of the sunset.

“That does not look much like a sign of mercy,” she said slowly, as if to herself, and hurried on, followed by Heyst. Suddenly she stopped. “I don’t care. I would do more yet! And some day you’ll forgive me. You’ll have to forgive me!”

Chapter 9

Stumbling up the steps, as if suddenly exhausted, Lena entered the room and let herself fall on the nearest chair. Before following her, Heyst took a survey of the surroundings from the veranda. It was a complete solitude. There was nothing in the aspect of this familiar scene to tell him that he and the girl were not as completely alone as they had been in the early days of their common life on this abandoned spot, with only Wang discreetly materializing from time to time and the uncomplaining memory of Morrison to keep them company.

After the cold gust of wind there was an absolute stillness of the air. The thunder-charged mass hung unbroken beyond the low, ink-black headland, darkening the twilight. By contrast, the sky at the zenith displayed pellucid clearness, the sheen of a delicate glass bubble which the merest movement of air might shatter. A little to the left, between the black masses of the headland and of the forest, the volcano, a feather of smoke by day and a cigar-glow at night, took its first fiery expanding breath of the evening. Above it a reddish star came out like an expelled spark from the fiery bosom of the earth, enchanted into permanency by the mysterious spell of frozen spaces.

In front of Heyst the forest, already full of the deepest shades, stood like a wall. But he lingered, watching its edge, especially where it ended at the line of bushes, masking the land end of the jetty. Since the girl had spoken of catching a glimpse of something white among the trees, he believed pretty firmly that they had been followed in their excursion up the mountain by Mr. Jones's secretary. No doubt the fellow had watched them out of the forest, and now, unless he took the trouble to go back some distance and fetch a considerable circuit inland over the clearing, he was bound to walk out into the open space before the bungalows. Heyst did, indeed, imagine at one time some movement between the trees, lost as soon as perceived. He stared patiently, but nothing more happened. After all, why should he trouble about these people's actions? Why this stupid concern for the preliminaries, since, when the issue was joined, it would find him disarmed and shrinking from the ugliness and degradation of it?

He turned and entered the room. Deep dusk reigned in there already. Lena, near the door, did not move or speak. The sheen of the white tablecloth was very obtrusive. The brute these two vagabonds had tamed had entered on its service while Heyst and Lena were away. The table was laid. Heyst walked up and down the room several times. The girl remained without sound or movement on the chair. But when Heyst, placing the two silver candelabra on the table, struck a match to light the candles, she got up suddenly and went into the bedroom. She came out again almost immediately, having taken off her hat. Heyst looked at her over his shoulder.

"What's the good of shirking the evil hour? I've lighted these candles for a sign of our return. After all, we might not have been watched — while returning, I mean. Of course we were seen leaving the house."

The girl sat down again. The great wealth of her hair looked very dark above her colourless face. She raised her eyes, glistening softly in the light with a sort of unreadable appeal, with a strange effect of unseeing innocence.

“Yes,” said Heyst across the table, the fingertips of one hand resting on the immaculate cloth. “A creature with an antediluvian lower jaw, hairy like a mastodon, and formed like a pre-historic ape, has laid this table. Are you awake, Lena? Am I? I would pinch myself, only I know that nothing would do away with this dream. Three covers. You know it is the shorter of the two who’s coming — the gentleman who, in the play of his shoulders as he walks, and in his facial structure, recalls a Jaguar. Ah, you don’t know what a jaguar is? But you have had a good look at these two. It’s the short one, you know, who’s to be our guest.”

She made a sign with her head that she knew; Heyst’s insistence brought Ricardo vividly before her mental vision. A sudden languor, like the physical echo of her struggle with the man, paralysed all her limbs. She lay still in the chair, feeling very frightened at this phenomenon — ready to pray aloud for strength.

Heyst had started to pace the room.

“Our guest! There is a proverb — in Russia, I believe — that when a guest enters the house, God enters the house. The sacred virtue of hospitality! But it leads one into trouble as well as any other.”

The girl unexpectedly got up from the chair, swaying her supple figure and stretching her arms above her head. He stopped to look at her curiously, paused, and then went on:

“I venture to think that God has nothing to do with such a hospitality and with such a guest!”

She had jumped to her feet to react against the numbness, to discover whether her body would obey her will. It did. She could stand up, and she could move her arms freely. Though no physiologist, she concluded that all that sudden numbness was in her head, not in her limbs. Her fears assuaged, she thanked God for it mentally, and to Heyst murmured a protest:

“Oh, yes! He’s got to do with everything — every little thing. Nothing can happen — ”

“Yes,” he said hastily, “one of the two sparrows can’t be struck to the ground — you are thinking of that.” The habitual playful smile faded on the kindly lips under the martial moustache. “Ah, you remember what you have been told — as a child — on Sundays.”

“Yes, I do remember.” She sank into the chair again. “It was the only decent bit of time I ever had when I was a kid, with our landlady’s two girls, you know.”

“I wonder, Lena,” Heyst said, with a return to his urbane playfulness, “whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world.”

She surprised Heyst by saying dreamily:

“Well — and what about you?”

"I? I date later — much later. I can't call myself a child, but I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour — or is it the hour before last? I have been out of it so long that I am not certain how far the hands of the clock have moved since — since — "

He glanced at the portrait of his father, exactly above the head of the girl, as if it were ignoring her in its painted austerity of feeling. He did not finish the sentence; but he did not remain silent for long.

"Only what must be avoided are fallacious inferences, my dear Lena — especially at this hour."

"Now you are making fun of me again," she said without looking up.

"Am I?" he cried. "Making fun? No, giving warning. Hang it all, whatever truth people told you in the old days, there is also this one — that sparrows do fall to the ground, that they are brought to the ground. This is no vain assertion, but a fact. That's why" — again his tone changed, while he picked up the table knife and let it fall disdainfully — "that's why I wish these wretched round knives had some edge on them. Absolute rubbish — neither edge, point, nor substance. I believe one of these forks would make a better weapon at a pinch. But can I go about with a fork in my pocket?" He gnashed his teeth with a rage very real, and yet comic.

"There used to be a carver here, but it was broken and thrown away a long time ago. Nothing much to carve here. It would have made a noble weapon, no doubt; but — "

He stopped. The girl sat very quiet, with downcast eyes. As he kept silence for some time, she looked up and said thoughtfully:

"Yes, a knife — it's a knife that you would want, wouldn't you, in case, in case — "

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There must be a crowbar or two in the sheds; but I have given up all the keys together. And then, do you see me walking about with a crowbar in my hand? Ha, ha! And besides, that edifying sight alone might start the trouble for all I know. In truth, why has it not started yet?"

"Perhaps they are afraid of you," she whispered, looking down again.

"By Jove, it looks like it," he assented meditatively. "They do seem to hang back for some reason. Is that reason prudence, or downright fear, or perhaps the leisurely method of certitude?"

Out in the black night, not very far from the bungalow, resounded a loud and prolonged whistle. Lena's hands grasped the sides of the chair, but she made no movement. Heyst started, and turned his face away from the door.

The startling sound had died away.

"Whistles, yells, omens, signals, portents — what do they matter?" he said. "But what about the crowbar? Suppose I had it! Could I stand in ambush at the side of the door — this door — and smash the first protruding head, scatter blood and brains over the floor, over these walls, and then run stealthily to the other door to do the same thing — and repeat the performance for a third time, perhaps? Could I? On

suspicion, without compunction, with a calm and determined purpose? No, it is not in me. I date too late. Would you like to see me attempt this thing while that mysterious prestige of mine lasts — or their not less mysterious hesitation?”

“No, no!” she whispered ardently, as if compelled to speak by his eyes fixed on her face. “No, it’s a knife you want to defend yourself with — to defend — there will be time — ”

“And who knows if it isn’t really my duty?” he began again, as if he had not heard her disjointed words at all. “It may be — my duty to you, to myself. For why should I put up with the humiliation of their secret menaces? Do you know what the world would say?”

He emitted a low laugh, which struck her with terror. She would have got up, but he stooped so low over her that she could not move without first pushing him away.

“It would say, Lena, that I — the Swede — after luring my friend and partner to his death from mere greed of money, have murdered these unoffending shipwrecked strangers from sheer funk. That would be the story whispered — perhaps shouted — certainly spread out, and believed — and believed, my dear Lena!”

“Who would believe such awful things?”

“Perhaps you wouldn’t — not at first, at any rate; but the power of calumny grows with time. It’s insidious and penetrating. It can even destroy one’s faith in oneself — dry-rot the soul.”

All at once her eyes leaped to the door and remained fixed, stony, a little enlarged. Turning his head, Heyst beheld the figure of Ricardo framed in the doorway. For a moment none of the three moved, then, looking from the newcomer to the girl in the chair, Heyst formulated a sardonic introduction.

“Mr Ricardo, my dear.”

Her head drooped a little. Ricardo’s hand went up to his moustache. His voice exploded in the room.

“At your service, ma’am!”

He stepped in, taking his hat off with a flourish, and dropping it carelessly on a chair near the door.

“At your service,” he repeated, in quite another tone. “I was made aware there was a lady about, by that Pedro of ours; only I didn’t know I should have the privilege of seeing you tonight, ma’am.”

Lena and Heyst looked at him covertly, but he, with a vague gaze avoiding them both, looked at nothing, seeming to pursue some point in space.

“Had a pleasant walk?” he asked suddenly.

“Yes. And you?” returned Heyst, who had managed to catch his glance.

“I haven’t been a yard away from the governor this afternoon till I started for here.” The genuineness of the accent surprised Heyst, without convincing him of the truth of the words.

“Why do you ask?” pursued Ricardo with every inflection of perfect candour.

“You might have wished to explore the island a little,” said Heyst, studying the man, who, to render him justice, did not try to free his captured gaze. “I may remind you that it wouldn’t be a perfectly safe proceeding.”

Ricardo presented a picture of innocence.

“Oh, yes — meaning that Chink that has ran away from you. He ain’t much!”

“He has a revolver,” observed Heyst meaningly.

“Well, and you have a revolver, too,” Mr. Ricardo argued unexpectedly. “I don’t worry myself about that.”

“That’s different. I am not afraid of you,” Heyst made answer after a short pause.

“Of me?”

“Of all of you.”

“You have a queer way of putting things,” began Ricardo.

At that moment the door on the compound side of the house came open with some noise, and Pedro entered, pressing the edge of a loaded tray to his breast. His big, hairy head rolled a little, his feet fell in front of each other with a short, hard thump on the floor. The arrival changed the current of Ricardo’s thought, perhaps, but certainly of his speech.

“You heard me whistling a little while ago outside? That was to give him a hint, as I came along, that it was time to bring in the dinner; and here it is.”

Lena rose and passed to the right of Ricardo, who lowered his glance for a moment. They sat down at the table. The enormous gorilla back of Pedro swayed out through the door.

“Extraordinary strong brute, ma’am,” said Ricardo. He, had a propensity to talk about “his Pedro,” as some men will talk of their dog. “He ain’t pretty, though. No, he ain’t pretty. And he has got to be kept under. I am his keeper, as it might be. The governor don’t trouble his head much about dee-tails. All that’s left to Martin. Martin, that’s me, ma’am.”

Heyst saw the girl’s eyes turn towards Mr. Jones’s secretary and rest blankly on his face. Ricardo, however, looked vaguely into space, and, with faint flickers of a smile about his lips, made conversation indefatigably against the silence of his entertainers. He boasted largely of his long association with Mr. Jones — over four years now, he said. Then, glancing rapidly at Heyst:

“You can see at once he’s a gentleman, can’t you?”

“You people,” Heyst said, his habitual playful intonation tinged with gloom, “are divorced from all reality in my eyes.”

Ricardo received this speech as if he had been expecting to hear those very words, or else did not mind at all what Heyst might say. He muttered an absent-minded “Ay, ay,” played with a bit of biscuit, sighed, and said, with a peculiar stare which did not seem to carry any distance, but to stop short at a point in the air very near his face:

“Anybody can see at once you are one. You and the governor ought to understand each other. He expects to see you tonight. The governor isn’t well, and we’ve got to think of getting away from here.”

While saying these words he turned himself full towards Lena, but without any marked expression. Leaning back with folded arms, the girl stared before her as if she had been alone in the room. But under that aspect of almost vacant unconcern the perils and emotion that had entered into her life warmed her heart, exalted her mind with a sense of an inconceivable intensity of existence.

“Really? Thinking of going away from here?” Heyst murmured.

“The best of friends must part,” Ricardo pronounced slowly. “And, as long as they part friends, there’s no harm done. We two are used to be on the move. You, I understand, prefer to stick in one place.”

It was obvious that all this was being said merely for the sake of talking, and that Ricardo’s mind was concentrated on some purpose unconnected with the words that were coming out of his mouth.

“I should like to know,” Heyst asked with incisive politeness, “how you have come to understand this or anything else about me? As far as I can remember, I’ve made you no confidences.”

Ricardo, gazing comfortably into space out of the back of his chair — for some time all three had given up any pretence of eating — answered abstractedly:

“Any fellow might have guessed it!” He sat up suddenly, and uncovered all his teeth in a grin of extraordinary ferocity, which was belied by the persistent amiability of his tone. “The governor will be the man to tell you something about that. I wish you would say you would see my governor. He’s the one who does all our talking. Let me take you to him this evening. He ain’t at all well; and he can’t make up his mind to go away without having a talk with you.”

Heyst, looking up, met Lena’s eyes. Their expression of candour seemed to hide some struggling intention. Her head, he fancied, had made an imperceptible affirmative movement. Why? What reason could she have? Was it the prompting of some obscure instinct? Or was it simply a delusion of his own senses? But in this strange complication invading the quietude of his life, in his state of doubt and disdain and almost of despair with which he looked at himself, he would let even a delusive appearance guide him through a darkness so dense that it made for indifference.

“Well, suppose I do say so.”

Ricardo did not conceal his satisfaction, which for a moment interested Heyst.

“It can’t be my life they are after,” he said to himself. “What good could it be to them?”

He looked across the table at the girl. What did it matter whether she had nodded or not? As always when looking into her unconscious eyes, he tasted something like the dregs of tender pity. He had decided to go. Her nod, imaginary or not imaginary, advice or illusion, had tipped the scale. He reflected that Ricardo’s invitation could scarcely be anything in the nature of a trap. It would have been too absurd. Why carry subtly into a trap someone already bound hand and foot, as it were?

All this time he had been looking fixedly at the girl he called Lena. In the submissive quietness of her being, which had been her attitude ever since they had begun their life

on the island, she remained as secret as ever. Heyst got up abruptly, with a smile of such enigmatic and despairing character that Mr. Secretary Ricardo, whose abstract gaze had an all-round efficiency, made a slight crouching start, as if to dive under the table for his leg-knife — a start that was repressed, as soon as begun. He had expected Heyst to spring on him or draw a revolver, because he created for himself a vision of him in his own image. Instead of doing either of these obvious things, Heyst walked across the room, opened the door and put his head through it to look out into the compound.

As soon as his back was turned, Ricardo's hand sought the girl's arm under the table. He was not looking at her, but she felt the groping, nervous touch of his search, felt suddenly the grip of his fingers above her wrist. He leaned forward a little; still he dared not look at her. His hard stare remained fastened on Heyst's back. In an extremely low hiss, his fixed idea of argument found expression scathingly:

"See! He's no good. He's not the man for you!"

He glanced at her at last. Her lips moved a little, and he was awed by that movement without a sound. Next instant the hard grasp of his fingers vanished from her arm. Heyst had shut the door. On his way back to the table, he crossed the path of the girl they had called Alma — she didn't know why — also Magdalen, whose mind had remained so long in doubt as to the reason of her own existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle, since her heart found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose.

Chapter 10

She passed by Heyst as if she had indeed been blinded by some secret, lurid, and consuming glare into which she was about to enter. The curtain of the bedroom door fell behind her into rigid folds. Ricardo's vacant gaze seemed to be watching the dancing flight of a fly in mid air.

"Extra dark outside, ain't it?" he muttered.

"Not so dark but that I could see that man of yours prowling about there," said Heyst in measured tones.

"What — Pedro? He's scarcely a man you know; or else I wouldn't be so fond of him as I am."

"Very well. Let's call him your worthy associate."

"Ay! Worthy enough for what we want of him. A great standby is Peter in a scrimmage. A growl and a bite — oh, my! And you don't want him about?"

"I don't."

"You want him out of the way?" insisted Ricardo with an affectation of incredulity which Heyst accepted calmly, though the air in the room seemed to grow more oppressive with every word spoken.

"That's it. I do want him out of the way." He forced himself to speak equably.

“Lor’! That’s no great matter. Pedro’s not much use here. The business my governor’s after can be settled by ten minutes’ rational talk with — with another gentleman. Quiet talk!”

He looked up suddenly with hard, phosphorescent eyes. Heyst didn’t move a muscle. Ricardo congratulated himself on having left his revolver behind. He was so exasperated that he didn’t know what he might have done. He said at last:

“You want poor, harmless Peter out of the way before you let me take you to see the governor — is that it?”

“Yes, that is it.”

“H’m! One can see,” Ricardo said with hidden venom, “that you are a gentleman; but all that gentlemanly fancifulness is apt to turn sour on a plain man’s stomach. However — you’ll have to pardon me.”

He put his fingers into his mouth and let out a whistle which seemed to drive a thin, sharp shaft of air solidly against one’s nearest ear-drum. Though he greatly enjoyed Heyst’s involuntary grimace, he sat perfectly stolid waiting for the effect of the call.

It brought Pedro in with an extraordinary, uncouth, primeval impetuosity. The door flew open with a clatter, and the wild figure it disclosed seemed anxious to devastate the room in leaps and bounds; but Ricardo raised his open palm, and the creature came in quietly. His enormous half-closed paws swung to and fro a little in front of his bowed trunk as he walked. Ricardo looked on truculently.

“You go to the boat — understand? Go now!”

The little red eyes of the tame monster blinked with painful attention in the mass of hair.

“Well? Why don’t you get? Forgot human speech, eh? Don’t you know any longer what a boat is?”

“Si — boat,” the creature stammered out doubtfully.

“Well, go there — the boat at the jetty. March off to it and sit there, lie down there, do anything but go to sleep there — till you hear my call, and then fly here. Them’s your orders. March! Get, vamos! No, not that way — out through the front door. No sulks!”

Pedro obeyed with uncouth alacrity. When he had gone, the gleam of pitiless savagery went out of Ricardo’s yellow eyes, and his physiognomy took on, for the first time that evening, the expression of a domestic cat which is being noticed.

“You can watch him right into the bushes, if you like. Too dark, eh? Why not go with him to the very spot, then?”

Heyst made a gesture of vague protest.

“There’s nothing to assure me that he will stay there. I have no doubt of his going, but it’s an act without guarantee.”

“There you are!” Ricardo shrugged his shoulders philosophically. “Can’t be helped. Short of shooting our Pedro, nobody can make absolutely sure of his staying in the same place longer than he has a mind to; but I tell you, he lives in holy terror of my temper. That’s why I put on my sudden-death air when I talk to him. And yet I

wouldn't shoot him — not I, unless in such a fit of rage as would make a man shoot his favourite dog. Look here, sir! This deal is on the square. I didn't tip him a wink to do anything else. He won't budge from the jetty. Are you coming along now, sir?"

A short-silence ensued. Ricardo's jaws were working ominously under his skin. His eyes glided: voluptuously here and there, cruel and dreamy, Heyst checked a sudden movement, reflected for a while, then said:

"You must wait a little."

"Wait a little! Wait a little! What does he think a fellow is — a graven image?" grumbled Ricardo half audibly.

Heyst went into the bedroom, and shut the door after him with a bang. Coming from the light, he could not see a thing in there at first; yet he received the impression of the girl getting up from the floor. On the less opaque darkness of the shutter-hole, her head detached itself suddenly, very faint, a mere hint of a round, dark shape without a face.

"I am going, Lena. I am going to confront these scoundrels." He was surprised to feel two arms falling on his shoulders. "I thought that you — " he began.

"Yes, yes!" the girl whispered hastily.

She neither clung to him, nor yet did she try to draw him to her. Her hands grasped his shoulders, and she seemed to him to be staring into his face in the dark. And now he could see something of her face, too — an oval without features — and faintly distinguish her person, in the blackness, a form without definite lines.

"You have a black dress here, haven't you, Lena?" he asked, speaking rapidly, and so low that she could just hear him.

"Yes — an old thing."

"Very good. Put it on at once."

"But why?"

"Not for mourning!" There was something peremptory in the slightly ironic murmur. "Can you find it and get into it in the dark?"

She could. She would try. He waited, very still. He could imagine her movements over there at the far end of the room; but his eyes, accustomed now to the darkness, had lost her completely. When she spoke, her voice surprised him by its nearness. She had done what he had told her to do, and had approached him, invisible.

"Good! Where's that piece of purple veil I've seen lying about?" he asked.

There was no answer, only a slight rustle.

"Where is it?" he repeated impatiently.

Her unexpected breath was on his cheek.

"In my hands."

"Capital! Listen, Lena. As soon as I leave the bungalow with that horrible scoundrel, you slip out at the back — instantly, lose no time! — and run round into the forest. That will be your time, while we are walking away, and I am sure he won't give me the slip. Run into the forest behind the fringe of bushes between the big trees. You will know, surely, how to find a place in full view of the front door. I fear for you; but in

this black dress, with most of your face muffled up in that dark veil, I defy anybody to find you there before daylight. Wait in the forest till the table is pushed into full view of the doorway, and you see three candles out of four blown out and one relighted — or, should the lights be put out here while you watch them, wait till three candles are lighted and then two put out. At either of these signals run back as hard as you can, for it will mean that I am waiting for you here.”

While he was speaking, the girl had sought and seized one of his hands. She did not press it; she held it loosely, as it were timidly, caressingly. It was no grasp; it was a mere contact, as if only to make sure that he was there, that he was real and no mere darker shadow in the obscurity. The warmth of her hand gave Heyst a strange, intimate sensation of all her person. He had to fight down a new sort of emotion, which almost unmanned him. He went on, whispering sternly:

“But if you see no such signals, don’t let anything — fear, curiosity, despair, or hope — entice you back to this house; and with the first sign of dawn steal away along the edge of the clearing till you strike the path. Wait no longer, because I shall probably be dead.”

The murmur of the word “Never!” floated into his ear as if it formed itself in the air.

“You know the path,” he continued. “Make your way to the barricade. Go to Wang — yes, to Wang. Let nothing stop you!” It seemed to him that the girl’s hand trembled a little. “The worst he can do to you is to shoot you, but he won’t. I really think he won’t, if I am not there. Stay with the villagers, with the wild people, and fear nothing. They will be more awed by you than you can be frightened of them. Davidson’s bound to turn up before very long. Keep a look-out for a passing steamer. Think of some sort of signal to call him.”

She made no answer. The sense of the heavy, brooding silence in the outside world seemed to enter and fill the room — the oppressive infinity of it, without breath, without light. It was as if the heart of hearts had ceased to beat and the end of all things had come.

“Have you understood? You are to run out of the house at once,” Heyst whispered urgently.

She lifted his hand to her lips and let it go. He was startled.

“Lena!” he cried out under his breath.

She was gone from his side. He dared not trust himself — no, not even to the extent of a tender word.

Turning to go out he heard a thud somewhere in the house. To open the door, he had first to lift the curtain; he did so with his face over his shoulder. The merest trickle of light, coming through the keyhole and one or two cracks, was enough for his eyes to see her plainly, all black, down on her knees, with her head and arms flung on the foot of the bed — all black in the desolation of a mourning sinner. What was this? A suspicion that there were everywhere more things than he could understand crossed Heyst’s mind. Her arm, detached from the bed, motioned him away. He obeyed, and went out, full of disquiet.

The curtain behind him had not ceased to tremble when she was up on her feet, close against it, listening for sounds, for words, in a stooping, tragic attitude of stealthy attention, one hand clutching at her breast as if to compress, to make less loud the beating of her heart. Heyst had caught Mr. Jones's secretary in the contemplation of his closed writing-desk. Ricardo might have been meditating how to break into it; but when he turned about suddenly, he showed so distorted a face that it made Heyst pause in wonder at the upturned whites of the eyes, which were blinking horribly, as if the man were inwardly convulsed.

"I thought you were never coming," Ricardo mumbled.

"I didn't know you were pressed for time. Even if your going away depends on this conversation, as you say, I doubt if you are the men to put to sea on such a night as this," said Heyst, motioning Ricardo to precede him out of the house.

With feline undulations of hip and shoulder, the secretary left the room at once. There was something cruel in the absolute dumbness of the night. The great cloud covering half the sky hung right against one, like an enormous curtain hiding menacing preparations of violence. As the feet of the two men touched the ground, a rumble came from behind it, preceded by a swift, mysterious gleam of light on the waters of the bay.

"Ha!" said Ricardo. "It begins."

"It may be nothing in the end," observed Heyst, stepping along steadily.

"No! Let it come!" Ricardo said viciously. "I am in the humour for it!"

By the time the two men had reached the other bungalow, the far-off modulated rumble growled incessantly, while pale lightning in waves of cold fire flooded and ran off the island in rapid succession. Ricardo, unexpectedly, dashed ahead up the steps and put his head through the doorway.

"Here he is, governor! Keep him with you as long as you can — till you hear me whistle. I am on the track."

He flung these words into the room with inconceivable speed, and stood aside to let the visitor pass through the doorway; but he had to wait an appreciable moment, because Heyst, seeing his purpose, had scornfully slowed his pace. When Heyst entered the room it was with a smile, the Heyst smile, lurking under his martial moustache.

Chapter 11

Two candles were burning on the stand-up desk. Mr. Jones, tightly enfolded in an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing-gown, kept his elbows close against his sides and his hands deeply plunged into the extraordinarily deep pockets of the garment. The costume accentuated his emaciation. He resembled a painted pole leaning against the edge of the desk, with a dried head of dubious distinction stuck on the top of it. Ricardo lounged in the doorway. Indifferent in appearance to what was going on, he was biding his time. At a given moment, between two flickers of lightning, he melted out of his frame into the outer air. His disappearance was observed on the instant by

Mr. Jones, who abandoned his nonchalant immobility against the desk, and made a few steps calculated to put him between Heyst and the doorway.

“It’s awfully close,” he remarked

Heyst, in the middle of the room, had made up his mind to speak plainly.

“We haven’t met to talk about the weather. You favoured me earlier in the day with a rather cryptic phrase about yourself. ‘I am he that is,’ you said. What does that mean?”

Mr. Jones, without looking at Heyst, continued his absentminded movements till, attaining the desired position, he brought his shoulders with a thump against the wall near the door, and raised his head. In the emotion of the decisive moment his haggard face glistened with perspiration. Drops ran down his hollow cheeks and almost blinded the spectral eyes in their bony caverns.

“It means that I am a person to be reckoned with. No — stop! Don’t put your hand into your pocket — don’t.”

His voice had a wild, unexpected shrillness. Heyst started, and there ensued a moment of suspended animation, during which the thunder’s deep bass muttered distantly and the doorway to the right of Mr. Jones flickered with bluish light. At last Heyst shrugged his shoulders; he even looked at his hand. He didn’t put it in his pocket, however. Mr. Jones, glued against the wall, watched him raise both his hands to the ends of his horizontal moustaches, and answered the note of interrogation in his steady eyes.

“A matter of prudence,” said Mr. Jones in his natural hollow tones, and with a face of deathlike composure. “A man of your free life has surely perceived that. You are a much talked-about man, Mr. Heyst — and though, as far as I understand, you are accustomed to employ the subtler weapons of intelligence, still I can’t afford to take any risks of the — er — grosser methods. I am not unscrupulous enough to be a match for you in the use of intelligence; but I assure you, Mr. Heyst, that in the other way you are no match for me. I have you covered at this very moment. You have been covered ever since you entered this room. Yes — from my pocket.”

During this harangue Heyst looked deliberately over his shoulder, stepped back a pace, and sat down on the end of the camp bedstead. Leaning his elbow on one knee, he laid his cheek in the palm of his hand and seemed to meditate on what he should say next. Mr. Jones, planted against the wall, was obviously waiting for some sort of overture. As nothing came, he resolved to speak himself; but he hesitated. For, though he considered that the most difficult step had been taken, he said to himself that every stage of progress required great caution, lest the man in Ricardo’s phraseology, should “start to prance” — which would be most inconvenient. He fell back on a previous statement:

“And I am a person to be reckoned with.”

The other man went on looking at the floor, as if he were alone in the room. There was a pause.

“You have heard of me, then?” Heyst said at length, looking up.

"I should think so! We have been staying at Schomberg's hotel."

"Schom — " Heyst choked on the word.

"What's the matter, Mr. Heyst?"

"Nothing. Nausea," Heyst said resignedly. He resumed his former attitude of meditative indifference. "What is this reckoning you are talking about?" he asked after a time, in the quietest possible tone. "I don't know you."

"It's obvious that we belong to the same — social sphere," began Mr. Jones with languid irony. Inwardly he was as watchful as he could be. "Something has driven you out — the originality of your ideas, perhaps. Or your tastes."

Mr Jones indulged in one of his ghastly smiles. In repose his features had a curious character of evil, exhausted austerity; but when he smiled, the whole mask took on an unpleasantly infantile expression. A recrudescence of the rolling thunder invaded the room loudly, and passed into silence.

"You are not taking this very well," observed Mr. Jones. This was what he said, but as a matter of fact he thought that the business was shaping quite satisfactorily. The man, he said to himself, had no stomach for a fight. Aloud he continued: "Come! You can't expect to have it always your own way. You are a man of the world."

"And you?" Heyst interrupted him unexpectedly. "How do you define yourself?"

"I, my dear sir? In one way I am — yes, I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast — almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate — the retribution that waits its time."

"I wish to goodness you were the commonest sort of ruffian!" said Heyst, raising his equable gaze to Mr. Jones. "One would be able to talk to you straight then, and hope for some humanity. As it is — "

"I dislike violence and ferocity of every sort as much as you do," Mr. Jones declared, looking very languid as he leaned against the wall, but speaking fairly loud. "You can ask my Martin if it is not so. This, Mr. Heyst, is a soft age. It is also an age without prejudices. I've heard that you are free from them yourself. You mustn't be shocked if I tell you plainly that we are after your money — or I am, if you prefer to make me alone responsible. Pedro, of course, knows no more of it than any other animal would. Ricardo is of the faithful-retainer class — absolutely identified with all my ideas, wishes, and even whims!"

Mr Jones pulled his left hand out of his pocket, got a handkerchief out of another, and began to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, neck, and chin. The excitement from which he suffered made his breathing visible. In his long dressing-gown he had the air of a convalescent invalid who had imprudently overtaxed his strength. Heyst, broad-shouldered, robust, watched the operation from the end of the camp bedstead, very calm, his hands on his knees.

"And by the by," he asked, "where is he now, that henchman of yours? Breaking into my desk?"

"That would be crude. Still, crudeness is one of life's conditions." There was the slightest flavour of banter in the tone of Ricardo's governor. "Conceivable, but unlikely.

Martin is a little crude; but you are not, Mr. Heyst. To tell you the truth, I don't know precisely where he is. He has been a little mysterious of late; but he has my confidence. No, don't get up, Mr. Heyst!"

The viciousness of his spectral face was indescribable. Heyst, who had moved a little, was surprised by the disclosure.

"It was not my intention," he said.

"Pray remain seated," Mr. Jones insisted in a languid voice, but with a very determined glitter in his black eye-caverns.

"If you were more observant," said Heyst with dispassionate contempt, "you would have known before I had been five minutes in the room that I had no weapon of any sort on me."

"Possibly; but pray keep your hands still. They are very well where they are. This is too big an affair for me to take any risks."

"Big? Too big?" Heyst repeated with genuine surprise. "Good Heavens! Whatever you are looking for, there's very little of it here — very little of anything."

"You would naturally say so, but that's not what we have heard," retorted Mr. Jones quickly, with a grin so ghastly that it was impossible to think it voluntary.

Heyst's face had grown very gloomy. He knitted his brows.

"What have you heard?" he asked.

"A lot, Mr. Heyst — a lot," affirmed Mr. Jones. He was vying to recover his manner of languid superiority. "We have heard, for instance, of a certain Mr. Morrison, once your partner."

Heyst could not repress a slight movement.

"Aha!" said Mr. Jones, with a sort of ghostly glee on his face.

The muffled thunder resembled the echo of a distant cannonade below the horizon, and the two men seemed to be listening to it in sullen silence.

"This diabolical calumny will end in actually and literally taking my life from me," thought Heyst.

Then, suddenly, he laughed. Portentously spectral, Mr. Jones frowned at the sound.

"Laugh as much as you please," he said. "I, who have been hounded out from society by a lot of highly moral souls, can't see anything funny in that story. But here we are, and you will now have to pay for your fun, Mr. Heyst."

"You have heard a lot of ugly lies," observed Heyst. "Take my word for it!"

"You would say so, of course — very natural. As a matter of fact I haven't heard very much. Strictly speaking, it was Martin. He collects information, and so on. You don't suppose I would talk to that Schomberg animal more than I could help? It was Martin whom he took into his confidence."

"The stupidity of that creature is so great that it becomes formidable," Heyst said, as if speaking to himself.

Involuntarily, his mind turned to the girl, wandering in the forest, alone and terrified. Would he ever see her again? At that thought he nearly lost his self-possession. But the idea that if she followed his instructions those men were not likely to find her steadied

him a little. They did not know that the island had any inhabitants; and he himself once disposed of, they would be too anxious to get away to waste time hunting for a vanished girl.

All this passed through Heyst's mind in a flash, as men think in moments of danger. He looked speculatively at Mr. Jones, who, of course, had never for a moment taken his eyes from his intended victim. And, the conviction came to Heyst that this outlaw from the higher spheres was an absolutely hard and pitiless scoundrel.

Mr Jones's voice made him start.

"It would be useless, for instance, to tell me that your Chinaman has run off with your money. A man living alone with a Chinaman on an island takes care to conceal property of that kind so well that the devil himself — "

"Certainly," Heyst muttered.

Again, with his left hand, Mr. Jones mopped his frontal bone, his stalk-like neck, his razor jaws, his fleshless chin. Again his voice faltered and his aspect became still more gruesomely malevolent as of a wicked and pitiless corpse.

"I see what you mean," he cried, "but you mustn't put too much trust in your ingenuity. You don't strike me as a very ingenious person, Mr. Heyst. Neither am I. My talents lie another way. But Martin — "

"Who is now engaged in rifling my desk," interjected Heyst.

"I don't think so. What I was going to say is that Martin is much cleverer than a Chinaman. Do you believe in racial superiority, Mr. Heyst? I do, firmly. Martin is great at ferreting out such secrets as yours, for instance."

"Secrets like mine!" repeated Heyst bitterly. "Well I wish him joy of all he can ferret out!"

"That's very kind of you," remarked Mr. Jones. He was beginning to be anxious for Martin's return. Of iron self-possession at the gaming-table, fearless in a sudden affray, he found that this rather special kind of work was telling on his nerves. "Keep still as you are!" he cried sharply.

"I've told you I am not armed," said Heyst, folding his arms on his breast.

"I am really inclined to believe that you are not," admitted Mr. Jones seriously. "Strange!" he mused aloud, the caverns of his eyes turned upon Heyst. Then briskly: "But my object is to keep you in this room. Don't provoke me, by some unguarded movement, to smash your knee or do something definite of that sort." He passed his tongue over his lips, which were dry and black, while his forehead glistened with moisture. "I don't know if it wouldn't be better to do it at once!"

"He who deliberates is lost," said Heyst with grave mockery.

Mr Jones disregarded the remark. He had the air of communing with himself.

"Physically I am no match for you," he said slowly, his black gaze fixed upon the man sitting on the end of the bed. "You could spring — "

"Are you trying to frighten yourself?" asked Heyst abruptly. "You don't seem to have quite enough pluck for your business. Why don't you do it at once?"

Mr Jones, taking violent offence, snorted like a savage skeleton.

“Strange as it may seem to you, it is because of my origin, my breeding, my traditions, my early associations, and such-like trifles. Not everybody can divest himself of the prejudices of a gentleman as easily as you have done, Mr. Heyst. But don’t worry about my pluck. If you were to make a clean spring at me, you would receive in mid air, so to speak, something that would make you perfectly harmless by the time you landed. No, don’t misapprehend us, Mr. Heyst. We are — er — adequate bandits; and we are after the fruit of your labours as a — er — successful swindler. It’s the way of the world — gorge and disgorge!”

He leaned wearily the back of his head against the wall. His vitality seemed exhausted. Even his sunken eyelids drooped within the bony sockets. Only his thin, waspish, beautifully pencilled eyebrows, drawn together a little, suggested the will and the power to sting — something vicious, unconquerable, and deadly.

“Fruits! Swindler!” repeated Heyst, without heat, almost without contempt. “You are giving yourself no end of trouble, you and your faithful henchman, to crack an empty nut. There are no fruits here, as you imagine. There are a few sovereigns, which you may have if you like; and since you have called yourself a bandit — ”

“Yaas!” drawled Mr. Jones. “That, rather than a swindler. Open warfare at least!”

“Very good! Only let me tell you that there were never in the world two more deluded bandits — never!”

Heyst uttered these words with such energy that Mr. Jones, stiffening up, seemed to become thinner and taller in his metallic blue dressing-gown against the whitewashed wall.

“Fooled by a silly, rascally innkeeper!” Heyst went on. “Talked over like a pair of children with a promise of sweets!”

“I didn’t talk with that disgusting animal,” muttered Mr. Jones sullenly; “but he convinced Martin, who is no fool.”

“I should think he wanted very much to be convinced,” said Heyst, with the courteous intonation so well known in the Islands. “I don’t want to disturb your touching trust in your — your follower, but he must be the most credulous brigand in existence. What do you imagine? If the story of my riches were ever so true, do you think Schomberg would have imparted it to you from sheer altruism? Is that the way of the world, Mr. Jones?”

For a moment the lower jaw of Ricardo’s gentleman dropped; but it came up with a snap of scorn, and he said with spectral intensity:

“The beast is cowardly! He was frightened, and wanted to get rid of us, if you want to know, Mr. Heyst. I don’t know that the material inducement was so very great, but I was bored, and we decided to accept the bribe. I don’t regret it. All my life I have been seeking new impressions, and you have turned out to be something quite out of the common. Martin, of course, looks to the material results. He’s simple — and faithful — and wonderfully acute.”

“Ah, yes! He’s on the track — ” and now Heyst’s speech had the character of politely grim raillery — ”but not sufficiently on the track, as yet, to make it quite convenient

to shoot me without more ado. Didn't Schomberg tell you precisely where I conceal the fruit of my rapines? Pah! Don't you know he would have told you anything, true or false, from a very clear motive? Revenge! Mad hate — the unclean idiot!"

Mr Jones did not seem very much moved. On his right hand the doorway incessantly flickered with distant lightning, and the continuous rumble of thunder went on irritatingly, like the growl of an inarticulate giant muttering fatuously.

Heyst overcame his immense repugnance to allude to her whose image, cowering in the forest was constantly before his eyes, with all the pathos and force of its appeal, august, pitiful, and almost holy to him. It was in a hurried, embarrassed manner that he went on:

"If it had not been for that girl whom he persecuted with his insane and odious passion, and who threw herself on my protection, he would never have — but you know well enough!"

"I don't know!" burst out Mr. Jones with amazing heat. "That hotel-keeper tried to talk to me once of some girl he had lost, but I told him I didn't want to hear any of his beastly women stories. It had something to do with you, had it?"

Heyst looked on serenely at this outburst, then lost his patience a little.

"What sort of comedy is this? You don't mean to say that you didn't know that I had — that there was a girl living with me here?"

One could see that the eyes of Mr. Jones had become fixed in the depths of their black holes by the gleam of white becoming steady there. The whole man seemed frozen still.

"Here! Here!" he screamed out twice. There was no mistaking his astonishment, his shocked incredulity — something like frightened disgust.

Heyst was disgusted also, but in another way. He too was incredulous. He regretted having mentioned the girl; but the thing was done, his repugnance had been overcome in the heat of his argument against the absurd bandit.

"Is it possible that you didn't know of that significant fact?" he inquired. "Of the only effective truth in the welter of silly lies that deceived you so easily?"

"No, I didn't!" Mr. Jones shouted. "But Martin did!" he added in a faint whisper, which Heyst's ears just caught and no more.

"I kept her out of sight as long as I could," said Heyst. "Perhaps, with your bringing up, traditions, and so on; you will understand my reason for it."

"He knew. He knew before!" Mr. Jones mourned in a hollow voice. "He knew of her from the first!"

Backed hard against the wall he no longer watched Heyst. He had the air of a man who had seen an abyss yawning under his feet.

"If I want to kill him, this is my time," thought Heyst; but he did not move.

Next moment Mr. Jones jerked his head up, glaring with sardonic fury.

"I have a good mind to shoot you, you woman-ridden hermit, you man in the moon, that can't exist without — no, it won't be you that I'll shoot. It's the other woman-

lover — the prevaricating, sly, low-class, amorous cuss! And he shaved — shaved under my very nose. I'll shoot him!"

"He's gone mad," thought Heyst, startled by the spectre's sudden fury.

He felt himself more in danger, nearer death, than ever since he had entered that room. An insane bandit is a deadly combination. He did not, could not know that Mr. Jones was quick-minded enough to see already the end of his reign over his excellent secretary's thoughts and feelings; the coming failure of Ricardo's fidelity. A woman had intervened! A woman, a girl, who apparently possessed the power to awaken men's disgusting folly. Her power had been proved in two instances already — the beastly innkeeper, and that man with moustaches, upon whom Mr. Jones, his deadly right hand twitching in his pocket, glared more in repulsion than in anger. The very object of the expedition was lost from view in his sudden and overwhelming sense of utter insecurity. And this made Mr. Jones feel very savage; but not against the man with the moustaches. Thus, while Heyst was really feeling that his life was not worth two minutes, purchase, he heard himself addressed with no affectation of languid impertinence but with a burst of feverish determination.

"Here! Let's call a truce!" said Mr. Jones.

Heyst's heart was too sick to allow him to smile.

"Have I been making war on you?" he asked wearily. "How do you expect me to attach any meaning to your words?" he went on. "You seem to be a morbid, senseless sort of bandit. We don't speak the same language. If I were to tell you why I am here, talking to you, you wouldn't believe me, because you would not understand me. It certainly isn't the love of life, from which I have divorced myself long ago — not sufficiently, perhaps; but if you are thinking of yours, then I repeat to you that it has never been in danger from me. I am unarmed."

Mr Jones was biting his lower lip, in a deep meditation. It was only towards the last that he looked at Heyst.

"Unarmed, eh?" Then he burst out violently: "I tell you, a gentleman is no match for the common herd. And yet one must make use of the brutes. Unarmed, eh? And I suppose that creature is of the commonest sort. You could hardly have got her out of a drawing-room. Though they're all alike, for that matter. Unarmed! It's a pity. I am in much greater danger than you are or were — or I am much mistaken. But I am not — I know my man!"

He lost his air of mental vacancy and broke out into shrill exclamations. To Heyst they seemed madder than anything that had gone before.

"On the track! On the scent!" he cried, forgetting himself to the point of executing a dance of rage in the middle of the floor.

Heyst looked on, fascinated by this skeleton in a gay dressing-gown, jerkily agitated like a grotesque toy on the end of an invisible string. It became quiet suddenly.

"I might have smelt a rat! I always knew that this would be the danger." He changed suddenly to a confidential tone, fixing his sepulchral stare on Heyst. "And yet here I am, taken in by the fellow, like the veriest fool. I've been always on the watch for some

bestly influence, but here I am, fairly caught. He shaved himself right in front of me and I never guessed!"

The shrill laugh, following on the low tone of secrecy, sounded so convincingly insane that Heyst got up as if moved by a spring. Mr. Jones stepped back two paces, but displayed no uneasiness.

"It's as clear as daylight!" he uttered mournfully, and fell silent.

Behind him the doorway flickered lividly, and the sound as of a naval action somewhere away on the horizon filled the breathless pause. Mr. Jones inclined his head on his shoulder. His mood had completely changed.

"What do you say, unarmed man? Shall we go and see what is detaining my trusted Martin so long? He asked me to keep you engaged in friendly conversation till he made a further examination of that track. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He is no doubt ransacking my house," said Heyst.

He was bewildered. It seemed to him that all this was an incomprehensible dream, or perhaps an elaborate other-world joke, contrived by that spectre in a gorgeous dressing gown.

Mr Jones looked at him with a horrible, cadaverous smile of inscrutable mockery, and pointed to the door. Heyst passed through it first. His feelings had become so blunted that he did not care how soon he was shot in the back.

"How oppressive the air is!" the voice of Mr. Jones said at his elbow. "This stupid storm gets on my nerves. I would welcome some rain, though it would be unpleasant to get wet. On the other hand, this exasperating thunder has the advantage of covering the sound of our approach. The lightning's not so convenient. Ah, your house is fully illuminated! My clever Martin is punishing your stock of candles. He belongs to the unceremonious classes, which are also unlovely, untrustworthy, and so on."

"I left the candles burning," said Heyst, "to save him trouble."

"You really believed he would go to your house?" asked Mr. Jones with genuine interest.

"I had that notion, strongly. I do believe he is there now."

"And you don't mind?"

"No!"

"You don't!" Mr. Jones stopped to wonder. "You are an extraordinary man," he said suspiciously, and moved on, touching elbows with Heyst.

In the latter's breast dwelt a deep silence, the complete silence of unused faculties. At this moment, by simply shouldering Mr. Jones, he could have thrown him down and put himself, by a couple of leaps, beyond the certain aim of the revolver; but he did not even think of that. His very will seemed dead of weariness. He moved automatically, his head low, like a prisoner captured by the evil power of a masquerading skeleton out of a grave. Mr. Jones took charge of the direction. They fetched a wide sweep. The echoes of distant thunder seemed to dog their footsteps.

“By the by,” said Mr. Jones, as if unable to restrain his curiosity, “aren’t you anxious about that — ouch! — that fascinating creature to whom you owe whatever pleasure you can find in our visit?”

“I have placed her in safety,” said Heyst. “I — I took good care of that.”

Mr Jones laid a hand on his arm.

“You have? Look! is that what you mean?”

Heyst raised his head. In the flicker of lightning the desolation of the cleared ground on his left leaped out and sank into the night, together with the elusive forms of things distant, pale, unearthly. But in the brilliant square of the door he saw the girl — the woman he had longed to see once more as if enthroned, with her hands on the arms of the chair. She was in black; her face was white, her head dreamily inclined on her breast. He saw her only as low as her knees. He saw her — there, in the room, alive with a sombre reality. It was no mocking vision. She was not in the forest — but there! She sat there in the chair, seemingly without strength, yet without fear, tenderly stooping.

“Can you understand their power?” whispered the hot breath of Mr. Jones into his ear. “Can there be a more disgusting spectacle? It’s enough to make the earth detestable. She seems to have found her affinity. Move on closer. If I have to shoot you in the end, then perhaps you will die cured.”

Heyst obeyed the pushing pressure of a revolver barrel between his shoulders. He felt it distinctly, but he did not feel the ground under his feet. They found the steps, without his being aware that he was ascending them — slowly, one by one. Doubt entered into him — a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs, and lodge in his entrails. He stopped suddenly, with a thought that he who experienced such a feeling had no business to live — or perhaps was no longer living.

Everything — the bungalow, the forest, the open ground — trembled incessantly, the earth, the sky itself, shivered all the time, and the only thing immovable in the shuddering universe was the interior of the lighted room and the woman in black sitting in the light of the eight candle-flames. They flung around her an intolerable brilliance which hurt his eyes, seemed to sear his very brain with the radiation of infernal heat. It was some time before his scorched eyes made out Ricardo seated on the floor at some little distance, his back to the doorway, but only partly so; one side of his upturned face showing the absorbed, all forgetful rapture of his contemplation.

The grip of Mr. Jones’s hard claw drew Heyst back a little. In the roll of thunder, swelling and subsiding, he whispered in his ear a sarcastic: “Of course!”

A great shame descended upon Heyst — the shame of guilt, absurd and maddening. Mr. Jones drew him still farther back into the darkness of the veranda.

“This is serious,” he went on, distilling his ghostly venom into Heyst’s very ear. “I had to shut my eyes many times to his little flings; but this is serious. He has found his soul-mate. Mud souls, obscene and cunning! Mud bodies, too — the mud of the gutter! I tell you, we are no match for the vile populace. I, even I, have been nearly

caught. He asked me to detain you till he gave me the signal. It won't be you that I'll have to shoot, but him. I wouldn't trust him near me for five minutes after this!"

He shook Heyst's arm a little.

"If you had not happened to mention the creature, we should both have been dead before morning. He would have stabbed you as you came down the steps after leaving me and then he would have walked up to me and planted the same knife between my ribs. He has no prejudices. The viler the origin, the greater the freedom of these simple souls!"

He drew a cautious, hissing breath and added in an agitated murmur: "I can see right into his mind, I have been nearly caught napping by his cunning."

He stretched his neck to peer into the room from the side. Heyst, too, made a step forward, under the slight impulse of that slender hand clasping his hand with a thin, bony grasp.

"Behold!" the skeleton of the crazy bandit jabbered thinly into his ear in spectral fellowship. "Behold the simple, Acis kissing the sandals of the nymph, on the way to her lips, all forgetful, while the menacing fife of Polyphemus already sounds close at hand — if he could only hear it! Stoop a little."

Chapter 12

On returning to the Heyst bungalow, rapid as if on wings, Ricardo found Lena waiting for him. She was dressed in black; and at once his uplifting exultation was replaced by an awed and quivering patience before her white face, before the immobility of her reposeful pose, the more amazing to him who had encountered the strength of her limbs and the indomitable spirit in her body. She had come out after Heyst's departure, and had sat down under the portrait to wait for the return of the man of violence and death. While lifting the curtain, she felt the anguish of her disobedience to her lover, which was soothed by a feeling she had known before — a gentle flood of penetrating sweetness. She was not automatically obeying a momentary suggestion, she was under influences more deliberate, more vague, and of greater potency. She had been prompted, not by her will, but by a force that was outside of her and more worthy. She reckoned upon nothing definite; she had calculated nothing. She saw only her purpose of capturing death — savage, sudden, irresponsible death, prowling round the man who possessed her, death embodied in the knife ready to strike into his heart. No doubt it had been a sin to throw herself into his arms. With that inspiration that descends at times from above for the good or evil of our common mediocrity, she had a sense of having been for him only a violent and sincere choice of curiosity and pity — a thing that passes. She did not know him. If he were to go away from her and disappear, she would utter no reproach, she would not resent it; for she would hold in herself the impress of something most rare and precious — his embraces made her own by her courage in saving his life.

All she thought of — the essence of her tremors, her flushes of heat, and her shudders of cold — was the question how to get hold of that knife, the mark and sign of stalking death. A tremor of impatience to clutch the frightful thing, glimpsed once and unforgettable, agitated her hands.

The instinctive flinging forward of these hands stopped Ricardo dead short between the door and her chair, with the ready obedience of a conquered man who can bide his time. Her success disconcerted her. She listened to the man's impassioned transports of terrible eulogy and even more awful declarations of love. She was even able to meet his eyes, oblique, apt to glide away, throwing feral gleams of desire.

"No!" he was saying, after a fiery outpouring of words in which the most ferocious phrases of love were mingled with wooing accents of entreaty. "I will have no more of it! Don't you mistrust me. I am sober in my talk. Feel how quietly my heart beats. Ten times today when you, you, you, swam in my eye, I thought it would burst one of my ribs or leap out of my throat. It has knocked itself dead and tired, waiting for this evening, for this very minute. And now it can do no more. Feel how quiet it is!"

He made a step forward, but she raised her clear voice commandingly:

"No nearer!"

He stopped with a smile of imbecile worship on his lips, and with the delighted obedience of a man who could at any moment seize her in his hands and dash her to the ground.

"Ah! If I had taken you by the throat this morning and had my way with you, I should never have known what you are. And now I do. You are a wonder! And so am I, in my way. I have nerve, and I have brains, too. We should have been lost many times but for me. I plan — I plot for my gentleman. Gentleman — pah! I am sick of him. And you are sick of yours, eh? You, you!"

He shook all over; he cooed at her a string of endearing names, obscene and tender, and then asked abruptly:

"Why don't you speak to me?"

"It's my part to listen," she said, giving him an inscrutable smile, with a flush on her cheek and her lips cold as ice.

"But you will answer me?"

"Yes," she said, her eyes dilated as if with sudden interest.

"Where's that plunder? Do you know?"

"No! Not yet."

"But there is plunder stowed somewhere that's worth having?"

"Yes, I think so. But who knows?" she added after a pause.

"And who cares?" he retorted recklessly. "I've had enough of this crawling on my belly. It's you who are my treasure. It's I who found you out where a gentleman had buried you to rot for his accursed pleasure!"

He looked behind him and all around for a seat, then turned to her his troubled eyes and dim smile.

"I am dog-tired," he said, and sat down on the floor. "I went tired this morning, since I came in here and started talking to you — as tired as if I had been pouring my life-blood here on these planks for you to dabble your white feet in."

Unmoved, she nodded at him thoughtfully. Woman-like, all her faculties remained concentrated on her heart's desire — on the knife — while the man went on babbling insanely at her feet, ingratiating and savage, almost crazy with elation. But he, too, was holding on to his purpose.

"For you! For you I will throw away money, lives — all the lives but mine! What you want is a man, a master that will let you put the heel of your shoe on his neck; not that skulker, who will get tired of you in a year — and you of him. And then what? You are not the one to sit still; neither am I. I live for myself, and you shall live for yourself, too — not for a Swedish baron. They make a convenience of people like you and me. A gentleman is better than an employer, but an equal partnership against all the 'yporcrits is the thing for you and me. We'll go on wandering the world over, you and I both free and both true. You are no cage bird. We'll rove together, for we are of them that have no homes. We are born rovers!"

She listened to him with the utmost attention, as if any unexpected word might give her some sort of opening to get that dagger, that awful knife — to disarm murder itself, pleading for her love at her feet. Again she nodded at him thoughtfully, rousing a gleam in his yellow eyes, yearning devotedly upon her face. When he hitched himself a little closer, her soul had no movement of recoil. This had to be. Anything had to be which would bring the knife within her reach. He talked more confidentially now.

"We have met, and their time has come," he began, looking up into her eyes. "The partnership between me and my gentleman has to be ripped up. There's no room for him where we two are. Why, he would shoot me like a dog! Don't you worry. This will settle it not later than tonight!"

He tapped his folded leg below the knee, and was surprised, flattered, by the lighting up of her face, which stooped towards him eagerly and remained expectant, the lips girlishly parted, red in the pale face, and quivering in the quickened drawing of her breath.

"You marvel, you miracle, you man's luck and joy — one in a million! No, the only one. You have found your man in me," he whispered tremulously. "Listen! They are having their last talk together; for I'll do for your gentleman, too, by midnight."

Without the slightest tremor she murmured, as soon as the tightening of her breast had eased off and the words would come:

"I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry — with him."

The pause, the tone, had all the value of meditated advice.

"Good, thrifty girl!" he laughed low, with a strange feline gaiety, expressed by the undulating movement of his shoulders and the sparkling snap of his oblique eyes. "You are still thinking about the chance of that swag. You'll make a good partner, that you will! And, I say, what a decoy you will make! Jee-miny!"

He was carried away for a moment, but his face darkened swiftly.

“No! No reprieve. What do you think a fellow is — a scarecrow? All hat and clothes and no feeling, no inside, no brain to make fancies for himself? No!” he went on violently. “Never in his life will he go again into that room of yours — never any more!”

A silence fell. He was gloomy with the torment of his jealousy, and did not even look at her. She sat up and slowly, gradually, bent lower and lower over him, as if ready to fall into his arms. He looked up at last, and checked this droop unwittingly.

“Say! You, who are up to fighting a man with your bare hands, could you — eh? — could you manage to stick one with a thing like that knife of mine?”

She opened her eyes very wide and gave him a wild smile.

“How can I tell?” she whispered enchantingly. “Will you let me have a look at it?”

Without taking his eyes from her face, he pulled the knife out of its sheath — a short, broad, cruel double-edged blade with a bone handle — and only then looked down at it.

“A good friend,” he said simply. “Take it in your hand and feel the balance,” he suggested.

At the moment when she bent forward to receive it from him, there was a flash of fire in her mysterious eyes — a red gleam in the white mist which wrapped the promptings and longings of her soul. She had done it! The very sting of death was in her hands, the venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted, safe in her possession — and the viper’s head all but lying under her heel. Ricardo, stretched on the mats of the floor, crept closer and closer to the chair in which she sat.

All her thoughts were busy planning how to keep possession of that weapon which had seemed to have drawn into itself every danger and menace on the death-ridden earth. She said with a low laugh, the exultation in which he failed to recognize:

“I didn’t think that you would ever trust me with that thing!”

“Why not?”

“For fear I should suddenly strike you with it.”

“What for? For this morning’s work? Oh, no! There’s no spite in you for that. You forgave me. You saved me. You got the better of me, too. And anyhow, what good would it be?”

“No, no good,” she admitted.

In her heart she felt that she would not know how to do it; that if it came to a struggle, she would have to drop the dagger and fight with her hands.

“Listen. When we are going about the world together, you shall always call me husband. Do you hear?”

“Yes,” she said bracing herself for the contest, in whatever shape it was coming.

The knife was lying in her lap. She let it slip into the fold of her dress, and laid her forearms with clasped fingers over her knees, which she pressed desperately together. The dreaded thing was out of sight at last. She felt a dampness break out all over her.

“I am not going to hide you, like that good-for-nothing, finicky, sneery gentleman. You shall be my pride and my chum. Isn’t that better than rotting on an island for the pleasure of a gentleman, till he gives you the chuck?”

"I'll be anything you like," she said.

In his intoxication he crept closer with every word she uttered, with every movement she made.

"Give your foot," he begged in a timid murmur, and in the full consciousness of his power.

Anything! Anything to keep murder quiet and disarmed till strength had returned to her limbs and she could make up her mind what to do. Her fortitude had been shaken by the very facility of success that had come to her. She advanced her foot forward a little from under the hem of her skirt; and he threw himself on it greedily. She was not even aware of him. She had thought of the forest, to which she had been told to run. Yes, the forest — that was the place for her to carry off the terrible spoil, the sting of vanquished death. Ricardo, clasping her ankle, pressed his lips time after time to the instep, muttering gasping words that were like sobs, making little noises that resembled the sounds of grief and distress. Unheard by them both, the thunder growled distantly with angry modulations of its tremendous voice, while the world outside shuddered incessantly around the dead stillness of the room where the framed profile of Heyst's father looked severely into space.

Suddenly Ricardo felt himself spurned by the foot he had been cherishing — spurned with a push of such violence into the very hollow of his throat that it swung him back instantly into an upright position on his knees. He read his danger in the stony eyes of the girl; and in the very act of leaping to his feet he heard sharply, detached on the comminatory voice of the storm the brief report of a shot which half stunned him, in the manner of a blow. He turned his burning head, and saw Heyst towering in the doorway. The thought that the beggar had started to prance darted through his mind. For a fraction of a second his distracted eyes sought for his weapon all over the floor. He couldn't see it.

"Stick him, you!" he called hoarsely to the girl, and dashed headlong for the door of the compound.

While he thus obeyed the instinct of self-preservation, his reason was telling him that he could not possibly reach it alive. It flew open, however, with a crash, before his launched weight, and instantly he swung it to behind him. There, his shoulder leaning against it, his hands clinging to the handle, dazed and alone in the night full of shudders and muttered menaces, he tried to pull himself together. He asked himself if he had been shot at more than once. His shoulder was wet with the blood trickling from his head. Feeling above his ear, he ascertained that it was only a graze, but the shock of the surprise had unmanned him for the moment.

What the deuce was the governor about to let the beggar break loose like this? Or — was the governor dead, perhaps?

The silence within the room awed him. Of going back there could be no question.

"But she knows how to take care of her self," he muttered.

She had his knife. It was she now who was deadly, while he was disarmed, no good for the moment. He stole away from the door, staggering, the warm trickle running

down his neck, to find out what had become of the governor and to provide himself with a firearm from the armoury in the trunks.

Chapter 13

Mr Jones, after firing his shot over Heyst's shoulder, had thought it proper to dodge away. Like the spectre he was, he noiselessly vanished from the veranda. Heyst stumbled into the room and looked around. All the objects in there — the books, portrait on the wall — seemed shadowy, unsubstantial, the dumb accomplices of an amazing dream-plot ending in an illusory effect of awakening and the impossibility of ever closing his eyes again. With dread he forced himself to look at the girl. Still in the chair, she was leaning forward far over her knees, and had hidden her face in her hands. Heyst remembered Wang suddenly. How clear all this was — and how extremely amusing! Very.

She sat up a little, then leaned back, and taking her hands from her face, pressed both of them to her breast as if moved to the heart by seeing him there looking at her with a black, horror-struck curiosity. He would have pitied her, if the triumphant expression of her face had not given him a shock which destroyed the balance of his feelings. She spoke with an accent of wild joy:

"I knew you would come back in time! You are safe now. I have done it! I would never, never have let him — " Her voice died out, while her eyes shone at him as when the sun breaks through a mist. "Never get it back. Oh, my beloved!"

He bowed his head gravely, and said in his polite, Heystian tone:

"No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon. I was a disarmed man, I have been a disarmed man all my life as I see it now. You may glory in your resourcefulness and your profound knowledge of yourself; but I may say that the other attitude, suggestive of shame, had its charm. For you are full of charm!"

The exultation vanished from her face.

"You mustn't make fun of me now. I know no shame. I was thanking God with all my sinful heart for having been able to do it — for giving you to me in that way — oh, my beloved — all my own at last!"

He stared as if mad. Timidly she tried to excuse herself for disobeying his directions for her safety. Every modulation of her enchanting voice cut deep into his very breast, so that he could hardly understand the words for the sheer pain of it. He turned his back on her; but a sudden drop, an extraordinary faltering of her tone, made him spin round. On her white neck her pale head dropped as in a cruel drought a withered flower droops on its stalk. He caught his breath, looked at her closely, and seemed to read some awful intelligence in her eyes. At the moment when her eyelids fell as if smitten from above by an the gleam of old silver familiar to him from boyhood, the very invisible power, he snatched her up bodily out of the chair, and disregarding an unexpected

metallic clatter on the floor, carried her off into the other room. The limpness of her body frightened him. Laying her down on the bed, he ran out again, seized a four-branched candlestick on the table, and ran back, tearing down with a furious jerk the curtain that swung stupidly in his way, but after putting the candlestick on the table by the bed, he remained absolutely idle. There did not seem anything more for him to do. Holding his chin in his hand he looked down intently at her still face.

“Has she been stabbed with this thing?” asked Davidson, whom suddenly he saw standing by his side and holding up Ricardo’s dagger to his sight. Heyst uttered no word of recognition or surprise. He gave Davidson only a dumb look of unutterable awe, then, as if possessed with a sudden fury, started tearing open the front of the girl’s dress. She remained insensible under his hands, and Heyst let out a groan which made Davidson shudder inwardly the heavy plaint of a man who falls clubbed in the dark.

They stood side by side, looking mournfully at the little black hole made by Mr. Jones’s bullet under the swelling breast of a dazzling and as it were sacred whiteness. It rose and fell slightly — so slightly that only the eyes of the lover could detect the faint stir of life. Heyst, calm and utterly unlike himself in the face, moving about noiselessly, prepared a wet cloth, and laid it on the insignificant wound, round which there was hardly a trace of blood to mar the charm, the fascination, of that mortal flesh.

Her eyelids fluttered. She looked drowsily about, serene, as if fatigued only by the exertions of her tremendous victory, capturing the very sting of death in the service of love. But her eyes became very wide awake when they caught sight of Ricardo’s dagger, the spoil of vanquished death, which Davidson was still holding, unconsciously.

“Give it to me,” she said. “It’s mine.”

Davidson put the symbol of her victory into her feeble hands extended to him with the innocent gesture of a child reaching eagerly for a toy.

“For you,” she gasped, turning her eyes to Heyst. “Kill nobody.”

“No,” said Heyst, taking the dagger and laying it gently on her breast, while her hands fell powerless by her side.

The faint smile on her deep-cut lips waned, and her head sank deep into the pillow, taking on the majestic pallor and immobility of marble. But over the muscles, which seemed set in their transfigured beauty for ever, passed a slight and awful tremor. With an amazing strength she asked loudly:

“What’s the matter with me?”

“You have been shot, dear Lena,” Heyst said in a steady voice, while Davidson, at the question, turned away and leaned his forehead against the post of the foot of the bed.

“Shot? I did think, too, that something had struck me.”

Over Samburan the thunder had ceased to growl at last, and the world of material forms shuddered no more under the emerging stars. The spirit of the girl which was passing away from under them clung to her triumph convinced of the reality of her victory over death.

“No more,” she muttered. “There will be no more! Oh, my beloved,” she cried weakly, “I’ve saved you! Why don’t you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?”

Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. He dared not touch her and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms about his neck.

“Who else could have done this for you?” she whispered gloriously.

“No one in the world,” he answered her in a murmur of unconcealed despair.

She tried to raise herself, but all she could do was to lift her head a little from the pillow. With a terrible and gentle movement, Heyst hastened to slip his arm under her neck. She felt relieved at once of an intolerable weight, and was content to surrender to him the infinite weariness of her tremendous achievement. Exulting, she saw herself extended on the bed, in a black dress, and profoundly at peace, while, stooping over her with a kindly, playful smile, he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart — for ever! The flush of rapture flooding her whole being broke out in a smile of innocent, girlish happiness; and with that divine radiance on her lips she breathed her last — triumphant, seeking for his glance in the shades of death.

Chapter 14

“Yes, Excellency,” said Davidson in his placid voice; “there are more dead in this affair — more white people, I mean — than have been killed in many of the battles in the last Achin war.”

Davidson was talking with an Excellency, because what was alluded to in conversation as “the mystery of Samburan” had caused such a sensation in the Archipelago that even those in the highest spheres were anxious to hear something at first hand. Davidson had been summoned to an audience. It was a high official on his tour.

“You knew the late Baron Heyst well?”

“The truth is that nobody out here can boast of having known him well,” said Davidson. “He was a queer chap. I doubt if he himself knew how queer he was. But everybody was aware that I was keeping my eye on him in a friendly way. And that’s how I got the warning which made me turn round in my tracks. In the middle of my trip and steam back to Samburan, where, I am grieved to say, I arrived too late.”

Without enlarging very much, Davidson explained to the attentive Excellency how a woman, the wife of a certain hotel-keeper named Schomberg, had overheard two card-sharpping rascals making inquiries from her husband as to the exact position of the island. She caught only a few words referring to the neighbouring volcano, but there were enough to arouse her suspicions — “which,” went on Davidson, “she imparted to me, your Excellency. They were only too well founded!”

“That was very clever of her,” remarked the great man.

“She’s much cleverer than people have any conception of,” said Davidson.

But he refrained from disclosing to the Excellency the real cause which had sharpened Mrs. Schomberg’s wits. The poor woman was in mortal terror of the girl being brought back within reach of her infatuated Wilhelm. Davidson only said that her agitation had impressed him; but he confessed that while going back, he began to have his doubts as to there being anything in it.

“I steamed into one of those silly thunderstorms that hang about the volcano, and had some trouble in making the island,” narrated Davidson. “I had to grope my way dead slow into Diamond Bay. I don’t suppose that anybody, even if looking out for me, could have heard me let go the anchor.”

He admitted that he ought to have gone ashore at once; but everything was perfectly dark and absolutely quiet. He felt ashamed of his impulsiveness. What a fool he would have looked, waking up a man in the middle of the night just to ask him if he was all right! And then the girl being there, he feared that Heyst would look upon his visit as an unwarrantable intrusion.

The first intimation he had of there being anything wrong was a big white boat, adrift, with the dead body of a very hairy man inside, bumping against the bows of his steamer. Then indeed he lost no time in going ashore — alone, of course, from motives of delicacy.

“I arrived in time to see that poor girl die, as I have told your Excellency,” pursued Davidson. “I won’t tell you what a time I had with him afterwards. He talked to me. His father seems to have been a crank, and to have upset his head when he was young. He was a queer chap. Practically the last words he said to me, as we came out on the veranda, were:

“‘Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love — and to put its trust in life!’

“As we stood there, just before I left him, for he said he wanted to be alone with his dead for a time, we heard a snarly sort of voice near the bushes by the shore calling out:

“‘Is that you, governor?’

“‘Yes, it’s me.’

“‘Jeeminy! I thought the beggar had done for you. He has started prancing and nearly had me. I have been dodging around, looking for you ever since.’

“‘Well, here I am,’ suddenly screamed the other voice, and then a shot rang out.

“‘This time he has not missed him,’ Heyst said to me bitterly, and went back into the house.

“I returned on board as he had insisted I should do. I didn’t want to intrude on his grief. Later, about five in the morning, some of my calashes came running to me, yelling that there was a fire ashore. I landed at once, of course. The principal bungalow was blazing. The heat drove us back. The other two houses caught one after another like kindling-wood. There was no going beyond the shore end of the jetty till the afternoon.”

Davidson sighed placidly.

“I suppose you are certain that Baron Heyst is dead?”

“He is — ashes, your Excellency,” said Davidson, wheezing a little; “he and the girl together. I suppose he couldn’t stand his thoughts before her dead body — and fire purifies everything. That Chinaman of whom I told your Excellency helped me to investigate next day, when the embers got cooled a little. We found enough to be sure. He’s not a bad Chinaman. He told me that he had followed Heyst and the girl through the forest from pity, and partly out of curiosity. He watched the house till he saw Heyst go out, after dinner, and Ricardo come back alone. While he was dodging there, it occurred to him that he had better cast the boat adrift, for fear those scoundrels should come round by water and bombard the village from the sea with their revolvers and Winchesters. He judged that they were devils enough for anything. So he walked down the wharf quietly; and as he got into the boat, to cast her off, that hairy man who, it seems, was dozing in her, jumped up growling, and Wang shot him dead. Then he shoved the boat off as far as he could and went away.”

There was a pause. Presently Davidson went on, in his tranquil manner:

“Let Heaven look after what has been purified. The wind and rain will take care of the ashes. The carcass of that follower, secretary, or whatever the unclean ruffian called himself, I left where it lay, to swell and rot in the sun. His principal had shot him neatly through the head. Then, apparently, this Jones went down to the wharf to look for the boat and for the hairy man. I suppose he tumbled into the water by accident — or perhaps not by accident. The boat and the man were gone, and the scoundrel saw himself alone, his game clearly up, and fairly trapped. Who knows? The water’s very clear there, and I could see him huddled up on the bottom, between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out. Wang was very pleased when he discovered him. That made everything safe, he said, and he went at once over the hill to fetch his Alfuro woman back to the hut.”

Davidson took out his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration off his forehead.

“And then, your Excellency, I went away. There was nothing to be done there.”

“Clearly!” assented the Excellency.

Davidson, thoughtful, seemed to weigh the matter in his mind, and then murmured with placid sadness:

“Nothing!”

October 1912 — May 1914

The Shadow-line

A CONFESSION

“Worthy of my undying regard”

To Borys And All Others Who,

Like Himself, Have Crossed In Early Youth

The Shadow-Line Of Their Generation With Love

— D'autre fois, calme plat, grand miroir De mon desespoir. — BAUDELAIRE

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Part 1

Chapter 1

Only the young have such moments. I don't mean the very young. No. The very young have, properly speaking, no moments. It is the privilege of early youth to live in advance of its days in all the beautiful continuity of hope which knows no pauses and no introspection.

One closes behind one the little gate of mere boyishness — and enters an enchanted garden. Its very shades glow with promise. Every turn of the path has its seduction. And it isn't because it is an undiscovered country. One knows well enough that all mankind had streamed that way. It is the charm of universal experience from which one expects an uncommon or personal sensation — a bit of one's own.

One goes on recognizing the landmarks of the predecessors, excited, amused, taking the hard luck and the good luck together — the kicks and the half-pence, as the saying is — the picturesque common lot that holds so many possibilities for the deserving or perhaps for the lucky. Yes. One goes on. And the time, too, goes on — till one perceives ahead a shadow-line warning one that the region of early youth, too, must be left behind.

This is the period of life in which such moments of which I have spoken are likely to come. What moments? Why, the moments of boredom, of weariness, of dissatisfaction. Rash moments. I mean moments when the still young are inclined to commit rash actions, such as getting married suddenly or else throwing up a job for no reason.

This is not a marriage story. It wasn't so bad as that with me. My action, rash as it was, had more the character of divorce — almost of desertion. For no reason on which a sensible person could put a finger I threw up my job — chucked my berth — left the ship of which the worst that could be said was that she was a steamship and therefore, perhaps, not entitled to that blind loyalty which. . . . However, it's no use trying to put a gloss on what even at the time I myself half suspected to be a caprice.

It was in an Eastern port. She was an Eastern ship, inasmuch as then she belonged to that port. She traded among dark islands on a blue reef-scarred sea, with the Red Ensign over the taffrail and at her masthead a house-flag, also red, but with a green border and with a white crescent in it. For an Arab owned her, and a Syed at that. Hence the green border on the flag. He was the head of a great House of Straits Arabs, but as loyal a subject of the complex British Empire as you could find east of the

Suez Canal. World politics did not trouble him at all, but he had a great occult power amongst his own people.

It was all one to us who owned the ship. He had to employ white men in the shipping part of his business, and many of those he so employed had never set eyes on him from the first to the last day. I myself saw him but once, quite accidentally on a wharf — an old, dark little man blind in one eye, in a snowy robe and yellow slippers. He was having his hand severely kissed by a crowd of Malay pilgrims to whom he had done some favour, in the way of food and money. His alms-giving, I have heard, was most extensive, covering almost the whole Archipelago. For isn't it said that "The charitable man is the friend of Allah"?

Excellent (and picturesque) Arab owner, about whom one needed not to trouble one's head, a most excellent Scottish ship — for she was that from the keep up — excellent sea-boat, easy to keep clean, most handy in every way, and if it had not been for her internal propulsion, worthy of any man's love, I cherish to this day a profound respect for her memory. As to the kind of trade she was engaged in and the character of my shipmates, I could not have been happier if I had had the life and the men made to my order by a benevolent Enchanter.

And suddenly I left all this. I left it in that, to us, inconsequential manner in which a bird flies away from a comfortable branch. It was as though all unknowing I had heard a whisper or seen something. Well — perhaps! One day I was perfectly right and the next everything was gone — glamour, flavour, interest, contentment — everything. It was one of these moments, you know. The green sickness of late youth descended on me and carried me off. Carried me off that ship, I mean.

We were only four white men on board, with a large crew of Kalashes and two Malay petty officers. The Captain stared hard as if wondering what ailed me. But he was a sailor, and he, too, had been young at one time. Presently a smile came to lurk under his thick iron-gray moustache, and he observed that, of course, if I felt I must go he couldn't keep me by main force. And it was arranged that I should be paid off the next morning. As I was going out of his cabin he added suddenly, in a peculiar wistful tone, that he hoped I would find what I was so anxious to go and look for. A soft, cryptic utterance which seemed to reach deeper than any diamond-hard tool could have done. I do believe he understood my case.

But the second engineer attacked me differently. He was a sturdy young Scot, with a smooth face and light eyes. His honest red countenance emerged out of the engine-room companion and then the whole robust man, with shirt sleeves turned up, wiping slowly the massive fore-arms with a lump of cotton-waste. And his light eyes expressed bitter distaste, as though our friendship had turned to ashes. He said weightily: "Oh! Aye! I've been thinking it was about time for you to run away home and get married to some silly girl."

It was tacitly understood in the port that John Nieven was a fierce misogynist; and the absurd character of the sally convinced me that he meant to be nasty — very nasty — had meant to say the most crushing thing he could think of. My laugh

sounded deprecatory. Nobody but a friend could be so angry as that. I became a little crestfallen. Our chief engineer also took a characteristic view of my action, but in a kindlier spirit.

He was young, too, but very thin, and with a mist of fluffy brown beard all round his haggard face. All day long, at sea or in harbour, he could be seen walking hastily up and down the after-deck, wearing an intense, spiritually rapt expression, which was caused by a perpetual consciousness of unpleasant physical sensations in his internal economy. For he was a confirmed dyspeptic. His view of my case was very simple. He said it was nothing but deranged liver. Of course! He suggested I should stay for another trip and meantime dose myself with a certain patent medicine in which his own belief was absolute. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy you two bottles, out of my own pocket. There. I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

I believe he would have perpetrated the atrocity (or generosity) at the merest sign of weakening on my part. By that time, however, I was more discontented, disgusted, and dogged than ever. The past eighteen months, so full of new and varied experience, appeared a dreary, prosaic waste of days. I felt — how shall I express it? — that there was no truth to be got out of them.

What truth? I should have been hard put to it to explain. Probably, if pressed, I would have burst into tears simply. I was young enough for that.

Next day the Captain and I transacted our business in the Harbour Office. It was a lofty, big, cool, white room, where the screened light of day glowed serenely. Everybody in it — the officials, the public — were in white. Only the heavy polished desks gleamed darkly in a central avenue, and some papers lying on them were blue. Enormous punkahs sent from on high a gentle draught through that immaculate interior and upon our perspiring heads.

The official behind the desk we approached grinned amiably and kept it up till, in answer to his perfunctory question, "Sign off and on again?" my Captain answered, "No! Signing off for good." And then his grin vanished in sudden solemnity. He did not look at me again till he handed me my papers with a sorrowful expression, as if they had been my passports for Hades.

While I was putting them away he murmured some question to the Captain, and I heard the latter answer good-humouredly:

"No. He leaves us to go home."

"Oh!" the other exclaimed, nodding mournfully over my sad condition.

I didn't know him outside the official building, but he leaned forward the desk to shake hands with me, compassionately, as one would with some poor devil going out to be hanged; and I am afraid I performed my part ungraciously, in the hardened manner of an impenitent criminal.

No homeward-bound mail-boat was due for three or four days. Being now a man without a ship, and having for a time broken my connection with the sea — become, in fact, a mere potential passenger — it would have been more appropriate perhaps if I had gone to stay at an hotel. There it was, too, within a stone's throw of the Harbour

Office, low, but somehow palatial, displaying its white, pillared pavilions surrounded by trim grass plots. I would have felt a passenger indeed in there! I gave it a hostile glance and directed my steps toward the Officers' Sailors' Home.

I walked in the sunshine, disregarding it, and in the shade of the big trees on the esplanade without enjoying it. The heat of the tropical East descended through the leafy boughs, enveloping my thinly-clad body, clinging to my rebellious discontent, as if to rob it of its freedom.

The Officers' Home was a large bungalow with a wide verandah and a curiously suburban-looking little garden of bushes and a few trees between it and the street. That institution partook somewhat of the character of a residential club, but with a slightly Governmental flavour about it, because it was administered by the Harbour Office. Its manager was officially styled Chief Steward. He was an unhappy, wizened little man, who if put into a jockey's rig would have looked the part to perfection. But it was obvious that at some time or other in his life, in some capacity or other, he had been connected with the sea. Possibly in the comprehensive capacity of a failure.

I should have thought his employment a very easy one, but he used to affirm for some reason or other that his job would be the death of him some day. It was rather mysterious. Perhaps everything naturally was too much trouble for him. He certainly seemed to hate having people in the house.

On entering it I thought he must be feeling pleased. It was as still as a tomb. I could see no one in the living rooms; and the verandah, too, was empty, except for a man at the far end dozing prone in a long chair. At the noise of my footsteps he opened one horribly fish-like eye. He was a stranger to me. I retreated from there, and crossing the dining room — a very bare apartment with a motionless punkah hanging over the centre table — I knocked at a door labelled in black letters: "Chief Steward."

The answer to my knock being a vexed and doleful plaint: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What is it now?" I went in at once.

It was a strange room to find in the tropics. Twilight and stuffiness reigned in there. The fellow had hung enormously ample, dusty, cheap lace curtains over his windows, which were shut. Piles of cardboard boxes, such as milliners and dressmakers use in Europe, cumbered the corners; and by some means he had procured for himself the sort of furniture that might have come out of a respectable parlour in the East End of London — a horsehair sofa, arm-chairs of the same. I glimpsed grimy antimacassars scattered over that horrid upholstery, which was awe-inspiring, insomuch that one could not guess what mysterious accident, need, or fancy had collected it there. Its owner had taken off his tunic, and in white trousers and a thin, short-sleeved singlet prowled behind the chair-backs nursing his meagre elbows.

An exclamation of dismay escaped him when he heard that I had come for a stay; but he could not deny that there were plenty of vacant rooms.

"Very well. Can you give me the one I had before?"

He emitted a faint moan from behind a pile of cardboard boxes on the table, which might have contained gloves or handkerchiefs or neckties. I wonder what the fellow

did keep in them? There was a smell of decaying coral, or Oriental dust of zoological specimens in that den of his. I could only see the top of his head and his unhappy eyes levelled at me over the barrier.

"It's only for a couple of days," I said, intending to cheer him up.

"Perhaps you would like to pay in advance?" he suggested eagerly.

"Certainly not!" I burst out directly I could speak. "Never heard of such a thing! This is the most infernal cheek. . . ."

He had seized his head in both hands — a gesture of despair which checked my indignation.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Don't fly out like this. I am asking everybody."

"I don't believe it," I said bluntly.

"Well, I am going to. And if you gentlemen all agreed to pay in advance I could make Hamilton pay up, too. He's always turning up ashore dead broke, and even when he has some money he won't settle his bills. I don't know what to do with him. He swears at me and tells me I can't chuck a white man out into the street here. So if you only would. . . ."

I was amazed. Incredulous, too. I suspected the fellow of gratuitous impertinence. I told him with marked emphasis that I would see him and Hamilton hanged first, and requested him to conduct me to my room with no more of his nonsense. He produced then a key from somewhere and led the way out of his lair, giving me a vicious sidelong look in passing.

"Any one I know staying here?" I asked him before he left my room.

He had recovered his usual pained impatient tone, and said that Captain Giles was there, back from a Solo Sea trip. Two other guests were staying also. He paused. And, of course, Hamilton, he added.

"Oh, yes! Hamilton," I said, and the miserable creature took himself off with a final groan.

His impudence still rankled when I came into the dining room at tiffin time. He was there on duty overlooking the Chinamen servants. The tiffin was laid on one end only of the long table, and the punkah was stirring the hot air lazily — mostly above a barren waste of polished wood.

We were four around the cloth. The dozing stranger from the chair was one. Both his eyes were partly opened now, but they did not seem to see anything. He was supine. The dignified person next him, with short side whiskers and a carefully scraped chin, was, of course, Hamilton. I have never seen any one so full of dignity for the station in life Providence had been pleased to place him in. I had been told that he regarded me as a rank outsider. He raised not only his eyes, but his eyebrows as well, at the sound I made pulling back my chair.

Captain Giles was at the head of the table. I exchanged a few words of greeting with him and sat down on his left. Stout and pale, with a great shiny dome of a bald forehead and prominent brown eyes, he might have been anything but a seaman. You would not have been surprised to learn that he was an architect. To me (I know how

absurd it is) he looked like a churchwarden. He had the appearance of a man from whom you would expect sound advice, moral sentiments, with perhaps a platitude or two thrown in on occasion, not from a desire to dazzle, but from honest conviction.

Though very well known and appreciated in the shipping world, he had no regular employment. He did not want it. He had his own peculiar position. He was an expert. An expert in — how shall I say it? — in intricate navigation. He was supposed to know more about remote and imperfectly charted parts of the Archipelago than any man living. His brain must have been a perfect warehouse of reefs, positions, bearings, images of headlands, shapes of obscure coasts, aspects of innumerable islands, desert and otherwise. Any ship, for instance, bound on a trip to Palawan or somewhere that way would have Captain Giles on board, either in temporary command or “to assist the master.” It was said that he had a retaining fee from a wealthy firm of Chinese steamship owners, in view of such services. Besides, he was always ready to relieve any man who wished to take a spell ashore for a time. No owner was ever known to object to an arrangement of that sort. For it seemed to be the established opinion at the port that Captain Giles was as good as the best, if not a little better. But in Hamilton’s view he was an “outsider.” I believe that for Hamilton the generalisation “outsider” covered the whole lot of us; though I suppose that he made some distinctions in his mind.

I didn’t try to make conversation with Captain Giles, whom I had not seen more than twice in my life. But, of course, he knew who I was. After a while, inclining his big shiny head my way, he addressed me first in his friendly fashion. He presumed from seeing me there, he said, that I had come ashore for a couple of days’ leave.

He was a low-voiced man. I spoke a little louder, saying that: No — I had left the ship for good.

“A free man for a bit,” was his comment.

“I suppose I may call myself that — since eleven o’clock,” I said.

Hamilton had stopped eating at the sound of our voices. He laid down his knife and fork gently, got up, and muttering something about “this infernal heat cutting one’s appetite,” went out of the room. Almost immediately we heard him leave the house down the verandah steps.

On this Captain Giles remarked easily that the fellow had no doubt gone off to look after my old job. The Chief Steward, who had been leaning against the wall, brought his face of an unhappy goat nearer to the table and addressed us dolefully. His object was to unburden himself of his eternal grievance against Hamilton. The man kept him in hot water with the Harbour Office as to the state of his accounts. He wished to goodness he would get my job, though in truth what would it be? Temporary relief at best.

I said: “You needn’t worry. He won’t get my job. My successor is on board already.”

He was surprised, and I believe his face fell a little at the news. Captain Giles gave a soft laugh. We got up and went out on the verandah, leaving the supine stranger to be dealt with by the Chinamen. The last thing I saw they had put a plate with a slice

of pine-apple on it before him and stood back to watch what would happen. But the experiment seemed a failure. He sat insensible.

It was imparted to me in a low voice by Captain Giles that this was an officer of some Rajah's yacht which had come into our port to be dry-docked. Must have been "seeing life" last night, he added, wrinkling his nose in an intimate, confidential way which pleased me vastly. For Captain Giles had prestige. He was credited with wonderful adventures and with some mysterious tragedy in his life. And no man had a word to say against him. He continued:

"I remember him first coming ashore here some years ago. Seems only the other day. He was a nice boy. Oh! these nice boys!"

I could not help laughing aloud. He looked startled, then joined in the laugh. "No! No! I didn't mean that," he cried. "What I meant is that some of them do go soft mighty quick out here."

Jocularly I suggested the beastly heat as the first cause. But Captain Giles disclosed himself possessed of a deeper philosophy. Things out East were made easy for white men. That was all right. The difficulty was to go on keeping white, and some of these nice boys did not know how. He gave me a searching look, and in a benevolent, heavy-uncle manner asked point blank:

"Why did you throw up your berth?"

I became angry all of a sudden; for you can understand how exasperating such a question was to a man who didn't know. I said to myself that I ought to shut up that moralist; and to him aloud I said with challenging politeness:

"Why . . . ? Do you disapprove?"

He was too disconcerted to do more than mutter confusedly: "I . . . In a general way. . ." and then gave me up. But he retired in good order, under the cover of a heavily humorous remark that he, too, was getting soft, and that this was his time for taking his little siesta — when he was on shore. "Very bad habit. Very bad habit."

There was a simplicity in the man which would have disarmed a touchiness even more youthful than mine. So when next day at tiffin he bent his head toward me and said that he had met my late Captain last evening, adding in an undertone: "He's very sorry you left. He had never had a mate that suited him so well," I answered him earnestly, without any affectation, that I certainly hadn't been so comfortable in any ship or with any commander in all my sea-going days.

"Well — then," he murmured.

"Haven't you heard, Captain Giles, that I intend to go home?"

"Yes," he said benevolently. "I have heard that sort of thing so often before."

"What of that?" I cried. I thought he was the most dull, unimaginative man I had ever met. I don't know what more I would have said, but the much-belated Hamilton came in just then and took his usual seat. So I dropped into a mumble.

"Anyhow, you shall see it done this time."

Hamilton, beautifully shaved, gave Captain Giles a curt nod, but didn't even condescend to raise his eyebrows at me; and when he spoke it was only to tell the Chief

Steward that the food on his plate wasn't fit to be set before a gentleman. The individual addressed seemed much too unhappy to groan. He cast his eyes up to the punkah and that was all.

Captain Giles and I got up from the table, and the stranger next to Hamilton followed our example, manoeuvring himself to his feet with difficulty. He, poor fellow, not because he was hungry but I verily believe only to recover his self-respect, had tried to put some of that unworthy food into his mouth. But after dropping his fork twice and generally making a failure of it, he had sat still with an air of intense mortification combined with a ghastly glazed stare. Both Giles and I had avoided looking his way at table.

On the verandah he stopped short on purpose to address to us anxiously a long remark which I failed to understand completely. It sounded like some horrible unknown language. But when Captain Giles, after only an instant for reflection, assured him with homely friendliness, "Aye, to be sure. You are right there," he appeared very much gratified indeed, and went away (pretty straight, too) to seek a distant long chair.

"What was he trying to say?" I asked with disgust.

"I don't know. Mustn't be down too much on a fellow. He's feeling pretty wretched, you may be sure; and to-morrow he'll feel worse yet."

Judging by the man's appearance it seemed impossible. I wondered what sort of complicated debauch had reduced him to that unspeakable condition. Captain Giles' benevolence was spoiled by a curious air of complacency which I disliked. I said with a little laugh:

"Well, he will have you to look after him." He made a deprecatory gesture, sat down, and took up a paper. I did the same. The papers were old and uninteresting, filled up mostly with dreary stereotyped descriptions of Queen Victoria's first jubilee celebrations. Probably we should have quickly fallen into a tropical afternoon doze if it had not been for Hamilton's voice raised in the dining room. He was finishing his tiffin there. The big double doors stood wide open permanently, and he could not have had any idea how near to the doorway our chairs were placed. He was heard in a loud, supercilious tone answering some statement ventured by the Chief Steward.

"I am not going to be rushed into anything. They will be glad enough to get a gentleman I imagine. There is no hurry."

A loud whispering from the Steward succeeded and then again Hamilton was heard with even intenser scorn.

"What? That young ass who fancies himself for having been chief mate with Kent so long? . . . Preposterous."

Giles and I looked at each other. Kent being the name of my late commander, Captain Giles' whisper, "He's talking of you," seemed to me sheer waste of breath. The Chief Steward must have stuck to his point, whatever it was, because Hamilton was heard again more supercilious if possible, and also very emphatic:

"Rubbish, my good man! One doesn't compete with a rank outsider like that. There's plenty of time."

Then there were pushing of chairs, footsteps in the next room, and plaintive expostulations from the Steward, who was pursuing Hamilton, even out of doors through the main entrance.

“That’s a very insulting sort of man,” remarked Captain Giles — superfluously, I thought. “Very insulting. You haven’t offended him in some way, have you?”

“Never spoke to him in my life,” I said grumpily. “Can’t imagine what he means by competing. He has been trying for my job after I left — and didn’t get it. But that isn’t exactly competition.”

Captain Giles balanced his big benevolent head thoughtfully. “He didn’t get it,” he repeated very slowly. “No, not likely either, with Kent. Kent is no end sorry you left him. He gives you the name of a good seaman, too.”

I flung away the paper I was still holding. I sat up, I slapped the table with my open palm. I wanted to know why he would keep harping on that, my absolutely private affair. It was exasperating, really.

Captain Giles silenced me by the perfect equanimity of his gaze. “Nothing to be annoyed about,” he murmured reasonably, with an evident desire to soothe the childish irritation he had aroused. And he was really a man of an appearance so inoffensive that I tried to explain myself as much as I could. I told him that I did not want to hear any more about what was past and gone. It had been very nice while it lasted, but now it was done with I preferred not to talk about it or even think about it. I had made up my mind to go home.

He listened to the whole tirade in a particular lending-the-ear attitude, as if trying to detect a false note in it somewhere; then straightened himself up and appeared to ponder sagaciously over the matter.

“Yes. You told me you meant to go home. Anything in view there?”

Instead of telling him that it was none of his business I said sullenly:

“Nothing that I know of.”

I had indeed considered that rather blank side of the situation I had created for myself by leaving suddenly my very satisfactory employment. And I was not very pleased with it. I had it on the tip of my tongue to say that common sense had nothing to do with my action, and that therefore it didn’t deserve the interest Captain Giles seemed to be taking in it. But he was puffing at a short wooden pipe now, and looked so guileless, dense, and commonplace, that it seemed hardly worth while to puzzle him either with truth or sarcasm.

He blew a cloud of smoke, then surprised me by a very abrupt: “Paid your passage money yet?”

Overcome by the shameless pertinacity of a man to whom it was rather difficult to be rude, I replied with exaggerated meekness that I had not done so yet. I thought there would be plenty of time to do that to-morrow.

And I was about to turn away, withdrawing my privacy from his fatuous, objectless attempts to test what sort of stuff it was made of, when he laid down his pipe in an

extremely significant manner, you know, as if a critical moment had come, and leaned sideways over the table between us.

“Oh! You haven’t yet!” He dropped his voice mysteriously. “Well, then I think you ought to know that there’s something going on here.”

I had never in my life felt more detached from all earthly goings on. Freed from the sea for a time, I preserved the sailor’s consciousness of complete independence from all land affairs. How could they concern me? I gazed at Captain Giles’ animation with scorn rather than with curiosity.

To his obviously preparatory question whether our Steward had spoken to me that day I said he hadn’t. And what’s more he would have had precious little encouragement if he had tried to. I didn’t want the fellow to speak to me at all.

Unrebuked by my petulance, Captain Giles, with an air of immense sagacity, began to tell me a minute tale about a Harbour Office peon. It was absolutely pointless. A peon was seen walking that morning on the verandah with a letter in his hand. It was in an official envelope. As the habit of these fellows is, he had shown it to the first white man he came across. That man was our friend in the arm-chair. He, as I knew, was not in a state to interest himself in any sublunary matters. He could only wave the peon away. The peon then wandered on along the verandah and came upon Captain Giles, who was there by an extraordinary chance. . . .

At this point he stopped with a profound look. The letter, he continued, was addressed to the Chief Steward. Now what could Captain Ellis, the Master Attendant, want to write to the Steward for? The fellow went every morning, anyhow, to the Harbour Office with his report, for orders or what not. He hadn’t been back more than an hour before there was an office peon chasing him with a note. Now what was that for?

And he began to speculate. It was not for this — and it could not be for that. As to that other thing it was unthinkable.

The fatuousness of all this made me stare. If the man had not been somehow a sympathetic personality I would have resented it like an insult. As it was, I felt only sorry for him. Something remarkably earnest in his gaze prevented me from laughing in his face. Neither did I yawn at him. I just stared.

His tone became a shade more mysterious. Directly the fellow (meaning the Steward) got that note he rushed for his hat and bolted out of the house. But it wasn’t because the note called him to the Harbour Office. He didn’t go there. He was not absent long enough for that. He came darting back in no time, flung his hat away, and raced about the dining room moaning and slapping his forehead. All these exciting facts and manifestations had been observed by Captain Giles. He had, it seems, been meditating upon them ever since.

I began to pity him profoundly. And in a tone which I tried to make as little sarcastic as possible I said that I was glad he had found something to occupy his morning hours.

With his disarming simplicity he made me observe, as if it were a matter of some consequence, how strange it was that he should have spent the morning indoors at all. He generally was out before tiffin, visiting various offices, seeing his friends in the

harbour, and so on. He had felt out of sorts somewhat on rising. Nothing much. Just enough to make him feel lazy.

All this with a sustained, holding stare which, in conjunction with the general inanity of the discourse, conveyed the impression of mild, dreary lunacy. And when he hitched his chair a little and dropped his voice to the low note of mystery, it flashed upon me that high professional reputation was not necessarily a guarantee of sound mind.

It never occurred to me then that I didn't know in what soundness of mind exactly consisted and what a delicate and, upon the whole, unimportant matter it was. With some idea of not hurting his feelings I blinked at him in an interested manner. But when he proceeded to ask me mysteriously whether I remembered what had passed just now between that Steward of ours and "that man Hamilton," I only grunted sourly assent and turned away my head.

"Aye. But do you remember every word?" he insisted tactfully.

"I don't know. It's none of my business," I snapped out, consigning, moreover, the Steward and Hamilton aloud to eternal perdition.

I meant to be very energetic and final, but Captain Giles continued to gaze at me thoughtfully. Nothing could stop him. He went on to point out that my personality was involved in that conversation. When I tried to preserve the semblance of unconcern he became positively cruel. I heard what the man had said? Yes? What did I think of it then? — he wanted to know.

Captain Giles' appearance excluding the suspicion of mere sly malice, I came to the conclusion that he was simply the most tactless idiot on earth. I almost despised myself for the weakness of attempting to enlighten his common understanding. I started to explain that I did not think anything whatever. Hamilton was not worth a thought. What such an offensive loafer . . . "Aye! that he is," interjected Captain Giles . . . thought or said was below any decent man's contempt, and I did not propose to take the slightest notice of it.

This attitude seemed to me so simple and obvious that I was really astonished at Giles giving no sign of assent. Such perfect stupidity was almost interesting.

"What would you like me to do?" I asked, laughing. "I can't start a row with him because of the opinion he has formed of me. Of course, I've heard of the contemptuous way he alludes to me. But he doesn't intrude his contempt on my notice. He has never expressed it in my hearing. For even just now he didn't know we could hear him. I should only make myself ridiculous."

That hopeless Giles went on puffing at his pipe moodily. All at once his face cleared, and he spoke.

"You missed my point."

"Have I? I am very glad to hear it," I said.

With increasing animation he stated again that I had missed his point. Entirely. And in a tone of growing self-conscious complacency he told me that few things escaped his

attention, and he was rather used to think them out, and generally from his experience of life and men arrived at the right conclusion.

This bit of self-praise, of course, fitted excellently the laborious inanity of the whole conversation. The whole thing strengthened in me that obscure feeling of life being but a waste of days, which, half-unconsciously, had driven me out of a comfortable berth, away from men I liked, to flee from the menace of emptiness . . . and to find inanity at the first turn. Here was a man of recognized character and achievement disclosed as an absurd and dreary chatterer. And it was probably like this everywhere — from east to west, from the bottom to the top of the social scale.

A great discouragement fell on me. A spiritual drowsiness. Giles' voice was going on complacently; the very voice of the universal hollow conceit. And I was no longer angry with it. There was nothing original, nothing new, startling, informing, to expect from the world; no opportunities to find out something about oneself, no wisdom to acquire, no fun to enjoy. Everything was stupid and overrated, even as Captain Giles was. So be it.

The name of Hamilton suddenly caught my ear and roused me up.

"I thought we had done with him," I said, with the greatest possible distaste.

"Yes. But considering what we happened to hear just now I think you ought to do it."

"Ought to do it?" I sat up bewildered. "Do what?"

Captain Giles confronted me very much surprised.

"Why! Do what I have been advising you to try. You go and ask the Steward what was there in that letter from the Harbour Office. Ask him straight out."

I remained speechless for a time. Here was something unexpected and original enough to be altogether incomprehensible. I murmured, astounded:

"But I thought it was Hamilton that you . . ."

"Exactly. Don't you let him. You do what I tell you. You tackle that Steward. You'll make him jump, I bet," insisted Captain Giles, waving his smouldering pipe impressively at me. Then he took three rapid puffs at it.

His aspect of triumphant acuteness was indescribable. Yet the man remained a strangely sympathetic creature. Benevolence radiated from him ridiculously, mildly, impressively. It was irritating, too. But I pointed out coldly, as one who deals with the incomprehensible, that I didn't see any reason to expose myself to a snub from the fellow. He was a very unsatisfactory steward and a miserable wretch besides, but I would just as soon think of tweaking his nose.

"Tweaking his nose," said Captain Giles in a scandalized tone. "Much use it would be to you."

That remark was so irrelevant that one could make no answer to it. But the sense of the absurdity was beginning at last to exercise its well-known fascination. I felt I must not let the man talk to me any more. I got up, observing curtly that he was too much for me — that I couldn't make him out.

Before I had time to move away he spoke again in a changed tone of obstinacy and puffing nervously at his pipe.

“Well — he’s a — no account cuss — anyhow. You just — ask him. That’s all.”

That new manner impressed me — or rather made me pause. But sanity asserting its sway at once I left the verandah after giving him a mirthless smile. In a few strides I found myself in the dining room, now cleared and empty. But during that short time various thoughts occurred to me, such as: that Giles had been making fun of me, expecting some amusement at my expense; that I probably looked silly and gullible; that I knew very little of life. . . .

The door facing me across the dining room flew open to my extreme surprise. It was the door inscribed with the word “Steward” and the man himself ran out of his stuffy, Philistinish lair in his absurd, hunted-animal manner, making for the garden door.

To this day I don’t know what made me call after him. “I say! Wait a minute.” Perhaps it was the sidelong glance he gave me; or possibly I was yet under the influence of Captain Giles’ mysterious earnestness. Well, it was an impulse of some sort; an effect of that force somewhere within our lives which shapes them this way or that. For if these words had not escaped from my lips (my will had nothing to do with that) my existence would, to be sure, have been still a seaman’s existence, but directed on now to me utterly inconceivable lines.

No. My will had nothing to do with it. Indeed, no sooner had I made that fateful noise than I became extremely sorry for it. Had the man stopped and faced me I would have had to retire in disorder. For I had no notion to carry out Captain Giles’ idiotic joke, either at my own expense or at the expense of the Steward.

But here the old human instinct of the chase came into play. He pretended to be deaf, and I, without thinking a second about it, dashed along my own side of the dining table and cut him off at the very door.

“Why can’t you answer when you are spoken to?” I asked roughly.

He leaned against the lintel of the door. He looked extremely wretched. Human nature is, I fear, not very nice right through. There are ugly spots in it. I found myself growing angry, and that, I believe, only because my quarry looked so woe-begone. Miserable beggar!

I went for him without more ado. “I understand there was an official communication to the Home from the Harbour Office this morning. Is that so?”

Instead of telling me to mind my own business, as he might have done, he began to whine with an undertone of impudence. He couldn’t see me anywhere this morning. He couldn’t be expected to run all over the town after me.

“Who wants you to?” I cried. And then my eyes became opened to the inwardness of things and speeches the triviality of which had been so baffling and tiresome.

I told him I wanted to know what was in that letter. My sternness of tone and behaviour was only half assumed. Curiosity can be a very fierce sentiment — at times.

He took refuge in a silly, muttering sulkiness. It was nothing to me, he mumbled. I had told him I was going home. And since I was going home he didn't see why he should. . . .

That was the line of his argument, and it was irrelevant enough to be almost insulting. Insulting to one's intelligence, I mean.

In that twilight region between youth and maturity, in which I had my being then, one is peculiarly sensitive to that kind of insult. I am afraid my behaviour to the Steward became very rough indeed. But it wasn't in him to face out anything or anybody. Drug habit or solitary tipping, perhaps. And when I forgot myself so far as to swear at him he broke down and began to shriek.

I don't mean to say that he made a great outcry. It was a cynical shrieking confession, only faint — piteously faint. It wasn't very coherent either, but sufficiently so to strike me dumb at first. I turned my eyes from him in righteous indignation, and perceived Captain Giles in the verandah doorway surveying quietly the scene, his own handiwork, if I may express it in that way. His smouldering black pipe was very noticeable in his big, paternal fist. So, too, was the glitter of his heavy gold watch-chain across the breast of his white tunic. He exhaled an atmosphere of virtuous sagacity serene enough for any innocent soul to fly to confidently. I flew to him.

"You would never believe it," I cried. "It was a notification that a master is wanted for some ship. There's a command apparently going about and this fellow puts the thing in his pocket."

The Steward screamed out in accents of loud despair: "You will be the death of me!"

The mighty slap he gave his wretched forehead was very loud, too. But when I turned to look at him he was no longer there. He had rushed away somewhere out of sight. This sudden disappearance made me laugh.

This was the end of the incident — for me. Captain Giles, however, staring at the place where the Steward had been, began to haul at his gorgeous gold chain till at last the watch came up from the deep pocket like solid truth from a well. Solemnly he lowered it down again and only then said:

"Just three o'clock. You will be in time — if you don't lose any, that is."

"In time for what?" I asked.

"Good Lord! For the Harbour Office. This must be looked into."

Strictly speaking, he was right. But I've never had much taste for investigation, for showing people up and all that no doubt ethically meritorious kind of work. And my view of the episode was purely ethical. If any one had to be the death of the Steward I didn't see why it shouldn't be Captain Giles himself, a man of age and standing, and a permanent resident. Whereas, I in comparison, felt myself a mere bird of passage in that port. In fact, it might have been said that I had already broken off my connection. I muttered that I didn't think — it was nothing to me. . . .

"Nothing!" repeated Captain Giles, giving some signs of quiet, deliberate indignation. "Kent warned me you were a peculiar young fellow. You will tell me next that a command is nothing to you — and after all the trouble I've taken, too!"

“The trouble!” I murmured, uncomprehending. What trouble? All I could remember was being mystified and bored by his conversation for a solid hour after tiffin. And he called that taking a lot of trouble.

He was looking at me with a self-complacency which would have been odious in any other man. All at once, as if a page of a book had been turned over disclosing a word which made plain all that had gone before, I perceived that this matter had also another than an ethical aspect.

And still I did not move. Captain Giles lost his patience a little. With an angry puff at his pipe he turned his back on my hesitation.

But it was not hesitation on my part. I had been, if I may express myself so, put out of gear mentally. But as soon as I had convinced myself that this stale, unprofitable world of my discontent contained such a thing as a command to be seized, I recovered my powers of locomotion.

It’s a good step from the Officers’ Home to the Harbour Office; but with the magic word “Command” in my head I found myself suddenly on the quay as if transported there in the twinkling of an eye, before a portal of dressed white stone above a flight of shallow white steps.

All this seemed to glide toward me swiftly. The whole great roadstead to the right was just a mere flicker of blue, and the dim cool hall swallowed me up out of the heat and glare of which I had not been aware till the very moment I passed in from it.

The broad inner staircase insinuated itself under my feet somehow. Command is a strong magic. The first human beings I perceived distinctly since I had parted with the indignant back of Captain Giles were the crew of the harbour steam-launch lounging on the spacious landing about the curtained archway of the shipping office.

It was there that my buoyancy abandoned me. The atmosphere of officialdom would kill anything that breathes the air of human endeavour, would extinguish hope and fear alike in the supremacy of paper and ink. I passed heavily under the curtain which the Malay coxswain of the harbour launch raised for me. There was nobody in the office except the clerks, writing in two industrious rows. But the head Shipping-Master hopped down from his elevation and hurried along on the thick mats to meet me in the broad central passage.

He had a Scottish name, but his complexion was of a rich olive hue, his short beard was jet black, and his eyes, also black, had a languishing expression. He asked confidentially:

“You want to see Him?”

All lightness of spirit and body having departed from me at the touch of officialdom, I looked at the scribe without animation and asked in my turn wearily:

“What do you think? Is it any use?”

“My goodness! He has asked for you twice today.”

This emphatic He was the supreme authority, the Marine Superintendent, the Harbour-Master — a very great person in the eyes of every single quill-driver in the room. But that was nothing to the opinion he had of his own greatness.

Captain Ellis looked upon himself as a sort of divine (pagan) emanation, the deputy-Neptune for the circumambient seas. If he did not actually rule the waves, he pretended to rule the fate of the mortals whose lives were cast upon the waters.

This uplifting illusion made him inquisitorial and peremptory. And as his temperament was choleric there were fellows who were actually afraid of him. He was redoubtable, not in virtue of his office, but because of his unwarrantable assumptions. I had never had anything to do with him before.

I said: "Oh! He has asked for me twice. Then perhaps I had better go in."

"You must! You must!"

The Shipping-Master led the way with a mincing gait around the whole system of desks to a tall and important-looking door, which he opened with a deferential action of the arm.

He stepped right in (but without letting go of the handle) and, after gazing reverently down the room for a while, beckoned me in by a silent jerk of the head. Then he slipped out at once and shut the door after me most delicately.

Three lofty windows gave on the harbour. There was nothing in them but the dark-blue sparkling sea and the paler luminous blue of the sky. My eye caught in the depths and distances of these blue tones the white speck of some big ship just arrived and about to anchor in the outer roadstead. A ship from home — after perhaps ninety days at sea. There is something touching about a ship coming in from sea and folding her white wings for a rest.

The next thing I saw was the top-knot of silver hair surmounting Captain Ellis' smooth red face, which would have been apoplectic if it hadn't had such a fresh appearance.

Our deputy-Neptune had no beard on his chin, and there was no trident to be seen standing in a corner anywhere, like an umbrella. But his hand was holding a pen — the official pen, far mightier than the sword in making or marring the fortune of simple toiling men. He was looking over his shoulder at my advance.

When I had come well within range he saluted me by a nerve-shattering: "Where have you been all this time?"

As it was no concern of his I did not take the slightest notice of the shot. I said simply that I had heard there was a master needed for some vessel, and being a sailing-ship man I thought I would apply. . . .

He interrupted me. "Why! Hang it! You are the right man for that job — if there had been twenty others after it. But no fear of that. They are all afraid to catch hold. That's what's the matter."

He was very irritated. I said innocently: "Are they, sir. I wonder why?"

"Why!" he fumed. "Afraid of the sails. Afraid of a white crew. Too much trouble. Too much work. Too long out here. Easy life and deck-chairs more their mark. Here I sit with the Consul-General's cable before me, and the only man fit for the job not to be found anywhere. I began to think you were funking it, too. . . ."

"I haven't been long getting to the office," I remarked calmly.

“You have a good name out here, though,” he growled savagely without looking at me.

“I am very glad to hear it from you, sir,” I said.

“Yes. But you are not on the spot when you are wanted. You know you weren’t. That steward of yours wouldn’t dare to neglect a message from this office. Where the devil did you hide yourself for the best part of the day?”

I only smiled kindly down on him, and he seemed to recollect himself, and asked me to take a seat. He explained that the master of a British ship having died in Bangkok the Consul-General had cabled to him a request for a competent man to be sent out to take command.

Apparently, in his mind, I was the man from the first, though for the looks of the thing the notification addressed to the Sailors’ Home was general. An agreement had already been prepared. He gave it to me to read, and when I handed it back to him with the remark that I accepted its terms, the deputy-Neptune signed it, stamped it with his own exalted hand, folded it in four (it was a sheet of blue foolscap) and presented it to me — a gift of extraordinary potency, for, as I put it in my pocket, my head swam a little.

“This is your appointment to the command,” he said with a certain gravity. “An official appointment binding the owners to conditions which you have accepted. Now — when will you be ready to go?”

I said I would be ready that very day if necessary. He caught me at my word with great alacrity. The steamer *Melita* was leaving for Bangkok that evening about seven. He would request her captain officially to give me a passage and wait for me till ten o’clock.

Then he rose from his office chair, and I got up, too. My head swam, there was no doubt about it, and I felt a certain heaviness of limbs as if they had grown bigger since I had sat down on that chair. I made my bow.

A subtle change in Captain Ellis’ manner became perceptible as though he had laid aside the trident of deputy-Neptune. In reality, it was only his official pen that he had dropped on getting up.

Chapter 2

He shook hands with me: “Well, there you are, on your own, appointed officially under my responsibility.”

He was actually walking with me to the door. What a distance off it seemed! I moved like a man in bonds. But we reached it at last. I opened it with the sensation of dealing with mere dream-stuff, and then at the last moment the fellowship of seamen asserted itself, stronger than the difference of age and station. It asserted itself in Captain Ellis’ voice.

“Good-bye — and good luck to you,” he said so heartily that I could only give him a grateful glance. Then I turned and went out, never to see him again in my life. I had not made three steps into the outer office when I heard behind my back a gruff, loud, authoritative voice, the voice of our deputy-Neptune.

It was addressing the head Shipping-Master who, having let me in, had, apparently, remained hovering in the middle distance ever since. “Mr. R., let the harbour launch have steam up to take the captain here on board the *Melita* at half-past nine to-night.”

I was amazed at the startled alacrity of R’s “Yes, sir.” He ran before me out on the landing. My new dignity sat yet so lightly on me that I was not aware that it was I, the Captain, the object of this last graciousness. It seemed as if all of a sudden a pair of wings had grown on my shoulders. I merely skimmed along the polished floor.

But R. was impressed.

“I say!” he exclaimed on the landing, while the Malay crew of the steam-launch standing by looked stonily at the man for whom they were going to be kept on duty so late, away from their gambling, from their girls, or their pure domestic joys. “I say! His own launch. What have you done to him?”

His stare was full of respectful curiosity. I was quite confounded.

“Was it for me? I hadn’t the slightest notion,” I stammered out.

He nodded many times. “Yes. And the last person who had it before you was a Duke. So, there!”

I think he expected me to faint on the spot. But I was in too much of a hurry for emotional displays. My feelings were already in such a whirl that this staggering information did not seem to make the slightest difference. It merely fell into the seething cauldron of my brain, and I carried it off with me after a short but effusive passage of leave-taking with R.

The favour of the great throws an aureole round the fortunate object of its selection. That excellent man enquired whether he could do anything for me. He had known me only by sight, and he was well aware he would never see me again; I was, in common with the other seamen of the port, merely a subject for official writing, filling up of forms with all the artificial superiority of a man of pen and ink to the men who grapple with realities outside the consecrated walls of official buildings. What ghosts we must have been to him! Mere symbols to juggle with in books and heavy registers, without brains and muscles and perplexities; something hardly useful and decidedly inferior.

And he — the office hours being over — wanted to know if he could be of any use to me!

I ought — properly speaking — I ought to have been moved to tears. But I did not even think of it. It was merely another miraculous manifestation of that day of miracles. I parted from him as if he were a mere symbol. I floated down the staircase. I floated out of the official and imposing portal. I went on floating along.

I use that word rather than the word “flew,” because I have a distinct impression that, though uplifted by my aroused youth, my movements were deliberate enough. To that mixed white, brown, and yellow portion of mankind, out abroad on their own

affairs, I presented the appearance of a man walking rather sedately. And nothing in the way of abstraction could have equalled my deep detachment from the forms and colours of this world. It was, as it were, final.

And yet, suddenly, I recognized Hamilton. I recognized him without effort, without a shock, without a start. There he was, strolling toward the Harbour Office with his stiff, arrogant dignity. His red face made him noticeable at a distance. It flamed, over there, on the shady side of the street.

He had perceived me, too. Something (unconscious exuberance of spirits perhaps) moved me to wave my hand to him elaborately. This lapse from good taste happened before I was aware that I was capable of it.

The impact of my impudence stopped him short, much as a bullet might have done. I verily believe he staggered, though as far as I could see he didn't actually fall. I had gone past in a moment and did not turn my head. I had forgotten his existence.

The next ten minutes might have been ten seconds or ten centuries for all my consciousness had to do with it. People might have been falling dead around me, houses crumbling, guns firing, I wouldn't have known. I was thinking: "By Jove! I have got it." It being the command. It had come about in a way utterly unforeseen in my modest day-dreams.

I perceived that my imagination had been running in conventional channels and that my hopes had always been drab stuff. I had envisaged a command as a result of a slow course of promotion in the employ of some highly respectable firm. The reward of faithful service. Well, faithful service was all right. One would naturally give that for one's own sake, for the sake of the ship, for the love of the life of one's choice; not for the sake of the reward.

There is something distasteful in the notion of a reward.

And now here I had my command, absolutely in my pocket, in a way undeniable indeed, but most unexpected; beyond my imaginings, outside all reasonable expectations, and even notwithstanding the existence of some sort of obscure intrigue to keep it away from me. It is true that the intrigue was feeble, but it helped the feeling of wonder — as if I had been specially destined for that ship I did not know, by some power higher than the prosaic agencies of the commercial world.

A strange sense of exultation began to creep into me. If I had worked for that command ten years or more there would have been nothing of the kind. I was a little frightened.

"Let us be calm," I said to myself.

Outside the door of the Officers' Home the wretched Steward seemed to be waiting for me. There was a broad flight of a few steps, and he ran to and fro on the top of it as if chained there. A distressed cur. He looked as though his throat were too dry for him to bark.

I regret to say I stopped before going in. There had been a revolution in my moral nature. He waited open-mouthed, breathless, while I looked at him for half a minute.

"And you thought you could keep me out of it," I said scathingly.

“You said you were going home,” he squeaked miserably. “You said so. You said so.”

“I wonder what Captain Ellis will have to say to that excuse,” I uttered slowly with a sinister meaning.

His lower jaw had been trembling all the time and his voice was like the bleating of a sick goat. “You have given me away? You have done for me?”

Neither his distress nor yet the sheer absurdity of it was able to disarm me. It was the first instance of harm being attempted to be done to me — at any rate, the first I had ever found out. And I was still young enough, still too much on this side of the shadow line, not to be surprised and indignant at such things.

I gazed at him inflexibly. Let the beggar suffer. He slapped his forehead and I passed in, pursued, into the dining room, by his screech: “I always said you’d be the death of me.”

This clamour not only overtook me, but went ahead as it were on to the verandah and brought out Captain Giles.

He stood before me in the doorway in all the commonplace solidity of his wisdom. The gold chain glittered on his breast. He clutched a smouldering pipe.

I extended my hand to him warmly and he seemed surprised, but did respond heartily enough in the end, with a faint smile of superior knowledge which cut my thanks short as if with a knife. I don’t think that more than one word came out. And even for that one, judging by the temperature of my face, I had blushed as if for a bad action. Assuming a detached tone, I wondered how on earth he had managed to spot the little underhand game that had been going on.

He murmured complacently that there were but few things done in the town that he could not see the inside of. And as to this house, he had been using it off and on for nearly ten years. Nothing that went on in it could escape his great experience. It had been no trouble to him. No trouble at all.

Then in his quiet, thick tone he wanted to know if I had complained formally of the Steward’s action.

I said that I hadn’t — though, indeed, it was not for want of opportunity. Captain Ellis had gone for me bald-headed in a most ridiculous fashion for being out of the way when wanted.

“Funny old gentleman,” interjected Captain Giles. “What did you say to that?”

“I said simply that I came along the very moment I heard of his message. Nothing more. I didn’t want to hurt the Steward. I would scorn to harm such an object. No. I made no complaint, but I believe he thinks I’ve done so. Let him think. He’s got a fright he won’t forget in a hurry, for Captain Ellis would kick him out into the middle of Asia. . . .”

“Wait a moment,” said Captain Giles, leaving me suddenly. I sat down feeling very tired, mostly in my head. Before I could start a train of thought he stood again before me, murmuring the excuse that he had to go and put the fellow’s mind at ease.

I looked up with surprise. But in reality I was indifferent. He explained that he had found the Steward lying face downward on the horsehair sofa. He was all right now.

“He would not have died of fright,” I said contemptuously.

“No. But he might have taken an overdose out of one of them little bottles he keeps in his room,” Captain Giles argued seriously. “The confounded fool has tried to poison himself once — a few years ago.”

“Really,” I said without emotion. “He doesn’t seem very fit to live, anyhow.”

“As to that, it may be said of a good many.”

“Don’t exaggerate like this!” I protested, laughing irritably. “But I wonder what this part of the world would do if you were to leave off looking after it, Captain Giles? Here you have got me a command and saved the Steward’s life in one afternoon. Though why you should have taken all that interest in either of us is more than I can understand.”

Captain Giles remained silent for a minute. Then gravely:

“He’s not a bad steward really. He can find a good cook, at any rate. And, what’s more, he can keep him when found. I remember the cooks we had here before his time! . . .”

I must have made a movement of impatience, because he interrupted himself with an apology for keeping me yarning there, while no doubt I needed all my time to get ready.

What I really needed was to be alone for a bit. I seized this opening hastily. My bedroom was a quiet refuge in an apparently uninhabited wing of the building. Having absolutely nothing to do (for I had not unpacked my things), I sat down on the bed and abandoned myself to the influences of the hour. To the unexpected influences. . . .

And first I wondered at my state of mind. Why was I not more surprised? Why? Here I was, invested with a command in the twinkling of an eye, not in the common course of human affairs, but more as if by enchantment. I ought to have been lost in astonishment. But I wasn’t. I was very much like people in fairy tales. Nothing ever astonishes them. When a fully appointed gala coach is produced out of a pumpkin to take her to a ball, Cinderella does not exclaim. She gets in quietly and drives away to her high fortune.

Captain Ellis (a fierce sort of fairy) had produced a command out of a drawer almost as unexpectedly as in a fairy tale. But a command is an abstract idea, and it seemed a sort of “lesser marvel” till it flashed upon me that it involved the concrete existence of a ship.

A ship! My ship! She was mine, more absolutely mine for possession and care than anything in the world; an object of responsibility and devotion. She was there waiting for me, spell-bound, unable to move, to live, to get out into the world (till I came), like an enchanted princess. Her call had come to me as if from the clouds. I had never suspected her existence. I didn’t know how she looked, I had barely heard her name, and yet we were indissolubly united for a certain portion of our future, to sink or swim together!

A sudden passion of anxious impatience rushed through my veins, gave me such a sense of the intensity of existence as I have never felt before or since. I discovered how much of a seaman I was, in heart, in mind, and, as it were, physically — a man

exclusively of sea and ships; the sea the only world that counted, and the ships, the test of manliness, of temperament, of courage and fidelity — and of love.

I had an exquisite moment. It was unique also. Jumping up from my seat, I paced up and down my room for a long time. But when I came downstairs I behaved with sufficient composure. Only I couldn't eat anything at dinner.

Having declared my intention not to drive but to walk down to the quay, I must render the wretched Steward justice that he bestirred himself to find me some coolies for the luggage. They departed, carrying all my worldly possessions (except a little money I had in my pocket) slung from a long pole. Captain Giles volunteered to walk down with me.

We followed the sombre, shaded alley across the Esplanade. It was moderately cool there under the trees. Captain Giles remarked, with a sudden laugh: "I know who's jolly thankful at having seen the last of you."

I guessed that he meant the Steward. The fellow had borne himself to me in a sulkily frightened manner at the last. I expressed my wonder that he should have tried to do me a bad turn for no reason at all.

"Don't you see that what he wanted was to get rid of our friend Hamilton by dodging him in front of you for that job? That would have removed him for good. See?"

"Heavens!" I exclaimed, feeling humiliated somehow. "Can it be possible? What a fool he must be! That overbearing, impudent loafer! Why! He couldn't. . . . And yet he's nearly done it, I believe; for the Harbour Office was bound to send somebody."

"Aye. A fool like our Steward can be dangerous sometimes," declared Captain Giles sententiously. "Just because he is a fool," he added, imparting further instruction in his complacent low tones. "For," he continued in the manner of a set demonstration, "no sensible person would risk being kicked out of the only berth between himself and starvation just to get rid of a simple annoyance — a small worry. Would he now?"

"Well, no," I conceded, restraining a desire to laugh at that something mysteriously earnest in delivering the conclusions of his wisdom as though it were the product of prohibited operations. "But that fellow looks as if he were rather crazy. He must be."

"As to that, I believe everybody in the world is a little mad," he announced quietly.

"You make no exceptions?" I inquired, just to hear his manner.

"Why! Kent says that even of you."

"Does he?" I retorted, extremely embittered all at once against my former captain. "There's nothing of that in the written character from him which I've got in my pocket. Has he given you any instances of my lunacy?"

Captain Giles explained in a conciliating tone that it had been only a friendly remark in reference to my abrupt leaving the ship for no apparent reason.

I muttered grumpily: "Oh! leaving his ship," and mended my pace. He kept up by my side in the deep gloom of the avenue as if it were his conscientious duty to see me out of the colony as an undesirable character. He panted a little, which was rather pathetic in a way. But I was not moved. On the contrary. His discomfort gave me a sort of malicious pleasure.

Presently I relented, slowed down, and said:

“What I really wanted was to get a fresh grip. I felt it was time. Is that so very mad?”

He made no answer. We were issuing from the avenue. On the bridge over the canal a dark, irresolute figure seemed to be awaiting something or somebody.

It was a Malay policeman, barefooted, in his blue uniform. The silver band on his little round cap shone dimly in the light of the street lamp. He peered in our direction timidly.

Before we could come up to him he turned about and walked in front of us in the direction of the jetty. The distance was some hundred yards; and then I found my coolies squatting on their heels. They had kept the pole on their shoulders, and all my worldly goods, still tied to the pole, were resting on the ground between them. As far as the eye could reach along the quay there was not another soul abroad except the police peon, who saluted us.

It seems he had detained the coolies as suspicious characters, and had forbidden them the jetty. But at a sign from me he took off the embargo with alacrity. The two patient fellows, rising together with a faint grunt, trotted off along the planks, and I prepared to take my leave of Captain Giles, who stood there with an air as though his mission were drawing to a close. It could not be denied that he had done it all. And while I hesitated about an appropriate sentence he made himself heard:

“I expect you’ll have your hands pretty full of tangled-up business.”

I asked him what made him think so; and he answered that it was his general experience of the world. Ship a long time away from her port, owners inaccessible by cable, and the only man who could explain matters dead and buried.

“And you yourself new to the business in a way,” he concluded in a sort of unanswerable tone.

“Don’t insist,” I said. “I know it only too well. I only wish you could impart to me some small portion of your experience before I go. As it can’t be done in ten minutes I had better not begin to ask you. There’s that harbour launch waiting for me, too. But I won’t feel really at peace till I have that ship of mine out in the Indian Ocean.”

He remarked casually that from Bangkok to the Indian Ocean was a pretty long step. And this murmur, like a dim flash from a dark lantern, showed me for a moment the broad belt of islands and reefs between that unknown ship, which was mine, and the freedom of the great waters of the globe.

But I felt no apprehension. I was familiar enough with the Archipelago by that time. Extreme patience and extreme care would see me through the region of broken land, of faint airs, and of dead water to where I would feel at last my command swing on the great swell and list over to the great breath of regular winds, that would give her the feeling of a large, more intense life. The road would be long. All roads are long that lead toward one’s heart’s desire. But this road my mind’s eye could see on a chart, professionally, with all its complications and difficulties, yet simple enough in a way. One is a seaman or one is not. And I had no doubt of being one.

The only part I was a stranger to was the Gulf of Siam. And I mentioned this to Captain Giles. Not that I was concerned very much. It belonged to the same region the nature of which I knew, into whose very soul I seemed to have looked during the last months of that existence with which I had broken now, suddenly, as one parts with some enchanting company.

“The gulf . . . Ay! A funny piece of water — that,” said Captain Giles.

Funny, in this connection, was a vague word. The whole thing sounded like an opinion uttered by a cautious person mindful of actions for slander.

I didn’t inquire as to the nature of that funniness. There was really no time. But at the very last he volunteered a warning.

“Whatever you do keep to the east side of it. The west side is dangerous at this time of the year. Don’t let anything tempt you over. You’ll find nothing but trouble there.”

Though I could hardly imagine what could tempt me to involve my ship amongst the currents and reefs of the Malay shore, I thanked him for the advice.

He gripped my extended arm warmly, and the end of our acquaintance came suddenly in the words: “Good-night.”

That was all he said: “Good-night.” Nothing more. I don’t know what I intended to say, but surprise made me swallow it, whatever it was. I choked slightly, and then exclaimed with a sort of nervous haste: “Oh! Good-night, Captain Giles, good-night.”

His movements were always deliberate, but his back had receded some distance along the deserted quay before I collected myself enough to follow his example and made a half turn in the direction of the jetty.

Only my movements were not deliberate. I hurried down to the steps, and leaped into the launch. Before I had fairly landed in her sternsheets the slim little craft darted away from the jetty with a sudden swirl of her propeller and the hard, rapid puffing of the exhaust in her vaguely gleaming brass funnel amidships.

The misty churning at her stern was the only sound in the world. The shore lay plunged in the silence of the deeper slumber. I watched the town recede still and soundless in the hot night, till the abrupt hail, “Steam-launch, ahoy!” made me spin round face forward. We were close to a white ghostly steamer. Lights shone on her decks, in her portholes. And the same voice shouted from her:

“Is that our passenger?”

“It is,” I yelled.

Her crew had been obviously on the jump. I could hear them running about. The modern spirit of haste was loudly vocal in the orders to “Heave away on the cable” — to “Lower the sideladder,” and in urgent requests to me to “Come along, sir! We have been delayed three hours for you. . . . Our time is seven o’clock, you know!”

I stepped on the deck. I said “No! I don’t know.” The spirit of modern hurry was embodied in a thin, long-armed, long-legged man, with a closely clipped gray beard. His meagre hand was hot and dry. He declared feverishly:

“I am hanged if I would have waited another five minutes Harbour-Master or no Harbour-Master.”

“That’s your own business,” I said. “I didn’t ask you to wait for me.”

“I hope you don’t expect any supper,” he burst out. “This isn’t a boarding-house afloat. You are the first passenger I ever had in my life and I hope to goodness you will be the last.”

I made no answer to this hospitable communication; and, indeed, he didn’t wait for any, bolting away on to his bridge to get his ship under way.

The three days he had me on board he did not depart from that half-hostile attitude. His ship having been delayed three hours on my account he couldn’t forgive me for not being a more distinguished person. He was not exactly outspoken about it, but that feeling of annoyed wonder was peeping out perpetually in his talk.

He was absurd.

He was also a man of much experience, which he liked to trot out; but no greater contrast with Captain Giles could have been imagined. He would have amused me if I had wanted to be amused. But I did not want to be amused. I was like a lover looking forward to a meeting. Human hostility was nothing to me. I thought of my unknown ship. It was amusement enough, torment enough, occupation enough.

He perceived my state, for his wits were sufficiently sharp for that, and he poked sly fun at my preoccupation in the manner some nasty, cynical old men assume toward the dreams and illusions of youth. I, on my side, refrained from questioning him as to the appearance of my ship, though I knew that being in Bangkok every fortnight or so he must have known her by sight. I was not going to expose the ship, my ship! to some slighting reference.

He was the first really unsympathetic man I had ever come in contact with. My education was far from being finished, though I didn’t know it. No! I didn’t know it.

All I knew was that he disliked me and had some contempt for my person. Why? Apparently because his ship had been delayed three hours on my account. Who was I to have such a thing done for me? Such a thing had never been done for him. It was a sort of jealous indignation.

My expectation, mingled with fear, was wrought to its highest pitch. How slow had been the days of the passage and how soon they were over. One morning, early, we crossed the bar, and while the sun was rising splendidly over the flat spaces of the land we steamed up the innumerable bends, passed under the shadow of the great gilt pagoda, and reached the outskirts of the town.

There it was, spread largely on both banks, the Oriental capital which had as yet suffered no white conqueror; an expanse of brown houses of bamboo, of mats, of leaves, of a vegetable-matter style of architecture, sprung out of the brown soil on the banks of the muddy river. It was amazing to think that in those miles of human habitations there was not probably half a dozen pounds of nails. Some of those houses of sticks and grass, like the nests of an aquatic race, clung to the low shores. Others seemed to grow out of the water; others again floated in long anchored rows in the very middle of the stream. Here and there in the distance, above the crowded mob of low, brown roof ridges, towered great piles of masonry, King’s Palace, temples, gorgeous and

dilapidated, crumbling under the vertical sunlight, tremendous, overpowering, almost palpable, which seemed to enter one's breast with the breath of one's nostrils and soak into one's limbs through every pore of one's skin.

The ridiculous victim of jealousy had for some reason or other to stop his engines just then. The steamer drifted slowly up with the tide. Oblivious of my new surroundings I walked the deck, in anxious, deadened abstraction, a commingling of romantic reverie with a very practical survey of my qualifications. For the time was approaching for me to behold my command and to prove my worth in the ultimate test of my profession.

Suddenly I heard myself called by that imbecile. He was beckoning me to come up on his bridge.

I didn't care very much for that, but as it seemed that he had something particular to say I went up the ladder.

He laid his hand on my shoulder and gave me a slight turn, pointing with his other arm at the same time.

"There! That's your ship, Captain," he said.

I felt a thump in my breast — only one, as if my heart had then ceased to beat. There were ten or more ships moored along the bank, and the one he meant was partly hidden away from my sight by her next astern. He said: "We'll drift abreast her in a moment."

What was his tone? Mocking? Threatening? Or only indifferent? I could not tell. I suspected some malice in this unexpected manifestation of interest.

He left me, and I leaned over the rail of the bridge looking over the side. I dared not raise my eyes. Yet it had to be done — and, indeed, I could not have helped myself. I believe I trembled.

But directly my eyes had rested on my ship all my fear vanished. It went off swiftly, like a bad dream. Only that a dream leaves no shame behind it, and that I felt a momentary shame at my unworthy suspicions.

Yes, there she was. Her hull, her rigging filled my eye with a great content. That feeling of life-emptiness which had made me so restless for the last few months lost its bitter plausibility, its evil influence, dissolved in a flow of joyous emotion.

At first glance I saw that she was a high-class vessel, a harmonious creature in the lines of her fine body, in the proportioned tallness of her spars. Whatever her age and her history, she had preserved the stamp of her origin. She was one of those craft that, in virtue of their design and complete finish, will never look old. Amongst her companions moored to the bank, and all bigger than herself, she looked like a creature of high breed — an Arab steed in a string of cart-horses.

A voice behind me said in a nasty equivocal tone: "I hope you are satisfied with her, Captain." I did not even turn my head. It was the master of the steamer, and whatever he meant, whatever he thought of her, I knew that, like some rare women, she was one of those creatures whose mere existence is enough to awaken an unselfish delight. One feels that it is good to be in the world in which she has her being.

That illusion of life and character which charms one in men's finest handiwork radiated from her. An enormous bulk of teak-wood timber swung over her hatchway; lifeless matter, looking heavier and bigger than anything aboard of her. When they started lowering it the surge of the tackle sent a quiver through her from water-line to the trucks up the fine nerves of her rigging, as though she had shuddered at the weight. It seemed cruel to load her so. . . .

Half an hour later, putting my foot on her deck for the first time, I received the feeling of deep physical satisfaction. Nothing could equal the fullness of that moment, the ideal completeness of that emotional experience which had come to me without the preliminary toil and disenchantments of an obscure career.

My rapid glance ran over her, enveloped, appropriated the form concreting the abstract sentiment of my command. A lot of details perceptible to a seaman struck my eye, vividly in that instant. For the rest, I saw her disengaged from the material conditions of her being. The shore to which she was moored was as if it did not exist. What were to me all the countries of the globe? In all the parts of the world washed by navigable waters our relation to each other would be the same — and more intimate than there are words to express in the language. Apart from that, every scene and episode would be a mere passing show. The very gang of yellow coolies busy about the main hatch was less substantial than the stuff dreams are made of. For who on earth would dream of Chinamen? . . .

I went aft, ascended the poop, where, under the awning, gleamed the brasses of the yacht-like fittings, the polished surfaces of the rails, the glass of the skylights. Right aft two seamen, busy cleaning the steering gear, with the reflected ripples of light running playfully up their bent backs, went on with their work, unaware of me and of the almost affectionate glance I threw at them in passing toward the companion-way of the cabin.

The doors stood wide open, the slide was pushed right back. The half-turn of the staircase cut off the view of the lobby. A low humming ascended from below, but it stopped abruptly at the sound of my descending footsteps.

Chapter 3

The first thing I saw down there was the upper part of a man's body projecting backward, as it were, from one of the doors at the foot of the stairs. His eyes looked at me very wide and still. In one hand he held a dinner plate, in the other a cloth.

"I am your new Captain," I said quietly.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he had got rid of the plate and the cloth and jumped to open the cabin door. As soon as I passed into the saloon he vanished, but only to reappear instantly, buttoning up a jacket he had put on with the swiftness of a "quick-change" artist.

"Where's the chief mate?" I asked.

“In the hold, I think, sir. I saw him go down the after-hatch ten minutes ago.”

“Tell him I am on board.”

The mahogany table under the skylight shone in the twilight like a dark pool of water. The sideboard, surmounted by a wide looking-glass in an ormolu frame, had a marble top. It bore a pair of silver-plated lamps and some other pieces — obviously a harbour display. The saloon itself was panelled in two kinds of wood in the excellent simple taste prevailing when the ship was built.

I sat down in the armchair at the head of the table — the captain’s chair, with a small tell-tale compass swung above it — a mute reminder of unremitting vigilance.

A succession of men had sat in that chair. I became aware of that thought suddenly, vividly, as though each had left a little of himself between the four walls of these ornate bulkheads; as if a sort of composite soul, the soul of command, had whispered suddenly to mine of long days at sea and of anxious moments.

“You, too!” it seemed to say, “you, too, shall taste of that peace and that unrest in a searching intimacy with your own self — obscure as we were and as supreme in the face of all the winds and all the seas, in an immensity that receives no impress, preserves no memories, and keeps no reckoning of lives.”

Deep within the tarnished ormolu frame, in the hot half-light sifted through the awning, I saw my own face propped between my hands. And I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance, rather with curiosity than with any other feeling, except of some sympathy for this latest representative of what for all intents and purposes was a dynasty, continuous not in blood indeed, but in its experience, in its training, in its conception of duty, and in the blessed simplicity of its traditional point of view on life.

It struck me that this quietly staring man whom I was watching, both as if he were myself and somebody else, was not exactly a lonely figure. He had his place in a line of men whom he did not know, of whom he had never heard; but who were fashioned by the same influences, whose souls in relation to their humble life’s work had no secrets for him.

Suddenly I perceived that there was another man in the saloon, standing a little on one side and looking intently at me. The chief mate. His long, red moustache determined the character of his physiognomy, which struck me as pugnacious in (strange to say) a ghastly sort of way.

How long had he been there looking at me, appraising me in my unguarded day-dreaming state? I would have been more disconcerted if, having the clock set in the top of the mirror-frame right in front of me, I had not noticed that its long hand had hardly moved at all.

I could not have been in that cabin more than two minutes altogether. Say three. . . . So he could not have been watching me more than a mere fraction of a minute, luckily. Still, I regretted the occurrence.

But I showed nothing of it as I rose leisurely (it had to be leisurely) and greeted him with perfect friendliness.

There was something reluctant and at the same time attentive in his bearing. His name was Burns. We left the cabin and went round the ship together. His face in the full light of day appeared very pale, meagre, even haggard. Somehow I had a delicacy as to looking too often at him; his eyes, on the contrary, remained fairly glued on my face. They were greenish and had an expectant expression.

He answered all my questions readily enough, but my ear seemed to catch a tone of unwillingness. The second officer, with three or four hands, was busy forward. The mate mentioned his name and I nodded to him in passing. He was very young. He struck me as rather a cub.

When we returned below, I sat down on one end of a deep, semi-circular, or, rather, semi-oval settee, upholstered in red plush. It extended right across the whole after-end of the cabin. Mr. Burns motioned to sit down, dropped into one of the swivel-chairs round the table, and kept his eyes on me as persistently as ever, and with that strange air as if all this were make-believe and he expected me to get up, burst into a laugh, slap him on the back, and vanish from the cabin.

There was an odd stress in the situation which began to make me uncomfortable. I tried to react against this vague feeling.

“It’s only my inexperience,” I thought.

In the face of that man, several years, I judged, older than myself, I became aware of what I had left already behind me — my youth. And that was indeed poor comfort. Youth is a fine thing, a mighty power — as long as one does not think of it. I felt I was becoming self-conscious. Almost against my will I assumed a moody gravity. I said: “I see you have kept her in very good order, Mr. Burns.”

Directly I had uttered these words I asked myself angrily why the deuce did I want to say that? Mr. Burns in answer had only blinked at me. What on earth did he mean?

I fell back on a question which had been in my thoughts for a long time — the most natural question on the lips of any seaman whatever joining a ship. I voiced it (confound this self-consciousness) in a degaged cheerful tone: “I suppose she can travel — what?”

Now a question like this might have been answered normally, either in accents of apologetic sorrow or with a visibly suppressed pride, in a “I don’t want to boast, but you shall see,” sort of tone. There are sailors, too, who would have been roughly outspoken: “Lazy brute,” or openly delighted: “She’s a flyer.” Two ways, if four manners.

But Mr. Burns found another way, a way of his own which had, at all events, the merit of saving his breath, if no other.

Again he did not say anything. He only frowned. And it was an angry frown. I waited. Nothing more came.

“What’s the matter? . . . Can’t you tell after being nearly two years in the ship?” I addressed him sharply.

He looked as startled for a moment as though he had discovered my presence only that very moment. But this passed off almost at once. He put on an air of indifference. But I suppose he thought it better to say something. He said that a ship needed, just

like a man, the chance to show the best she could do, and that this ship had never had a chance since he had been on board of her. Not that he could remember. The last captain. . . . He paused.

“Has he been so very unlucky?” I asked with frank incredulity. Mr. Burns turned his eyes away from me. No, the late captain was not an unlucky man. One couldn’t say that. But he had not seemed to want to make use of his luck.

Mr. Burns — man of enigmatic moods — made this statement with an inanimate face and staring wilfully at the rudder casing. The statement itself was obscurely suggestive. I asked quietly:

“Where did he die?”

“In this saloon. Just where you are sitting now,” answered Mr. Burns.

I repressed a silly impulse to jump up; but upon the whole I was relieved to hear that he had not died in the bed which was now to be mine. I pointed out to the chief mate that what I really wanted to know was where he had buried his late captain.

Mr. Burns said that it was at the entrance to the gulf. A roomy grave; a sufficient answer. But the mate, overcoming visibly something within him — something like a curious reluctance to believe in my advent (as an irrevocable fact, at any rate), did not stop at that — though, indeed, he may have wished to do so.

As a compromise with his feelings, I believe, he addressed himself persistently to the rudder-casing, so that to me he had the appearance of a man talking in solitude, a little unconsciously, however.

His tale was that at seven bells in the forenoon watch he had all hands mustered on the quarterdeck and told them they had better go down to say good-bye to the captain.

Those words, as if grudged to an intruding personage, were enough for me to evoke vividly that strange ceremony: The bare-footed, bare-headed seamen crowding shyly into that cabin, a small mob pressed against that sideboard, uncomfortable rather than moved, shirts open on sunburnt chests, weather-beaten faces, and all staring at the dying man with the same grave and expectant expression.

“Was he conscious?” I asked.

“He didn’t speak, but he moved his eyes to look at them,” said the mate.

After waiting a moment, Mr. Burns motioned the crew to leave the cabin, but he detained the two eldest men to stay with the captain while he went on deck with his sextant to “take the sun.” It was getting toward noon and he was anxious to obtain a good observation for latitude. When he returned below to put his sextant away he found that the two men had retreated out into the lobby. Through the open door he had a view of the captain lying easy against the pillows. He had “passed away” while Mr. Burns was taking this observation. As near noon as possible. He had hardly changed his position.

Mr. Burns sighed, glanced at me inquisitively, as much as to say, “Aren’t you going yet?” and then turned his thoughts from his new captain back to the old, who, being dead, had no authority, was not in anybody’s way, and was much easier to deal with.

Mr. Burns dealt with him at some length. He was a peculiar man — of sixty-five about — iron gray, hard-faced, obstinate, and uncommunicative. He used to keep the ship loafing at sea for inscrutable reasons. Would come on deck at night sometimes, take some sail off her, God only knows why or wherefore, then go below, shut himself up in his cabin, and play on the violin for hours — till daybreak perhaps. In fact, he spent most of his time day or night playing the violin. That was when the fit took him. Very loud, too.

It came to this, that Mr. Burns mustered his courage one day and remonstrated earnestly with the captain. Neither he nor the second mate could get a wink of sleep in their watches below for the noise. . . . And how could they be expected to keep awake while on duty? He pleaded. The answer of that stern man was that if he and the second mate didn't like the noise, they were welcome to pack up their traps and walk over the side. When this alternative was offered the ship happened to be 600 miles from the nearest land.

Mr. Burns at this point looked at me with an air of curiosity. I began to think that my predecessor was a remarkably peculiar old man.

But I had to hear stranger things yet. It came out that this stern, grim, wind-tanned, rough, sea-salted, taciturn sailor of sixty-five was not only an artist, but a lover as well. In Haiphong, when they got there after a course of most unprofitable peregrinations (during which the ship was nearly lost twice), he got himself, in Mr. Burns' own words, "mixed up" with some woman. Mr. Burns had had no personal knowledge of that affair, but positive evidence of it existed in the shape of a photograph taken in Haiphong. Mr. Burns found it in one of the drawers in the captain's room.

In due course I, too, saw that amazing human document (I even threw it overboard later). There he sat, with his hands reposing on his knees, bald, squat, gray, bristly, recalling a wild boar somehow; and by his side towered an awful mature, white female with rapacious nostrils and a cheaply ill-omened stare in her enormous eyes. She was disguised in some semi-oriental, vulgar, fancy costume. She resembled a low-class medium or one of those women who tell fortunes by cards for half a crown. And yet she was striking. A professional sorceress from the slums. It was incomprehensible. There was something awful in the thought that she was the last reflection of the world of passion for the fierce soul which seemed to look at one out of the sardonically savage face of that old seaman. However, I noticed that she was holding some musical instrument — guitar or mandoline — in her hand. Perhaps that was the secret of her sortilege.

For Mr. Burns that photograph explained why the unloaded ship had kept sweltering at anchor for three weeks in a pestilential hot harbour without air. They lay there and gasped. The captain, appearing now and then on short visits, mumbled to Mr. Burns unlikely tales about some letters he was waiting for.

Suddenly, after vanishing for a week, he came on board in the middle of the night and took the ship out to sea with the first break of dawn. Daylight showed him looking wild and ill. The mere getting clear of the land took two days, and somehow or other they bumped slightly on a reef. However, no leak developed, and the captain, growling

“no matter,” informed Mr. Burns that he had made up his mind to take the ship to Hong-Kong and drydock her there.

At this Mr. Burns was plunged into despair. For indeed, to beat up to Hong-Kong against a fierce monsoon, with a ship not sufficiently ballasted and with her supply of water not completed, was an insane project.

But the captain growled peremptorily, “Stick her at it,” and Mr. Burns, dismayed and enraged, stuck her at it, and kept her at it, blowing away sails, straining the spars, exhausting the crew — nearly maddened by the absolute conviction that the attempt was impossible and was bound to end in some catastrophe.

Meantime the captain, shut up in his cabin and wedged in a corner of his settee against the crazy bounding of the ship, played the violin — or, at any rate, made continuous noise on it.

When he appeared on deck he would not speak and not always answer when spoken to. It was obvious that he was ill in some mysterious manner, and beginning to break up.

As the days went by the sounds of the violin became less and less loud, till at last only a feeble scratching would meet Mr. Burns’ ear as he stood in the saloon listening outside the door of the captain’s state-room.

One afternoon in perfect desperation he burst into that room and made such a scene, tearing his hair and shouting such horrid imprecations that he cowed the contemptuous spirit of the sick man. The water-tanks were low, they had not gained fifty miles in a fortnight. She would never reach Hong-Kong.

It was like fighting desperately toward destruction for the ship and the men. This was evident without argument. Mr. Burns, losing all restraint, put his face close to his captain’s and fairly yelled: “You, sir, are going out of the world. But I can’t wait till you are dead before I put the helm up. You must do it yourself. You must do it now!”

The man on the couch snarled in contempt. “So I am going out of the world — am I?”

“Yes, sir — you haven’t many days left in it,” said Mr. Burns calming down. “One can see it by your face.”

“My face, eh? . . . Well, put up the helm and be damned to you.”

Burns flew on deck, got the ship before the wind, then came down again composed, but resolute.

“I’ve shaped a course for Pulo Condor, sir,” he said. “When we make it, if you are still with us, you’ll tell me into what port you wish me to take the ship and I’ll do it.”

The old man gave him a look of savage spite, and said those atrocious words in deadly, slow tones.

“If I had my wish, neither the ship nor any of you would ever reach a port. And I hope you won’t.”

Mr. Burns was profoundly shocked. I believe he was positively frightened at the time. It seems, however, that he managed to produce such an effective laugh that it

was the old man's turn to be frightened. He shrank within himself and turned his back on him.

"And his head was not gone then," Mr. Burns assured me excitedly. "He meant every word of it."

"Such was practically the late captain's last speech. No connected sentence passed his lips afterward. That night he used the last of his strength to throw his fiddle over the side. No one had actually seen him in the act, but after his death Mr. Burns couldn't find the thing anywhere. The empty case was very much in evidence, but the fiddle was clearly not in the ship. And where else could it have gone to but overboard?"

"Threw his violin overboard!" I exclaimed.

"He did," cried Mr. Burns excitedly. "And it's my belief he would have tried to take the ship down with him if it had been in human power. He never meant her to see home again. He wouldn't write to his owners, he never wrote to his old wife, either — he wasn't going to. He had made up his mind to cut adrift from everything. That's what it was. He didn't care for business, or freights, or for making a passage — or anything. He meant to have gone wandering about the world till he lost her with all hands."

Mr. Burns looked like a man who had escaped great danger. For a little he would have exclaimed: "If it hadn't been for me!" And the transparent innocence of his indignant eyes was underlined quaintly by the arrogant pair of moustaches which he proceeded to twist, and as if extend, horizontally.

I might have smiled if I had not been busy with my own sensations, which were not those of Mr. Burns. I was already the man in command. My sensations could not be like those of any other man on board. In that community I stood, like a king in his country, in a class all by myself. I mean an hereditary king, not a mere elected head of a state. I was brought there to rule by an agency as remote from the people and as inscrutable almost to them as the Grace of God.

And like a member of a dynasty, feeling a semimystical bond with the dead, I was profoundly shocked by my immediate predecessor.

That man had been in all essentials but his age just such another man as myself. Yet the end of his life was a complete act of treason, the betrayal of a tradition which seemed to me as imperative as any guide on earth could be. It appeared that even at sea a man could become the victim of evil spirits. I felt on my face the breath of unknown powers that shape our destinies.

Not to let the silence last too long I asked Mr. Burns if he had written to his captain's wife. He shook his head. He had written to nobody.

In a moment he became sombre. He never thought of writing. It took him all his time to watch incessantly the loading of the ship by a rascally Chinese stevedore. In this Mr. Burns gave me the first glimpse of the real chief mate's soul which dwelt uneasily in his body.

He mused, then hastened on with gloomy force.

“Yes! The captain died as near noon as possible. I looked through his papers in the afternoon. I read the service over him at sunset and then I stuck the ship’s head north and brought her in here. I — brought — her — in.”

He struck the table with his fist.

“She would hardly have come in by herself,” I observed. “But why didn’t you make for Singapore instead?”

His eyes wavered. “The nearest port,” he muttered sullenly.

I had framed the question in perfect innocence, but his answer (the difference in distance was insignificant) and his manner offered me a clue to the simple truth. He took the ship to a port where he expected to be confirmed in his temporary command from lack of a qualified master to put over his head. Whereas Singapore, he surmised justly, would be full of qualified men. But his naive reasoning forgot to take into account the telegraph cable reposing on the bottom of the very Gulf up which he had turned that ship which he imagined himself to have saved from destruction. Hence the bitter flavour of our interview. I tasted it more and more distinctly — and it was less and less to my taste.

“Look here, Mr. Burns,” I began very firmly. “You may as well understand that I did not run after this command. It was pushed in my way. I’ve accepted it. I am here to take the ship home first of all, and you may be sure that I shall see to it that every one of you on board here does his duty to that end. This is all I have to say — for the present.”

He was on his feet by this time, but instead of taking his dismissal he remained with trembling, indignant lips, and looking at me hard as though, really, after this, there was nothing for me to do in common decency but to vanish from his outraged sight. Like all very simple emotional states this was moving. I felt sorry for him — almost sympathetic, till (seeing that I did not vanish) he spoke in a tone of forced restraint.

“If I hadn’t a wife and a child at home you may be sure, sir, I would have asked you to let me go the very minute you came on board.”

I answered him with a matter-of-course calmness as though some remote third person were in question.

“And I, Mr. Burns, would not have let you go. You have signed the ship’s articles as chief officer, and till they are terminated at the final port of discharge I shall expect you to attend to your duty and give me the benefit of your experience to the best of your ability.”

Stony incredulity lingered in his eyes: but it broke down before my friendly attitude. With a slight upward toss of his arms (I got to know that gesture well afterward) he bolted out of the cabin.

We might have saved ourselves that little passage of harmless sparring. Before many days had elapsed it was Mr. Burns who was pleading with me anxiously not to leave him behind; while I could only return him but doubtful answers. The whole thing took on a somewhat tragic complexion.

And this horrible problem was only an extraneous episode, a mere complication in the general problem of how to get that ship — which was mine with her appurtenances and her men, with her body and her spirit now slumbering in that pestilential river — how to get her out to sea.

Mr. Burns, while still acting captain, had hastened to sign a charter-party which in an ideal world without guile would have been an excellent document. Directly I ran my eye over it I foresaw trouble ahead unless the people of the other part were quite exceptionally fair-minded and open to argument.

Mr. Burns, to whom I imparted my fears, chose to take great umbrage at them. He looked at me with that usual incredulous stare, and said bitterly:

“I suppose, sir, you want to make out I’ve acted like a fool?”

I told him, with my systematic kindliness which always seemed to augment his surprise, that I did not want to make out anything. I would leave that to the future.

And, sure enough, the future brought in a lot of trouble. There were days when I used to remember Captain Giles with nothing short of abhorrence. His confounded acuteness had let me in for this job; while his prophecy that I “would have my hands full” coming true, made it appear as if done on purpose to play an evil joke on my young innocence.

Yes. I had my hands full of complications which were most valuable as “experience.” People have a great opinion of the advantages of experience. But in this connection experience means always something disagreeable as opposed to the charm and innocence of illusions.

I must say I was losing mine rapidly. But on these instructive complications I must not enlarge more than to say that they could all be resumed in the one word: Delay.

A mankind which has invented the proverb, “Time is money,” will understand my vexation. The word “Delay” entered the secret chamber of my brain, resounded there like a tolling bell which maddens the ear, affected all my senses, took on a black colouring, a bitter taste, a deadly meaning.

“I am really sorry to see you worried like this. Indeed, I am. . . .”

It was the only humane speech I used to hear at that time. And it came from a doctor, appropriately enough.

A doctor is humane by definition. But that man was so in reality. His speech was not professional. I was not ill. But other people were, and that was the reason of his visiting the ship.

He was the doctor of our Legation and, of course, of the Consulate, too. He looked after the ship’s health, which generally was poor, and trembling, as it were, on the verge of a break-up. Yes. The men ailed. And thus time was not only money, but life as well.

I had never seen such a steady ship’s company. As the doctor remarked to me: “You seem to have a most respectable lot of seamen.” Not only were they consistently sober, but they did not even want to go ashore. Care was taken to expose them as little as

possible to the sun. They were employed on light work under the awnings. And the humane doctor commended me.

“Your arrangements appear to me to be very judicious, my dear Captain.”

It is difficult to express how much that pronouncement comforted me. The doctor’s round, full face framed in a light-coloured whisker was the perfection of a dignified amenity. He was the only human being in the world who seemed to take the slightest interest in me. He would generally sit in the cabin for half an hour or so at every visit.

I said to him one day:

“I suppose the only thing now is to take care of them as you are doing till I can get the ship to sea?”

He inclined his head, shutting his eyes under the large spectacles, and murmured:

“The sea . . . undoubtedly.”

The first member of the crew fairly knocked over was the steward — the first man to whom I had spoken on board. He was taken ashore (with choleric symptoms) and died there at the end of a week. Then, while I was still under the startling impression of this first home-thrust of the climate, Mr. Burns gave up and went to bed in a raging fever without saying a word to anybody.

I believe he had partly fretted himself into that illness; the climate did the rest with the swiftness of an invisible monster ambushed in the air, in the water, in the mud of the river-bank. Mr. Burns was a predestined victim.

I discovered him lying on his back, glaring sullenly and radiating heat on one like a small furnace. He would hardly answer my questions, and only grumbled. Couldn’t a man take an afternoon off duty with a bad headache — for once?

That evening, as I sat in the saloon after dinner, I could hear him muttering continuously in his room. Ransome, who was clearing the table, said to me:

“I am afraid, sir, I won’t be able to give the mate all the attention he’s likely to need. I will have to be forward in the galley a great part of my time.”

Ransome was the cook. The mate had pointed him out to me the first day, standing on the deck, his arms crossed on his broad chest, gazing on the river.

Even at a distance his well-proportioned figure, something thoroughly sailor-like in his poise, made him noticeable. On nearer view the intelligent, quiet eyes, a well-bred face, the disciplined independence of his manner made up an attractive personality. When, in addition, Mr. Burns told me that he was the best seaman in the ship, I expressed my surprise that in his earliest prime and of such appearance he should sign on as cook on board a ship.

“It’s his heart,” Mr. Burns had said. “There’s something wrong with it. He mustn’t exert himself too much or he may drop dead suddenly.”

And he was the only one the climate had not touched — perhaps because, carrying a deadly enemy in his breast, he had schooled himself into a systematic control of feelings and movements. When one was in the secret this was apparent in his manner. After the poor steward died, and as he could not be replaced by a white man in this Oriental port, Ransome had volunteered to do the double work.

"I can do it all right, sir, as long as I go about it quietly," he had assured me.

But obviously he couldn't be expected to take up sick-nursing in addition. Moreover, the doctor peremptorily ordered Mr. Burns ashore.

With a seaman on each side holding him up under the arms, the mate went over the gangway more sullen than ever. We built him up with pillows in the gharry, and he made an effort to say brokenly:

"Now — you've got — what you wanted — got me out of — the ship."

"You were never more mistaken in your life, Mr. Burns," I said quietly, duly smiling at him; and the trap drove off to a sort of sanatorium, a pavilion of bricks which the doctor had in the grounds of his residence.

I visited Mr. Burns regularly. After the first few days, when he didn't know anybody, he received me as if I had come either to gloat over an enemy or else to curry favour with a deeply wronged person. It was either one or the other, just as it happened according to his fantastic sickroom moods. Whichever it was, he managed to convey it to me even during the period when he appeared almost too weak to talk. I treated him to my invariable kindness.

Then one day, suddenly, a surge of downright panic burst through all this craziness.

If I left him behind in this deadly place he would die. He felt it, he was certain of it. But I wouldn't have the heart to leave him ashore. He had a wife and child in Sydney.

He produced his wasted forearms from under the sheet which covered him and clasped his fleshless claws. He would die! He would die here. . . .

He absolutely managed to sit up, but only for a moment, and when he fell back I really thought that he would die there and then. I called to the Bengali dispenser, and hastened away from the room.

Next day he upset me thoroughly by renewing his entreaties. I returned an evasive answer, and left him the picture of ghastly despair. The day after I went in with reluctance, and he attacked me at once in a much stronger voice and with an abundance of argument which was quite startling. He presented his case with a sort of crazy vigour, and asked me finally how would I like to have a man's death on my conscience? He wanted me to promise that I would not sail without him.

I said that I really must consult the doctor first. He cried out at that. The doctor! Never! That would be a death sentence.

The effort had exhausted him. He closed his eyes, but went on rambling in a low voice. I had hated him from the start. The late captain had hated him, too. Had wished him dead. Had wished all hands dead. . . .

"What do you want to stand in with that wicked corpse for, sir? He'll have you, too," he ended, blinking his glazed eyes vacantly.

"Mr. Burns," I cried, very much discomposed, "what on earth are you talking about?" He seemed to come to himself, though he was too weak to start.

"I don't know," he said languidly. "But don't ask that doctor, sir. You and I are sailors. Don't ask him, sir. Some day perhaps you will have a wife and child yourself."

And again he pleaded for the promise that I would not leave him behind. I had the firmness of mind not to give it to him. Afterward this sternness seemed criminal; for my mind was made up. That prostrated man, with hardly strength enough to breathe and ravaged by a passion of fear, was irresistible. And, besides, he had happened to hit on the right words. He and I were sailors. That was a claim, for I had no other family. As to the wife and child (some day) argument, it had no force. It sounded merely bizarre.

I could imagine no claim that would be stronger and more absorbing than the claim of that ship, of these men snared in the river by silly commercial complications, as if in some poisonous trap.

However, I had nearly fought my way out. Out to sea. The sea — which was pure, safe, and friendly. Three days more.

That thought sustained and carried me on my way back to the ship. In the saloon the doctor's voice greeted me, and his large form followed his voice, issuing out of the starboard spare cabin where the ship's medicine chest was kept securely lashed in the bed-place.

Finding that I was not on board he had gone in there, he said, to inspect the supply of drugs, bandages, and so on. Everything was completed and in order.

I thanked him; I had just been thinking of asking him to do that very thing, as in a couple of days, as he knew, we were going to sea, where all our troubles of every sort would be over at last.

He listened gravely and made no answer. But when I opened to him my mind as to Mr. Burns he sat down by my side, and, laying his hand on my knee amicably, begged me to think what it was I was exposing myself to.

The man was just strong enough to bear being moved and no more. But he couldn't stand a return of the fever. I had before me a passage of sixty days perhaps, beginning with intricate navigation and ending probably with a lot of bad weather. Could I run the risk of having to go through it single-handed, with no chief officer and with a second quite a youth? . . .

He might have added that it was my first command, too. He did probably think of that fact, for he checked himself. It was very present to my mind.

He advised me earnestly to cable to Singapore for a chief officer, even if I had to delay my sailing for a week.

"Never," I said. The very thought gave me the shivers. The hands seemed fairly fit, all of them, and this was the time to get them away. Once at sea I was not afraid of facing anything. The sea was now the only remedy for all my troubles.

The doctor's glasses were directed at me like two lamps searching the genuineness of my resolution. He opened his lips as if to argue further, but shut them again without saying anything. I had a vision so vivid of poor Burns in his exhaustion, helplessness, and anguish, that it moved me more than the reality I had come away from only an hour before. It was purged from the drawbacks of his personality, and I could not resist it.

“Look here,” I said. “Unless you tell me officially that the man must not be moved I’ll make arrangements to have him brought on board tomorrow, and shall take the ship out of the river next morning, even if I have to anchor outside the bar for a couple of days to get her ready for sea.”

“Oh! I’ll make all the arrangements myself,” said the doctor at once. “I spoke as I did only as a friend — as a well-wisher, and that sort of thing.”

He rose in his dignified simplicity and gave me a warm handshake, rather solemnly, I thought. But he was as good as his word. When Mr. Burns appeared at the gangway carried on a stretcher, the doctor himself walked by its side. The programme had been altered in so far that this transportation had been left to the last moment, on the very morning of our departure.

It was barely an hour after sunrise. The doctor waved his big arm to me from the shore and walked back at once to his trap, which had followed him empty to the river-side. Mr. Burns, carried across the quarter-deck, had the appearance of being absolutely lifeless. Ransome went down to settle him in his cabin. I had to remain on deck to look after the ship, for the tug had got hold of our towrope already.

The splash of our shore-fasts falling in the water produced a complete change of feeling in me. It was like the imperfect relief of awakening from a nightmare. But when the ship’s head swung down the river away from that town, Oriental and squalid, I missed the expected elation of that striven-for moment. What there was, undoubtedly, was a relaxation of tension which translated itself into a sense of weariness after an inglorious fight.

About midday we anchored a mile outside the bar. The afternoon was busy for all hands. Watching the work from the poop, where I remained all the time, I detected in it some of the languor of the six weeks spent in the steaming heat of the river. The first breeze would blow that away. Now the calm was complete. I judged that the second officer — a callow youth with an unpromising face — was not, to put it mildly, of that invaluable stuff from which a commander’s right hand is made. But I was glad to catch along the main deck a few smiles on those seamen’s faces at which I had hardly had time to have a good look as yet. Having thrown off the mortal coil of shore affairs, I felt myself familiar with them and yet a little strange, like a long-lost wanderer among his kin.

Ransome flitted continually to and fro between the galley and the cabin. It was a pleasure to look at him. The man positively had grace. He alone of all the crew had not had a day’s illness in port. But with the knowledge of that uneasy heart within his breast I could detect the restraint he put on the natural sailor-like agility of his movements. It was as though he had something very fragile or very explosive to carry about his person and was all the time aware of it.

I had occasion to address him once or twice. He answered me in his pleasant, quiet voice and with a faint, slightly wistful smile. Mr. Burns appeared to be resting. He seemed fairly comfortable.

After sunset I came out on deck again to meet only a still void. The thin, featureless crust of the coast could not be distinguished. The darkness had risen around the ship like a mysterious emanation from the dumb and lonely waters. I leaned on the rail and turned my ear to the shadows of the night. Not a sound. My command might have been a planet flying vertiginously on its appointed path in a space of infinite silence. I clung to the rail as if my sense of balance were leaving me for good. How absurd. I failed nervously.

“On deck there!”

The immediate answer, “Yes, sir,” broke the spell. The anchor-watch man ran up the poop ladder smartly. I told him to report at once the slightest sign of a breeze coming.

Going below I looked in on Mr. Burns. In fact, I could not avoid seeing him, for his door stood open. The man was so wasted that, in this white cabin, under a white sheet, and with his diminished head sunk in the white pillow, his red moustaches captured their eyes exclusively, like something artificial — a pair of moustaches from a shop exhibited there in the harsh light of the bulkhead-lamp without a shade.

While I stared with a sort of wonder he asserted himself by opening his eyes and even moving them in my direction. A minute stir.

“Dead calm, Mr. Burns,” I said resignedly.

In an unexpectedly distinct voice Mr. Burns began a rambling speech. Its tone was very strange, not as if affected by his illness, but as if of a different nature. It sounded unearthly. As to the matter, I seemed to make out that it was the fault of the “old man” — the late captain — ambushed down there under the sea with some evil intention. It was a weird story.

I listened to the end; then stepping into the cabin I laid my hand on the mate’s forehead. It was cool. He was light-headed only from extreme weakness. Suddenly he seemed to become aware of me, and in his own voice — of course, very feeble — he asked regretfully:

“Is there no chance at all to get under way, sir?”

“What’s the good of letting go our hold of the ground only to drift, Mr. Burns?” I answered.

He sighed and I left him to his immobility. His hold on life was as slender as his hold on sanity. I was oppressed by my lonely responsibilities. I went into my cabin to seek relief in a few hours’ sleep, but almost before I closed my eyes the man on deck came down reporting a light breeze. Enough to get under way with, he said.

And it was no more than just enough. I ordered the windlass manned, the sails loosed, and the topsails set. But by the time I had cast the ship I could hardly feel any breath of wind. Nevertheless, I trimmed the yards and put everything on her. I was not going to give up the attempt.

Part 2

Chapter 4

With her anchor at the bow and clothed in canvas to her very trucks, my command seemed to stand as motionless as a model ship set on the gleams and shadows of polished marble. It was impossible to distinguish land from water in the enigmatical tranquillity of the immense forces of the world. A sudden impatience possessed me.

“Won’t she answer the helm at all?” I said irritably to the man whose strong brown hands grasping the spokes of the wheel stood out lighted on the darkness; like a symbol of mankind’s claim to the direction of its own fate.

He answered me.

“Yes, sir. She’s coming-to slowly.”

“Let her head come up to south.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

I paced the poop. There was not a sound but that of my footsteps, till the man spoke again.

“She is at south now, sir.”

I felt a slight tightness of the chest before I gave out the first course of my first command to the silent night, heavy with dew and sparkling with stars. There was a finality in the act committing me to the endless vigilance of my lonely task.

“Steady her head at that,” I said at last. “The course is south.”

“South, sir,” echoed the man.

I sent below the second mate and his watch and remained in charge, walking the deck through the chill, somnolent hours that precede the dawn.

Slight puffs came and went, and whenever they were strong enough to wake up the black water the murmur alongside ran through my very heart in a delicate crescendo of delight and died away swiftly. I was bitterly tired. The very stars seemed weary of waiting for daybreak. It came at last with a mother-of-pearl sheen at the zenith, such as I had never seen before in the tropics, unglowing, almost gray, with a strange reminder of high latitudes.

The voice of the look-out man hailed from forward:

“Land on the port bow, sir.”

“All right.”

Leaning on the rail I never even raised my eyes.

The motion of the ship was imperceptible. Presently Ransome brought me the cup of morning coffee. After I had drunk it I looked ahead, and in the still streak of very bright pale orange light I saw the land profiled flatly as if cut out of black paper and seeming to float on the water as light as cork. But the rising sun turned it into mere dark vapour, a doubtful, massive shadow trembling in the hot glare.

The watch finished washing decks. I went below and stopped at Mr. Burns' door (he could not bear to have it shut), but hesitated to speak to him till he moved his eyes. I gave him the news.

"Sighted Cape Liant at daylight. About fifteen miles."

He moved his lips then, but I heard no sound till I put my ear down, and caught the peevish comment: "This is crawling. . . . No luck."

"Better luck than standing still, anyhow," I pointed out resignedly, and left him to whatever thoughts or fancies haunted his awful immobility.

Later that morning, when relieved by my second officer, I threw myself on my couch and for some three hours or so I really found oblivion. It was so perfect that on waking up I wondered where I was. Then came the immense relief of the thought: on board my ship! At sea! At sea!

Through the port-holes I beheld an unruffled, sun-smitten horizon. The horizon of a windless day. But its spaciousness alone was enough to give me a sense of a fortunate escape, a momentary exultation of freedom.

I stepped out into the saloon with my heart lighter than it had been for days. Ransome was at the sideboard preparing to lay the table for the first sea dinner of the passage. He turned his head, and something in his eyes checked my modest elation.

Instinctively I asked: "What is it now?" not expecting in the least the answer I got. It was given with that sort of contained serenity which was characteristic of the man.

"I am afraid we haven't left all sickness behind us, sir."

"We haven't! What's the matter?"

He told me then that two of our men had been taken bad with fever in the night. One of them was burning and the other was shivering, but he thought that it was pretty much the same thing. I thought so, too. I felt shocked by the news. "One burning, the other shivering, you say? No. We haven't left the sickness behind. Do they look very ill?"

"Middling bad, sir." Ransome's eyes gazed steadily into mine. We exchanged smiles. Ransome's a little wistful, as usual, mine no doubt grim enough, to correspond with my secret exasperation.

I asked:

"Was there any wind at all this morning?"

"Can hardly say that, sir. We've moved all the time though. The land ahead seems a little nearer."

That was it. A little nearer. Whereas if we had only had a little more wind, only a very little more, we might, we should, have been abreast of Liant by this time and increasing our distance from that contaminated shore. And it was not only the distance.

It seemed to me that a stronger breeze would have blown away the contamination which clung to the ship. It obviously did cling to the ship. Two men. One burning, one shivering. I felt a distinct reluctance to go and look at them. What was the good? Poison is poison. Tropical fever is tropical fever. But that it should have stretched its claw after us over the sea seemed to me an extraordinary and unfair license. I could hardly believe that it could be anything worse than the last desperate pluck of the evil from which we were escaping into the clean breath of the sea. If only that breath had been a little stronger. However, there was the quinine against the fever. I went into the spare cabin where the medicine chest was kept to prepare two doses. I opened it full of faith as a man opens a miraculous shrine. The upper part was inhabited by a collection of bottles, all square-shouldered and as like each other as peas. Under that orderly array there were two drawers, stuffed as full of things as one could imagine — paper packages, bandages, cardboard boxes officially labelled. The lower of the two, in one of its compartments, contained our provision of quinine.

There were five bottles, all round and all of a size. One was about a third full. The other four remained still wrapped up in paper and sealed. But I did not expect to see an envelope lying on top of them. A square envelope, belonging, in fact, to the ship's stationery.

It lay so that I could see it was not closed down, and on picking it up and turning it over I perceived that it was addressed to myself. It contained a half-sheet of notepaper, which I unfolded with a queer sense of dealing with the uncanny, but without any excitement as people meet and do extraordinary things in a dream.

"My dear Captain," it began, but I ran to the signature. The writer was the doctor. The date was that of the day on which, returning from my visit to Mr. Burns in the hospital, I had found the excellent doctor waiting for me in the cabin; and when he told me that he had been putting in time inspecting the medicine chest for me. How bizarre! While expecting me to come in at any moment he had been amusing himself by writing me a letter, and then as I came in had hastened to stuff it into the medicine-chest drawer. A rather incredible proceeding. I turned to the text in wonder.

In a large, hurried, but legible hand the good, sympathetic man for some reason, either of kindness or more likely impelled by the irresistible desire to express his opinion, with which he didn't want to damp my hopes before, was warning me not to put my trust in the beneficial effects of a change from land to sea. "I didn't want to add to your worries by discouraging your hopes," he wrote. "I am afraid that, medically speaking, the end of your troubles is not yet." In short, he expected me to have to fight a probable return of tropical illness. Fortunately I had a good provision of quinine. I should put my trust in that, and administer it steadily, when the ship's health would certainly improve.

I crumpled up the letter and rammed it into my pocket. Ransome carried off two big doses to the men forward. As to myself, I did not go on deck as yet. I went instead to the door of Mr. Burns' room, and gave him that news, too.

It was impossible to say the effect it had on him. At first I thought that he was speechless. His head lay sunk in the pillow. He moved his lips enough, however, to assure me that he was getting much stronger; a statement shockingly untrue on the face of it.

That afternoon I took my watch as a matter of course. A great over-heated stillness enveloped the ship and seemed to hold her motionless in a flaming ambience composed in two shades of blue. Faint, hot puffs eddied nervelessly from her sails. And yet she moved. She must have. For, as the sun was setting, we had drawn abreast of Cape Liant and dropped it behind us: an ominous retreating shadow in the last gleams of twilight.

In the evening, under the crude glare of his lamp, Mr. Burns seemed to have come more to the surface of his bedding. It was as if a depressing hand had been lifted off him. He answered my few words by a comparatively long, connected speech. He asserted himself strongly. If he escaped being smothered by this stagnant heat, he said, he was confident that in a very few days he would be able to come up on deck and help me.

While he was speaking I trembled lest this effort of energy should leave him lifeless before my eyes. But I cannot deny that there was something comforting in his willingness. I made a suitable reply, but pointed out to him that the only thing that could really help us was wind — a fair wind.

He rolled his head impatiently on the pillow. And it was not comforting in the least to hear him begin to mutter crazily about the late captain, that old man buried in latitude 8 d 20', right in our way — ambushed at the entrance of the Gulf.

“Are you still thinking of your late captain, Mr. Burns?” I said. “I imagine the dead feel no animosity against the living. They care nothing for them.”

“You don’t know that one,” he breathed out feebly.

“No. I didn’t know him, and he didn’t know me. And so he can’t have any grievance against me, anyway.”

“Yes. But there’s all the rest of us on board,” he insisted.

I felt the inexpugnable strength of common sense being insidiously menaced by this gruesome, by this insane, delusion. And I said:

“You mustn’t talk so much. You will tire yourself.”

“And there is the ship herself,” he persisted in a whisper.

“Now, not a word more,” I said, stepping in and laying my hand on his cool forehead. It proved to me that this atrocious absurdity was rooted in the man himself and not in the disease, which, apparently, had emptied him of every power, mental and physical, except that one fixed idea.

I avoided giving Mr. Burns any opening for conversation for the next few days. I merely used to throw him a hasty, cheery word when passing his door. I believe that if he had had the strength he would have called out after me more than once. But he hadn’t the strength. Ransome, however, observed to me one afternoon that the mate “seemed to be picking up wonderfully.”

“Did he talk any nonsense to you of late?” I asked casually.

“No, sir.” Ransome was startled by the direct question; but, after a pause, he added equably: “He told me this morning, sir, that he was sorry he had to bury our late captain right in the ship’s way, as one may say, out of the Gulf.”

“Isn’t this nonsense enough for you?” I asked, looking confidently at the intelligent, quiet face on which the secret uneasiness in the man’s breast had thrown a transparent veil of care.

Ransome didn’t know. He had not given a thought to the matter. And with a faint smile he flitted away from me on his never-ending duties, with his usual guarded activity.

Two more days passed. We had advanced a little way — a very little way — into the larger space of the Gulf of Siam. Seizing eagerly upon the elation of the first command thrown into my lap, by the agency of Captain Giles, I had yet an uneasy feeling that such luck as this has got perhaps to be paid for in some way. I had held, professionally, a review of my chances. I was competent enough for that. At least, I thought so. I had a general sense of my preparedness which only a man pursuing a calling he loves can know. That feeling seemed to me the most natural thing in the world. As natural as breathing. I imagined I could not have lived without it.

I don’t know what I expected. Perhaps nothing else than that special intensity of existence which is the quintessence of youthful aspirations. Whatever I expected I did not expect to be beset by hurricanes. I knew better than that. In the Gulf of Siam there are no hurricanes. But neither did I expect to find myself bound hand and foot to the hopeless extent which was revealed to me as the days went on.

Not that the evil spell held us always motionless. Mysterious currents drifted us here and there, with a stealthy power made manifest only by the changing vistas of the islands fringing the east shore of the Gulf. And there were winds, too, fitful and deceitful. They raised hopes only to dash them into the bitterest disappointment, promises of advance ending in lost ground, expiring in sighs, dying into dumb stillness in which the currents had it all their own way — their own inimical way.

The island of Koh-ring, a great, black, upheaved ridge amongst a lot of tiny islets, lying upon the glassy water like a triton amongst minnows, seemed to be the centre of the fatal circle. It seemed impossible to get away from it. Day after day it remained in sight. More than once, in a favourable breeze, I would take its bearings in the fast-ebbing twilight, thinking that it was for the last time. Vain hope. A night of fitful airs would undo the gains of temporary favour, and the rising sun would throw out the black relief of Koh-ring looking more barren, inhospitable, and grim than ever.

“It’s like being bewitched, upon my word,” I said once to Mr. Burns, from my usual position in the doorway.

He was sitting up in his bed-place. He was progressing toward the world of living men; if he could hardly have been said to have rejoined it yet. He nodded to me his frail and bony head in a wisely mysterious assent.

“Oh, yes, I know what you mean,” I said. “But you cannot expect me to believe that a dead man has the power to put out of joint the meteorology of this part of the world. Though indeed it seems to have gone utterly wrong. The land and sea breezes have got broken up into small pieces. We cannot depend upon them for five minutes together.”

“It won’t be very long now before I can come up on deck,” muttered Mr. Burns, “and then we shall see.”

Whether he meant this for a promise to grapple with supernatural evil I couldn’t tell. At any rate, it wasn’t the kind of assistance I needed. On the other hand, I had been living on deck practically night and day so as to take advantage of every chance to get my ship a little more to the southward. The mate, I could see, was extremely weak yet, and not quite rid of his delusion, which to me appeared but a symptom of his disease. At all events, the hopefulness of an invalid was not to be discouraged. I said:

“You will be most welcome there, I am sure, Mr. Burns. If you go on improving at this rate you’ll be presently one of the healthiest men in the ship.”

This pleased him, but his extreme emaciation converted his self-satisfied smile into a ghastly exhibition of long teeth under the red moustache.

“Aren’t the fellows improving, sir?” he asked soberly, with an extremely sensible expression of anxiety on his face.

I answered him only with a vague gesture and went away from the door. The fact was that disease played with us capriciously very much as the winds did. It would go from one man to another with a lighter or heavier touch, which always left its mark behind, staggering some, knocking others over for a time, leaving this one, returning to another, so that all of them had now an invalidish aspect and a hunted, apprehensive look in their eyes; while Ransome and I, the only two completely untouched, went amongst them assiduously distributing quinine. It was a double fight. The adverse weather held us in front and the disease pressed on our rear. I must say that the men were very good. The constant toil of trimming yards they faced willingly. But all spring was out of their limbs, and as I looked at them from the poop I could not keep from my mind the dreadful impression that they were moving in poisoned air.

Down below, in his cabin, Mr. Burns had advanced so far as not only to be able to sit up, but even to draw up his legs. Clasping them with bony arms, like an animated skeleton, he emitted deep, impatient sighs.

“The great thing to do, sir,” he would tell me on every occasion, when I gave him the chance, “the great thing is to get the ship past 8 d 20’ of latitude. Once she’s past that we’re all right.”

At first I used only to smile at him, though, God knows, I had not much heart left for smiles. But at last I lost my patience.

“Oh, yes. The latitude 8 d 20’. That’s where you buried your late captain, isn’t it?” Then with severity: “Don’t you think, Mr. Burns, it’s about time you dropped all that nonsense?”

He rolled at me his deep-sunken eyes in a glance of invincible obstinacy. But for the rest he only muttered, just loud enough for me to hear, something about “Not surprised . . . find . . . play us some beastly trick yet. . . .”

Such passages as this were not exactly wholesome for my resolution. The stress of adversity was beginning to tell on me. At the same time, I felt a contempt for that obscure weakness of my soul. I said to myself disdainfully that it should take much more than that to affect in the smallest degree my fortitude.

I didn’t know then how soon and from what unexpected direction it would be attacked.

It was the very next day. The sun had risen clear of the southern shoulder of Koh-ring, which still hung, like an evil attendant, on our port quarter. It was intensely hateful to my sight. During the night we had been heading all round the compass, trimming the yards again and again, to what I fear must have been for the most part imaginary puffs of air. Then just about sunrise we got for an hour an inexplicable, steady breeze, right in our teeth. There was no sense in it. It fitted neither with the season of the year nor with the secular experience of seamen as recorded in books, nor with the aspect of the sky. Only purposeful malevolence could account for it. It sent us travelling at a great pace away from our proper course; and if we had been out on pleasure sailing bent it would have been a delightful breeze, with the awakened sparkle of the sea, with the sense of motion and a feeling of unwonted freshness. Then, all at once, as if disdainful to carry farther the sorry jest, it dropped and died out completely in less than five minutes. The ship’s head swung where it listed; the stilled sea took on the polish of a steel plate in the calm.

I went below, not because I meant to take some rest, but simply because I couldn’t bear to look at it just then. The indefatigable Ransome was busy in the saloon. It had become a regular practice with him to give me an informal health report in the morning. He turned away from the sideboard with his usual pleasant, quiet gaze. No shadow rested on his intelligent forehead.

“There are a good many of them middling bad this morning, sir,” he said in a calm tone.

“What? All knocked out?”

“Only two actually in their bunks, sir, but — ”

“It’s the last night that has done for them. We have had to pull and haul all the blessed time.”

“I heard, sir. I had a mind to come out and help only, you know. . . .”

“Certainly not. You mustn’t. . . . The fellows lie at night about the decks, too. It isn’t good for them.”

Ransome assented. But men couldn’t be looked after like children. Moreover, one could hardly blame them for trying for such coolness and such air as there was to be found on deck. He himself, of course, knew better.

He was, indeed, a reasonable man. Yet it would have been hard to say that the others were not. The last few days had been for us like the ordeal of the fiery furnace. One

really couldn't quarrel with their common, imprudent humanity making the best of the moments of relief, when the night brought in the illusion of coolness and the starlight twinkled through the heavy, dew-laden air. Moreover, most of them were so weakened that hardly anything could be done without everybody that could totter mustering on the braces. No, it was no use remonstrating with them. But I fully believed that quinine was of very great use indeed.

I believed in it. I pinned my faith to it. It would save the men, the ship, break the spell by its medicinal virtue, make time of no account, the weather but a passing worry and, like a magic powder working against mysterious malefices, secure the first passage of my first command against the evil powers of calms and pestilence. I looked upon it as more precious than gold, and unlike gold, of which there ever hardly seems to be enough anywhere, the ship had a sufficient store of it. I went in to get it with the purpose of weighing out doses. I stretched my hand with the feeling of a man reaching for an unfailing panacea, took up a fresh bottle and unrolled the wrapper, noticing as I did so that the ends, both top and bottom, had come unsealed. . . .

But why record all the swift steps of the appalling discovery? You have guessed the truth already. There was the wrapper, the bottle, and the white powder inside, some sort of powder! But it wasn't quinine. One look at it was quite enough. I remember that at the very moment of picking up the bottle, before I even dealt with the wrapper, the weight of the object I had in my hand gave me an instant premonition. Quinine is as light as feathers; and my nerves must have been exasperated into an extraordinary sensibility. I let the bottle smash itself on the floor. The stuff, whatever it was, felt gritty under the sole of my shoe. I snatched up the next bottle and then the next. The weight alone told the tale. One after another they fell, breaking at my feet, not because I threw them down in my dismay, but slipping through my fingers as if this disclosure were too much for my strength.

It is a fact that the very greatness of a mental shock helps one to bear up against it by producing a sort of temporary insensibility. I came out of the state-room stunned, as if something heavy had dropped on my head. From the other side of the saloon, across the table, Ransome, with a duster in his hand, stared open-mouthed. I don't think that I looked wild. It is quite possible that I appeared to be in a hurry because I was instinctively hastening up on deck. An example this of training become instinct. The difficulties, the dangers, the problems of a ship at sea must be met on deck.

To this fact, as it were of nature, I responded instinctively; which may be taken as a proof that for a moment I must have been robbed of my reason.

I was certainly off my balance, a prey to impulse, for at the bottom of the stairs I turned and flung myself at the doorway of Mr. Burns' cabin. The wildness of his aspect checked my mental disorder. He was sitting up in his bunk, his body looking immensely long, his head drooping a little sideways, with affected complacency. He flourished, in his trembling hand, on the end of a forearm no thicker than a walking-stick, a shining pair of scissors which he tried before my very eyes to jab at his throat.

I was to a certain extent horrified; but it was rather a secondary sort of effect, not really strong enough to make me yell at him in some such manner as: "Stop!" . . . "Heavens!" . . . "What are you doing?"

In reality he was simply overtaxing his returning strength in a shaky attempt to clip off the thick growth of his red beard. A large towel was spread over his lap, and a shower of stiff hairs, like bits of copper wire, was descending on it at every snip of the scissors.

He turned to me his face grotesque beyond the fantasies of mad dreams, one cheek all bushy as if with a swollen flame, the other denuded and sunken, with the untouched long moustache on that side asserting itself, lonely and fierce. And while he stared thunderstruck, with the gaping scissors on his fingers, I shouted my discovery at him fiendishly, in six words, without comment.

Chapter 5

I heard the clatter of the scissors escaping from his hand, noted the perilous heave of his whole person over the edge of the bunk after them, and then, returning to my first purpose, pursued my course on the deck. The sparkle of the sea filled my eyes. It was gorgeous and barren, monotonous and without hope under the empty curve of the sky. The sails hung motionless and slack, the very folds of their sagging surfaces moved no more than carved granite. The impetuosity of my advent made the man at the helm start slightly. A block aloft squeaked incomprehensibly, for what on earth could have made it do so? It was a whistling note like a bird's. For a long, long time I faced an empty world, steeped in an infinity of silence, through which the sunshine poured and flowed for some mysterious purpose. Then I heard Ransome's voice at my elbow.

"I have put Mr. Burns back to bed, sir."

"You have."

"Well, sir, he got out, all of a sudden, but when he let go the edge of his bunk he fell down. He isn't light-headed, though, it seems to me."

"No," I said dully, without looking at Ransome. He waited for a moment, then cautiously, as if not to give offence: "I don't think we need lose much of that stuff, sir," he said, "I can sweep it up, every bit of it almost, and then we could sift the glass out. I will go about it at once. It will not make the breakfast late, not ten minutes."

"Oh, yes," I said bitterly. "Let the breakfast wait, sweep up every bit of it, and then throw the damned lot overboard!"

The profound silence returned, and when I looked over my shoulder, Ransome — the intelligent, serene Ransome — had vanished from my side. The intense loneliness of the sea acted like poison on my brain. When I turned my eyes to the ship, I had a morbid vision of her as a floating grave. Who hasn't heard of ships found floating, haphazard, with their crews all dead? I looked at the seaman at the helm, I had an

impulse to speak to him, and, indeed, his face took on an expectant cast as if he had guessed my intention. But in the end I went below, thinking I would be alone with the greatness of my trouble for a little while. But through his open door Mr. Burns saw me come down, and addressed me grumpily: "Well, sir?"

I went in. "It isn't well at all," I said.

Mr. Burns, reestablished in his bed-place, was concealing his hirsute cheek in the palm of his hand.

"That confounded fellow has taken away the scissors from me," were the next words he said.

The tension I was suffering from was so great that it was perhaps just as well that Mr. Burns had started on his grievance. He seemed very sore about it and grumbled, "Does he think I am mad, or what?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Burns," I said. I looked upon him at that moment as a model of self-possession. I even conceived on that account a sort of admiration for that man, who had (apart from the intense materiality of what was left of his beard) come as near to being a disembodied spirit as any man can do and live. I noticed the preternatural sharpness of the ridge of his nose, the deep cavities of his temples, and I envied him. He was so reduced that he would probably die very soon. Envidable man! So near extinction — while I had to bear within me a tumult of suffering vitality, doubt, confusion, self-reproach, and an indefinite reluctance to meet the horrid logic of the situation. I could not help muttering: "I feel as if I were going mad myself."

Mr. Burns glared spectrally, but otherwise was wonderfully composed.

"I always thought he would play us some deadly trick," he said, with a peculiar emphasis on the he.

It gave me a mental shock, but I had neither the mind, nor the heart, nor the spirit to argue with him. My form of sickness was indifference. The creeping paralysis of a hopeless outlook. So I only gazed at him. Mr. Burns broke into further speech.

"Eh! What! No! You won't believe it? Well, how do you account for this? How do you think it could have happened?"

"Happened?" I repeated dully. "Why, yes, how in the name of the infernal powers did this thing happen?"

Indeed, on thinking it out, it seemed incomprehensible that it should just be like this: the bottles emptied, refilled, rewrapped, and replaced. A sort of plot, a sinister attempt to deceive, a thing resembling sly vengeance, but for what? Or else a fiendish joke. But Mr. Burns was in possession of a theory. It was simple, and he uttered it solemnly in a hollow voice.

"I suppose they have given him about fifteen pounds in Haiphong for that little lot."

"Mr. Burns!" I cried.

He nodded grotesquely over his raised legs, like two broomsticks in the pyjamas, with enormous bare feet at the end.

"Why not? The stuff is pretty expensive in this part of the world, and they were very short of it in Tonkin. And what did he care? You have not known him. I have,

and I have defied him. He feared neither God, nor devil, nor man, nor wind, nor sea, nor his own conscience. And I believe he hated everybody and everything. But I think he was afraid to die. I believe I am the only man who ever stood up to him. I faced him in that cabin where you live now, when he was sick, and I cowed him then. He thought I was going to twist his neck for him. If he had had his way we would have been beating up against the Nord-East monsoon, as long as he lived and afterward, too, for ages and ages. Acting the Flying Dutchman in the China Sea! Ha! Ha!"

"But why should he replace the bottles like this?" . . . I began.

"Why shouldn't he? Why should he want to throw the bottles away? They fit the drawer. They belong to the medicine chest."

"And they were wrapped up," I cried.

"Well, the wrappers were there. Did it from habit, I suppose, and as to refilling, there is always a lot of stuff they send in paper parcels that burst after a time. And then, who can tell? I suppose you didn't taste it, sir? But, of course, you are sure. . . ."

"No," I said. "I didn't taste it. It is all overboard now."

Behind me, a soft, cultivated voice said: "I have tasted it. It seemed a mixture of all sorts, sweetish, saltish, very horrible."

Ransome, stepping out of the pantry, had been listening for some time, as it was very excusable in him to do.

"A dirty trick," said Mr. Burns. "I always said he would."

The magnitude of my indignation was unbounded. And the kind, sympathetic doctor, too. The only sympathetic man I ever knew . . . instead of writing that warning letter, the very refinement of sympathy, why didn't the man make a proper inspection? But, as a matter of fact, it was hardly fair to blame the doctor. The fittings were in order and the medicine chest is an officially arranged affair. There was nothing really to arouse the slightest suspicion. The person I could never forgive was myself. Nothing should ever be taken for granted. The seed of everlasting remorse was sown in my breast.

"I feel it's all my fault," I exclaimed, "mine and nobody else's. That's how I feel. I shall never forgive myself."

"That's very foolish, sir," said Mr. Burns fiercely.

And after this effort he fell back exhausted on his bed. He closed his eyes, he panted; this affair, this abominable surprise had shaken him up, too. As I turned away I perceived Ransome looking at me blankly. He appreciated what it meant, but managed to produce his pleasant, wistful smile. Then he stepped back into his pantry, and I rushed up on deck again to see whether there was any wind, any breath under the sky, any stir of the air, any sign of hope. The deadly stillness met me again. Nothing was changed except that there was a different man at the wheel. He looked ill. His whole figure drooped, and he seemed rather to cling to the spokes than hold them with a controlling grip. I said to him:

"You are not fit to be here."

"I can manage, sir," he said feebly.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing for him to do. The ship had no steerage way. She lay with her head to the westward, the everlasting Koh-ring visible over the stern, with a few small islets, black spots in the great blaze, swimming before my troubled eyes. And but for those bits of land there was no speck on the sky, no speck on the water, no shape of vapour, no wisp of smoke, no sail, no boat, no stir of humanity, no sign of life, nothing!

The first question was, what to do? What could one do? The first thing to do obviously was to tell the men. I did it that very day. I wasn't going to let the knowledge simply get about. I would face them. They were assembled on the quarterdeck for the purpose. Just before I stepped out to speak to them I discovered that life could hold terrible moments. No confessed criminal had ever been so oppressed by his sense of guilt. This is why, perhaps, my face was set hard and my voice curt and unemotional while I made my declaration that I could do nothing more for the sick in the way of drugs. As to such care as could be given them they knew they had had it.

I would have held them justified in tearing me limb from limb. The silence which followed upon my words was almost harder to bear than the angriest uproar. I was crushed by the infinite depth of its reproach. But, as a matter of fact, I was mistaken. In a voice which I had great difficulty in keeping firm, I went on: "I suppose, men, you have understood what I said, and you know what it means."

A voice or two were heard: "Yes, sir. . . . We understand."

They had kept silent simply because they thought that they were not called to say anything; and when I told them that I intended to run into Singapore and that the best chance for the ship and the men was in the efforts all of us, sick and well, must make to get her along out of this, I received the encouragement of a low assenting murmur and of a louder voice exclaiming: "Surely there is a way out of this blamed hole."

Here is an extract from the notes I wrote at the time.

"We have lost Koh-ring at last. For many days now I don't think I have been two hours below altogether. I remain on deck, of course, night and day, and the nights and the days wheel over us in succession, whether long or short, who can say? All sense of time is lost in the monotony of expectation, of hope, and of desire — which is only one: Get the ship to the southward! Get the ship to the southward! The effect is curiously mechanical; the sun climbs and descends, the night swings over our heads as if somebody below the horizon were turning a crank. It is the prettiest, the most aimless! . . . and all through that miserable performance I go on, tramping, tramping the deck. How many miles have I walked on the poop of that ship! A stubborn pilgrimage of sheer restlessness, diversified by short excursions below to look upon Mr. Burns. I don't know whether it is an illusion, but he seems to become more substantial from day to day. He doesn't say much, for, indeed, the situation doesn't lend itself to idle remarks. I notice this even with the men as I watch them moving or sitting about the decks. They don't talk to each other. It strikes me that if there exists an invisible ear catching the whispers of the earth, it will find this ship the most silent spot on it. . . ."

“No, Mr. Burns has not much to say to me. He sits in his bunk with his beard gone, his moustaches flaming, and with an air of silent determination on his chalky physiognomy. Ransome tells me he devours all the food that is given him to the last scrap, but that, apparently, he sleeps very little. Even at night, when I go below to fill my pipe, I notice that, though dozing flat on his back, he still looks very determined. From the side glance he gives me when awake it seems as though he were annoyed at being interrupted in some arduous mental operation; and as I emerge on deck the ordered arrangement of the stars meets my eye, unclouded, infinitely wearisome. There they are: stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space, great waters; the formidable Work of the Seven Days, into which mankind seems to have blundered unbidden. Or else decoyed. Even as I have been decoyed into this awful, this death-haunted command. . . .”

The only spot of light in the ship at night was that of the compass-lamps, lighting up the faces of the succeeding helmsmen; for the rest we were lost in the darkness, I walking the poop and the men lying about the decks. They were all so reduced by sickness that no watches could be kept. Those who were able to walk remained all the time on duty, lying about in the shadows of the main deck, till my voice raised for an order would bring them to their enfeebled feet, a tottering little group, moving patiently about the ship, with hardly a murmur, a whisper amongst them all. And every time I had to raise my voice it was with a pang of remorse and pity.

Then about four o'clock in the morning a light would gleam forward in the galley. The unfailing Ransome with the uneasy heart, immune, serene, and active, was getting ready for the early coffee for the men. Presently he would bring me a cup up on the poop, and it was then that I allowed myself to drop into my deck chair for a couple of hours of real sleep. No doubt I must have been snatching short dozes when leaning against the rail for a moment in sheer exhaustion; but, honestly, I was not aware of them, except in the painful form of convulsive starts that seemed to come on me even while I walked. From about five, however, until after seven I would sleep openly under the fading stars.

I would say to the helmsman: “Call me at need,” and drop into that chair and close my eyes, feeling that there was no more sleep for me on earth. And then I would know nothing till, some time between seven and eight, I would feel a touch on my shoulder and look up at Ransome’s face, with its faint, wistful smile and friendly, gray eyes, as though he were tenderly amused at my slumbers. Occasionally the second mate would come up and relieve me at early coffee time. But it didn’t really matter. Generally it was a dead calm, or else faint airs so changing and fugitive that it really wasn’t worth while to touch a brace for them. If the air steadied at all the seaman at the helm could be trusted for a warning shout: “Ship’s all aback, sir!” which like a trumpet-call would make me spring a foot above the deck. Those were the words which it seemed to me would have made me spring up from eternal sleep. But this was not often. I have never met since such breathless sunrises. And if the second mate happened to be there (he had generally one day in three free of fever) I would find him sitting on the skylight

half senseless, as it were, and with an idiotic gaze fastened on some object near by — a rope, a cleat, a belaying pin, a ringbolt.

That young man was rather troublesome. He remained cubbish in his sufferings. He seemed to have become completely imbecile; and when the return of fever drove him to his cabin below, the next thing would be that we would miss him from there. The first time it happened Ransome and I were very much alarmed. We started a quiet search and ultimately Ransome discovered him curled up in the sail-locker, which opened into the lobby by a sliding door. When remonstrated with, he muttered sulkily, "It's cool in there." That wasn't true. It was only dark there.

The fundamental defects of his face were not improved by its uniform livid hue. The disease disclosed its low type in a startling way. It was not so with many of the men. The wastage of ill-health seemed to idealise the general character of the features, bringing out the unsuspected nobility of some, the strength of others, and in one case revealing an essentially comic aspect. He was a short, gingery, active man with a nose and chin of the Punch type, and whom his shipmates called "Frenchy." I don't know why. He may have been a Frenchman, but I have never heard him utter a single word in French.

To see him coming aft to the wheel comforted one. The blue dungaree trousers turned up the calf, one leg a little higher than the other, the clean check shirt, the white canvas cap, evidently made by himself, made up a whole of peculiar smartness, and the persistent jauntiness of his gait, even, poor fellow, when he couldn't help tottering, told of his invincible spirit. There was also a man called Gambril. He was the only grizzled person in the ship. His face was of an austere type. But if I remember all their faces, wasting tragically before my eyes, most of their names have vanished from my memory.

The words that passed between us were few and puerile in regard of the situation. I had to force myself to look them in the face. I expected to meet reproachful glances. There were none. The expression of suffering in their eyes was indeed hard enough to bear. But that they couldn't help. For the rest, I ask myself whether it was the temper of their souls or the sympathy of their imagination that made them so wonderful, so worthy of my undying regard.

For myself, neither my soul was highly tempered, nor my imagination properly under control. There were moments when I felt, not only that I would go mad, but that I had gone mad already; so that I dared not open my lips for fear of betraying myself by some insane shriek. Luckily I had only orders to give, and an order has a steadying influence upon him who has to give it. Moreover, the seaman, the officer of the watch, in me was sufficiently sane. I was like a mad carpenter making a box. Were he ever so convinced that he was King of Jerusalem, the box he would make would be a sane box. What I feared was a shrill note escaping me involuntarily and upsetting my balance. Luckily, again, there was no necessity to raise one's voice. The brooding stillness of the world seemed sensitive to the slightest sound, like a whispering gallery. The conversational tone would almost carry a word from one end of the ship to the

other. The terrible thing was that the only voice that I ever heard was my own. At night especially it reverberated very lonely amongst the planes of the unstirring sails.

Mr. Burns, still keeping to his bed with that air of secret determination, was moved to grumble at many things. Our interviews were short five-minute affairs, but fairly frequent. I was everlastingly diving down below to get a light, though I did not consume much tobacco at that time. The pipe was always going out; for in truth my mind was not composed enough to enable me to get a decent smoke. Likewise, for most of the time during the twenty-four hours I could have struck matches on deck and held them aloft till the flame burnt my fingers. But I always used to run below. It was a change. It was the only break in the incessant strain; and, of course, Mr. Burns through the open door could see me come in and go out every time.

With his knees gathered up under his chin and staring with his greenish eyes over them, he was a weird figure, and with my knowledge of the crazy notion in his head, not a very attractive one for me. Still, I had to speak to him now and then, and one day he complained that the ship was very silent. For hours and hours, he said, he was lying there, not hearing a sound, till he did not know what to do with himself.

“When Ransome happens to be forward in his galley everything’s so still that one might think everybody in the ship was dead,” he grumbled. “The only voice I do hear sometimes is yours, sir, and that isn’t enough to cheer me up. What’s the matter with the men? Isn’t there one left that can sing out at the ropes?”

“Not one, Mr. Burns,” I said. “There is no breath to spare on board this ship for that. Are you aware that there are times when I can’t muster more than three hands to do anything?”

He asked swiftly but fearfully:

“Nobody dead yet, sir?”

“No.”

“It wouldn’t do,” Mr. Burns declared forcibly. “Mustn’t let him. If he gets hold of one he will get them all.”

I cried out angrily at this. I believe I even swore at the disturbing effect of these words. They attacked all the self-possession that was left to me. In my endless vigil in the face of the enemy I had been haunted by gruesome images enough. I had had visions of a ship drifting in calms and swinging in light airs, with all her crew dying slowly about her decks. Such things had been known to happen.

Mr. Burns met my outburst by a mysterious silence.

“Look here,” I said. “You don’t believe yourself what you say. You can’t. It’s impossible. It isn’t the sort of thing I have a right to expect from you. My position’s bad enough without being worried with your silly fancies.”

He remained unmoved. On account of the way in which the light fell on his head I could not be sure whether he had smiled faintly or not. I changed my tone.

“Listen,” I said. “It’s getting so desperate that I had thought for a moment, since we can’t make our way south, whether I wouldn’t try to steer west and make an attempt

to reach the mailboat track. We could always get some quinine from her, at least. What do you think?"

He cried out: "No, no, no. Don't do that, sir. You mustn't for a moment give up facing that old ruffian. If you do he will get the upper hand of us."

I left him. He was impossible. It was like a case of possession. His protest, however, was essentially quite sound. As a matter of fact, my notion of heading out west on the chance of sighting a problematical steamer could not bear calm examination. On the side where we were we had enough wind, at least from time to time, to struggle on toward the south. Enough, at least, to keep hope alive. But suppose that I had used those capricious gusts of wind to sail away to the westward, into some region where there was not a breath of air for days on end, what then? Perhaps my appalling vision of a ship floating with a dead crew would become a reality for the discovery weeks afterward by some horror-stricken mariners.

That afternoon Ransome brought me up a cup of tea, and while waiting there, tray in hand, he remarked in the exactly right tone of sympathy:

"You are holding out well, sir."

"Yes," I said. "You and I seem to have been forgotten."

"Forgotten, sir?"

"Yes, by the fever-devil who has got on board this ship," I said.

Ransome gave me one of his attractive, intelligent, quick glances and went away with the tray. It occurred to me that I had been talking somewhat in Mr. Burns' manner. It annoyed me. Yet often in darker moments I forgot myself into an attitude toward our troubles more fit for a contest against a living enemy.

Yes. The fever-devil had not laid his hand yet either on Ransome or on me. But he might at any time. It was one of those thoughts one had to fight down, keep at arm's length at any cost. It was unbearable to contemplate the possibility of Ransome, the housekeeper of the ship, being laid low. And what would happen to my command if I got knocked over, with Mr. Burns too weak to stand without holding on to his bed-place and the second mate reduced to a state of permanent imbecility? It was impossible to imagine, or rather, it was only too easy to imagine.

I was alone on the poop. The ship having no steerage way, I had sent the helmsman away to sit down or lie down somewhere in the shade. The men's strength was so reduced that all unnecessary calls on it had to be avoided. It was the austere Gambрил with the grizzly beard. He went away readily enough, but he was so weakened by repeated bouts of fever, poor fellow, that in order to get down the poop ladder he had to turn sideways and hang on with both hands to the brass rail. It was just simply heart-breaking to watch. Yet he was neither very much worse nor much better than most of the half-dozen miserable victims I could muster up on deck.

It was a terribly lifeless afternoon. For several days in succession low clouds had appeared in the distance, white masses with dark convolutions resting on the water, motionless, almost solid, and yet all the time changing their aspects subtly. Toward evening they vanished as a rule. But this day they awaited the setting sun, which

glowed and smouldered sulkily amongst them before it sank down. The punctual and wearisome stars reappeared over our mastheads, but the air remained stagnant and oppressive.

The unfailing Ransome lighted the binnaclelamps and glided, all shadowy, up to me.

“Will you go down and try to eat something, sir?” he suggested.

His low voice startled me. I had been standing looking out over the rail, saying nothing, feeling nothing, not even the weariness of my limbs, overcome by the evil spell.

“Ransome,” I asked abruptly, “how long have I been on deck? I am losing the notion of time.”

“Twelve days, sir,” he said, “and it’s just a fortnight since we left the anchorage.”

His equable voice sounded mournful somehow. He waited a bit, then added: “It’s the first time that it looks as if we were to have some rain.”

I noticed then the broad shadow on the horizon, extinguishing the low stars completely, while those overhead, when I looked up, seemed to shine down on us through a veil of smoke.

How it got there, how it had crept up so high, I couldn’t say. It had an ominous appearance. The air did not stir. At a renewed invitation from Ransome I did go down into the cabin to — in his own words — “try and eat something.” I don’t know that the trial was very successful. I suppose at that period I did exist on food in the usual way; but the memory is now that in those days life was sustained on invincible anguish, as a sort of infernal stimulant exciting and consuming at the same time.

It’s the only period of my life in which I attempted to keep a diary. No, not the only one. Years later, in conditions of moral isolation, I did put down on paper the thoughts and events of a score of days. But this was the first time. I don’t remember how it came about or how the pocketbook and the pencil came into my hands. It’s inconceivable that I should have looked for them on purpose. I suppose they saved me from the crazy trick of talking to myself.

Strangely enough, in both cases I took to that sort of thing in circumstances in which I did not expect, in colloquial phrase, “to come out of it.” Neither could I expect the record to outlast me. This shows that it was purely a personal need for intimate relief and not a call of egotism.

Here I must give another sample of it, a few detached lines, now looking very ghostly to my own eyes, out of the part scribbled that very evening:

“There is something going on in the sky like a decomposition; like a corruption of the air, which remains as still as ever. After all, mere clouds, which may or may not hold wind or rain. Strange that it should trouble me so. I feel as if all my sins had found me out. But I suppose the trouble is that the ship is still lying motionless, not under command; and that I have nothing to do to keep my imagination from running wild amongst the disastrous images of the worst that may befall us. What’s going to happen? Probably nothing. Or anything. It may be a furious squall coming, butt end

foremost. And on deck there are five men with the vitality and the strength of, say, two. We may have all our sails blown away. Every stitch of canvas has been on her since we broke ground at the mouth of the Mei-nam, fifteen days ago . . . or fifteen centuries. It seems to me that all my life before that momentous day is infinitely remote, a fading memory of light-hearted youth, something on the other side of a shadow. Yes, sails may very well be blown away. And that would be like a death sentence on the men. We haven't strength enough on board to bend another suit; incredible thought, but it is true. Or we may even get dismasted. Ships have been dismasted in squalls simply because they weren't handled quick enough, and we have no power to whirl the yards around. It's like being bound hand and foot preparatory to having one's throat cut. And what appals me most of all is that I shrink from going on deck to face it. It's due to the ship, it's due to the men who are there on deck — some of them, ready to put out the last remnant of their strength at a word from me. And I am shrinking from it. From the mere vision. My first command. Now I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good. And here is proof positive. I am shirking it. I am no good."

At that moment, or, perhaps, the moment after, I became aware of Ransome standing in the cabin. Something in his expression startled me. It had a meaning which I could not make out. I exclaimed: "Somebody's dead."

It was his turn then to look startled.

"Dead? Not that I know of, sir. I have been in the forecabin only ten minutes ago and there was no dead man there then."

"You did give me a scare," I said.

His voice was extremely pleasant to listen to. He explained that he had come down below to close Mr. Burns' port in case it should come on to rain. "He did not know that I was in the cabin," he added.

"How does it look outside?" I asked him.

"Very black, indeed, sir. There is something in it for certain."

"In what quarter?"

"All round, sir."

I repeated idly: "All round. For certain," with my elbows on the table.

Ransome lingered in the cabin as if he had something to do there, but hesitated about doing it. I said suddenly:

"You think I ought to be on deck?"

He answered at once but without any particular emphasis or accent: "I do, sir."

I got to my feet briskly, and he made way for me to go out. As I passed through the lobby I heard Mr. Burns' voice saying:

"Shut the door of my room, will you, steward?" And Ransome's rather surprised: "Certainly, sir."

I thought that all my feelings had been dulled into complete indifference. But I found it as trying as ever to be on deck. The impenetrable blackness beset the ship so close that it seemed that by thrusting one's hand over the side one could touch

some unearthly substance. There was in it an effect of inconceivable terror and of inexpressible mystery. The few stars overhead shed a dim light upon the ship alone, with no gleams of any kind upon the water, in detached shafts piercing an atmosphere which had turned to soot. It was something I had never seen before, giving no hint of the direction from which any change would come, the closing in of a menace from all sides.

There was still no man at the helm. The immobility of all things was perfect. If the air had turned black, the sea, for all I knew, might have turned solid. It was no good looking in any direction, watching for any sign, speculating upon the nearness of the moment. When the time came the blackness would overwhelm silently the bit of starlight falling upon the ship, and the end of all things would come without a sigh, stir, or murmur of any kind, and all our hearts would cease to beat like run-down clocks.

It was impossible to shake off that sense of finality. The quietness that came over me was like a foretaste of annihilation. It gave me a sort of comfort, as though my soul had become suddenly reconciled to an eternity of blind stillness.

The seaman's instinct alone survived whole in my moral dissolution. I descended the ladder to the quarter-deck. The starlight seemed to die out before reaching that spot, but when I asked quietly: "Are you there, men?" my eyes made out shadow forms starting up around me, very few, very indistinct; and a voice spoke: "All here, sir." Another amended anxiously:

"All that are any good for anything, sir."

Both voices were very quiet and unringing; without any special character of readiness or discouragement. Very matter-of-fact voices.

"We must try to haul this mainsail close up," I said.

The shadows swayed away from me without a word. Those men were the ghosts of themselves, and their weight on a rope could be no more than the weight of a bunch of ghosts. Indeed, if ever a sail was hauled up by sheer spiritual strength it must have been that sail, for, properly speaking, there was not muscle enough for the task in the whole ship let alone the miserable lot of us on deck. Of course, I took the lead in the work myself. They wandered feebly after me from rope to rope, stumbling and panting. They toiled like Titans. We were half-an-hour at it at least, and all the time the black universe made no sound. When the last leech-line was made fast, my eyes, accustomed to the darkness, made out the shapes of exhausted men drooping over the rails, collapsed on hatches. One hung over the after-capstan, sobbing for breath, and I stood amongst them like a tower of strength, impervious to disease and feeling only the sickness of my soul. I waited for some time fighting against the weight of my sins, against my sense of unworthiness, and then I said:

"Now, men, we'll go aft and square the mainyard. That's about all we can do for the ship; and for the rest she must take her chance."

Chapter 6

As we all went up it occurred to me that there ought to be a man at the helm. I raised my voice not much above a whisper, and, noiselessly, an uncomplaining spirit in a fever-wasted body appeared in the light aft, the head with hollow eyes illuminated against the blackness which had swallowed up our world — and the universe. The bared forearm extended over the upper spokes seemed to shine with a light of its own.

I murmured to that luminous appearance:

“Keep the helm right amidships.”

It answered in a tone of patient suffering:

“Right amidships, sir.”

Then I descended to the quarter-deck. It was impossible to tell whence the blow would come. To look round the ship was to look into a bottomless, black pit. The eye lost itself in inconceivable depths.

I wanted to ascertain whether the ropes had been picked up off the deck. One could only do that by feeling with one’s feet. In my cautious progress I came against a man in whom I recognized Ransome. He possessed an unimpaired physical solidity which was manifest to me at the contact. He was leaning against the quarter-deck capstan and kept silent. It was like a revelation. He was the collapsed figure sobbing for breath I had noticed before we went on the poop.

“You have been helping with the mainsail!” I exclaimed in a low tone.

“Yes, sir,” sounded his quiet voice.

“Man! What were you thinking of? You mustn’t do that sort of thing.”

After a pause he assented: “I suppose I mustn’t.” Then after another short silence he added: “I am all right now,” quickly, between the tell-tale gasps.

I could neither hear nor see anybody else; but when I spoke up, answering sad murmurs filled the quarter-deck, and its shadows seemed to shift here and there. I ordered all the halyards laid down on deck clear for running.

“I’ll see to that, sir,” volunteered Ransome in his natural, pleasant tone, which comforted one and aroused one’s compassion, too, somehow.

That man ought to have been in his bed, resting, and my plain duty was to send him there. But perhaps he would not have obeyed me; I had not the strength of mind to try. All I said was:

“Go about it quietly, Ransome.”

Returning on the poop I approached Gambriel. His face, set with hollow shadows in the light, looked awful, finally silenced. I asked him how he felt, but hardly expected an answer. Therefore, I was astonished at his comparative loquacity.

“Them shakes leaves me as weak as a kitten, sir,” he said, preserving finely that air of unconsciousness as to anything but his business a helmsman should never lose. “And before I can pick up my strength that there hot fit comes along and knocks me over again.”

He sighed. There was no reproach in his tone, but the bare words were enough to give me a horrible pang of self-reproach. It held me dumb for a time. When the tormenting sensation had passed off I asked:

“Do you feel strong enough to prevent the rudder taking charge if she gets sternway on her? It wouldn’t do to get something smashed about the steering-gear now. We’ve enough difficulties to cope with as it is.”

He answered with just a shade of weariness that he was strong enough to hang on. He could promise me that she shouldn’t take the wheel out of his hands. More he couldn’t say.

At that moment Ransome appeared quite close to me, stepping out of the darkness into visibility suddenly, as if just created with his composed face and pleasant voice.

Every rope on deck, he said, was laid down clear for running, as far as one could make certain by feeling. It was impossible to see anything. Frenchy had stationed himself forward. He said he had a jump or two left in him yet.

Here a faint smile altered for an instant the clear, firm design of Ransome’s lips. With his serious clear, gray eyes, his serene temperament — he was a priceless man altogether. Soul as firm as the muscles of his body.

He was the only man on board (except me, but I had to preserve my liberty of movement) who had a sufficiency of muscular strength to trust to. For a moment I thought I had better ask him to take the wheel. But the dreadful knowledge of the enemy he had to carry about him made me hesitate. In my ignorance of physiology it occurred to me that he might die suddenly, from excitement, at a critical moment.

While this gruesome fear restrained the ready words on the tip of my tongue, Ransome stepped back two paces and vanished from my sight.

At once an uneasiness possessed me, as if some support had been withdrawn. I moved forward, too, outside the circle of light, into the darkness that stood in front of me like a wall. In one stride I penetrated it. Such must have been the darkness before creation. It had closed behind me. I knew I was invisible to the man at the helm. Neither could I see anything. He was alone, I was alone, every man was alone where he stood. And every form was gone too, spar, sail, fittings, rails; everything was blotted out in the dreadful smoothness of that absolute night.

A flash of lightning would have been a relief — I mean physically. I would have prayed for it if it hadn’t been for my shrinking apprehension of the thunder. In the tension of silence I was suffering from it seemed to me that the first crash must turn me into dust.

And thunder was, most likely, what would happen next. Stiff all over and hardly breathing, I waited with a horribly strained expectation. Nothing happened. It was maddening, but a dull, growing ache in the lower part of my face made me aware that I had been grinding my teeth madly enough, for God knows how long.

It’s extraordinary I should not have heard myself doing it; but I hadn’t. By an effort which absorbed all my faculties I managed to keep my jaw still. It required much attention, and while thus engaged I became bothered by curious, irregular sounds of

faint tapping on the deck. They could be heard single, in pairs, in groups. While I wondered at this mysterious devilry, I received a slight blow under the left eye and felt an enormous tear run down my cheek. Raindrops. Enormous. Forerunners of something. Tap. Tap. Tap. . . .

I turned about, and, addressing Gambrel earnestly, entreated him to “hang on to the wheel.” But I could hardly speak from emotion. The fatal moment had come. I held my breath. The tapping had stopped as unexpectedly as it had begun, and there was a renewed moment of intolerable suspense; something like an additional turn of the racking screw. I don’t suppose I would have ever screamed, but I remember my conviction that there was nothing else for it but to scream.

Suddenly — how am I to convey it? Well, suddenly the darkness turned into water. This is the only suitable figure. A heavy shower, a downpour, comes along, making a noise. You hear its approach on the sea, in the air, too, I verily believe. But this was different. With no preliminary whisper or rustle, without a splash, and even without the ghost of impact, I became instantaneously soaked to the skin. Not a very difficult matter, since I was wearing only my sleeping suit. My hair got full of water in an instant, water streamed on my skin, it filled my nose, my ears, my eyes. In a fraction of a second I swallowed quite a lot of it.

As to Gambrel, he was fairly choked. He coughed pitifully, the broken cough of a sick man; and I beheld him as one sees a fish in an aquarium by the light of an electric bulb, an elusive, phosphorescent shape. Only he did not glide away. But something else happened. Both binnaclelamps went out. I suppose the water forced itself into them, though I wouldn’t have thought that possible, for they fitted into the cowl perfectly.

The last gleam of light in the universe had gone, pursued by a low exclamation of dismay from Gambrel. I groped for him and seized his arm. How startlingly wasted it was.

“Never mind,” I said. “You don’t want the light. All you need to do is to keep the wind, when it comes, at the back of your head. You understand?”

“Aye, aye, sir. . . . But I should like to have a light,” he added nervously.

All that time the ship lay as steady as a rock. The noise of the water pouring off the sails and spars, flowing over the break of the poop, had stopped short. The poop scuppers gurgled and sobbed for a little while longer, and then perfect silence, joined to perfect immobility, proclaimed the yet unbroken spell of our helplessness, poised on the edge of some violent issue, lurking in the dark.

I started forward restlessly. I did not need my sight to pace the poop of my ill-starred first command with perfect assurance. Every square foot of her decks was impressed indelibly on my brain, to the very grain and knots of the planks. Yet, all of a sudden, I fell clean over something, landing full length on my hands and face.

It was something big and alive. Not a dog — more like a sheep, rather. But there were no animals in the ship. How could an animal. . . . It was an added and fantastic horror which I could not resist. The hair of my head stirred even as I picked myself up,

awfully scared; not as a man is scared while his judgment, his reason still try to resist, but completely, boundlessly, and, as it were, innocently scared — like a little child.

I could see It — that Thing! The darkness, of which so much had just turned into water, had thinned down a little. There It was! But I did not hit upon the notion of Mr. Burns issuing out of the companion on all fours till he attempted to stand up, and even then the idea of a bear crossed my mind first.

He growled like one when I seized him round the body. He had buttoned himself up into an enormous winter overcoat of some woolly material, the weight of which was too much for his reduced state. I could hardly feel the incredibly thin lath of his body, lost within the thick stuff, but his growl had depth and substance: Confounded dump ship with a craven, tiptoeing crowd. Why couldn't they stamp and go with a brace? Wasn't there one Godforsaken lubber in the lot fit to raise a yell on a rope?

"Skulking's no good, sir," he attacked me directly. "You can't slink past the old murderous ruffian. It isn't the way. You must go for him boldly — as I did. Boldness is what you want. Show him that you don't care for any of his damned tricks. Kick up a jolly old row."

"Good God, Mr. Burns," I said angrily. "What on earth are you up to? What do you mean by coming up on deck in this state?"

"Just that! Boldness. The only way to scare the old bullying rascal."

I pushed him, still growling, against the rail. "Hold on to it," I said roughly. I did not know what to do with him. I left him in a hurry, to go to Gambril, who had called faintly that he believed there was some wind aloft. Indeed, my own ears had caught a feeble flutter of wet canvas, high up overhead, the jingle of a slack chain sheet. . . .

These were eerie, disturbing, alarming sounds in the dead stillness of the air around me. All the instances I had heard of topmasts being whipped out of a ship while there was not wind enough on her deck to blow out a match rushed into my memory.

"I can't see the upper sails, sir," declared Gambril shakily.

"Don't move the helm. You'll be all right," I said confidently.

The poor man's nerves were gone. Mine were not in much better case. It was the moment of breaking strain and was relieved by the abrupt sensation of the ship moving forward as if of herself under my feet. I heard plainly the sougning of the wind aloft, the low cracks of the upper spars taking the strain, long before I could feel the least draught on my face turned aft, anxious and sightless like the face of a blind man.

Suddenly a louder-sounding note filled our ears, the darkness started streaming against our bodies, chilling them exceedingly. Both of us, Gambril and I, shivered violently in our clinging, soaked garments of thin cotton. I said to him:

"You are all right now, my man. All you've got to do is to keep the wind at the back of your head. Surely you are up to that. A child could steer this ship in smooth water."

He muttered: "Aye! A healthy child." And I felt ashamed of having been passed over by the fever which had been preying on every man's strength but mine, in order that

my remorse might be the more bitter, the feeling of unworthiness more poignant, and the sense of responsibility heavier to bear.

The ship had gathered great way on her almost at once on the calm water. I felt her slipping through it with no other noise but a mysterious rustle alongside. Otherwise, she had no motion at all, neither lift nor roll. It was a disheartening steadiness which had lasted for eighteen days now; for never, never had we had wind enough in that time to raise the slightest run of the sea. The breeze freshened suddenly. I thought it was high time to get Mr. Burns off the deck. He worried me. I looked upon him as a lunatic who would be very likely to start roaming over the ship and break a limb or fall overboard.

I was truly glad to find he had remained holding on where I had left him, sensibly enough. He was, however, muttering to himself ominously.

This was discouraging. I remarked in a matter-of-fact tone:

“We have never had so much wind as this since we left the roads.”

“There’s some heart in it, too,” he growled judiciously. It was a remark of a perfectly sane seaman. But he added immediately: “It was about time I should come on deck. I’ve been nursing my strength for this — just for this. Do you see it, sir?”

I said I did, and proceeded to hint that it would be advisable for him to go below now and take a rest.

His answer was an indignant “Go below! Not if I know it, sir.”

Very cheerful! He was a horrible nuisance. And all at once he started to argue. I could feel his crazy excitement in the dark.

“You don’t know how to go about it, sir. How could you? All this whispering and tiptoeing is no good. You can’t hope to slink past a cunning, wide-awake, evil brute like he was. You never heard him talk. Enough to make your hair stand on end. No! No! He wasn’t mad. He was no more mad than I am. He was just downright wicked. Wicked so as to frighten most people. I will tell you what he was. He was nothing less than a thief and a murderer at heart. And do you think he’s any different now because he’s dead? Not he! His carcass lies a hundred fathom under, but he’s just the same . . . in latitude 8 d 20’ north.”

He snorted defiantly. I noted with weary resignation that the breeze had got lighter while he raved. He was at it again.

“I ought to have thrown the beggar out of the ship over the rail like a dog. It was only on account of the men. . . . Fancy having to read the Burial Service over a brute like that! . . . ‘Our departed brother’ . . . I could have laughed. That was what he couldn’t bear. I suppose I am the only man that ever stood up to laugh at him. When he got sick it used to scare that . . . brother. . . . Brother. . . . Departed. . . . Sooner call a shark brother.”

The breeze had let go so suddenly that the way of the ship brought the wet sails heavily against the mast. The spell of deadly stillness had caught us up again. There seemed to be no escape.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Mr. Burns in a startled voice. “Calm again!”

I addressed him as though he had been sane.

“This is the sort of thing we’ve been having for seventeen days, Mr. Burns,” I said with intense bitterness. “A puff, then a calm, and in a moment, you’ll see, she’ll be swinging on her heel with her head away from her course to the devil somewhere.”

He caught at the word. “The old dodging Devil,” he screamed piercingly and burst into such a loud laugh as I had never heard before. It was a provoking, mocking peal, with a hair-raising, screeching over-note of defiance. I stepped back, utterly confounded.

Instantly there was a stir on the quarter-deck; murmurs of dismay. A distressed voice cried out in the dark below us: “Who’s that gone crazy, now?”

Perhaps they thought it was their captain? Rush is not the word that could be applied to the utmost speed the poor fellows were up to; but in an amazing short time every man in the ship able to walk upright had found his way on to that poop.

I shouted to them: “It’s the mate. Lay hold of him a couple of you. . . .”

I expected this performance to end in a ghastly sort of fight. But Mr. Burns cut his derisive screeching dead short and turned upon them fiercely, yelling:

“Aha! Dog-gone ye! You’ve found your tongues — have ye? I thought you were dumb. Well, then — laugh! Laugh — I tell you. Now then — all together. One, two, three — laugh!”

A moment of silence ensued, of silence so profound that you could have heard a pin drop on the deck. Then Ransome’s unperturbed voice uttered pleasantly the words:

“I think he has fainted, sir — ” The little motionless knot of men stirred, with low murmurs of relief. “I’ve got him under the arms. Get hold of his legs, some one.”

Yes. It was a relief. He was silenced for a time — for a time. I could not have stood another peal of that insane screeching. I was sure of it; and just then Gambril, the austere Gambril, treated us to another vocal performance. He began to sing out for relief. His voice wailed pitifully in the darkness: “Come aft somebody! I can’t stand this. Here she’ll be off again directly and I can’t. . . .”

I dashed aft myself meeting on my way a hard gust of wind whose approach Gambril’s ear had detected from afar and which filled the sails on the main in a series of muffled reports mingled with the low plaint of the spars. I was just in time to seize the wheel while Frenchy who had followed me caught up the collapsing Gambril. He hauled him out of the way, admonished him to lie still where he was, and then stepped up to relieve me, asking calmly:

“How am I to steer her, sir?”

“Dead before it for the present. I’ll get you a light in a moment.”

But going forward I met Ransome bringing up the spare binnacle lamp. That man noticed everything, attended to everything, shed comfort around him as he moved. As he passed me he remarked in a soothing tone that the stars were coming out. They were. The breeze was sweeping clear the sooty sky, breaking through the indolent silence of the sea.

The barrier of awful stillness which had encompassed us for so many days as though we had been accursed, was broken. I felt that. I let myself fall on to the skylight seat.

A faint white ridge of foam, thin, very thin, broke alongside. The first for ages — for ages. I could have cheered, if it hadn't been for the sense of guilt which clung to all my thoughts secretly. Ransome stood before me.

"What about the mate," I asked anxiously. "Still unconscious?"

"Well, sir — it's funny," Ransome was evidently puzzled. "He hasn't spoken a word, and his eyes are shut. But it looks to me more like sound sleep than anything else."

I accepted this view as the least troublesome of any, or at any rate, least disturbing. Dead faint or deep slumber, Mr. Burns had to be left to himself for the present. Ransome remarked suddenly:

"I believe you want a coat, sir."

"I believe I do," I sighed out.

But I did not move. What I felt I wanted were new limbs. My arms and legs seemed utterly useless, fairly worn out. They didn't even ache. But I stood up all the same to put on the coat when Ransome brought it up. And when he suggested that he had better now "take Gambril forward," I said:

"All right. I'll help you to get him down on the main deck."

I found that I was quite able to help, too. We raised Gambril up between us. He tried to help himself along like a man but all the time he was inquiring piteously:

"You won't let me go when we come to the ladder? You won't let me go when we come to the ladder?"

The breeze kept on freshening and blew true, true to a hair. At daylight by careful manipulation of the helm we got the foreyards to run square by themselves (the water keeping smooth) and then went about hauling the ropes tight. Of the four men I had with me at night, I could see now only two. I didn't inquire as to the others. They had given in. For a time only I hoped.

Our various tasks forward occupied us for hours, the two men with me moved so slow and had to rest so often. One of them remarked that "every blamed thing in the ship felt about a hundred times heavier than its proper weight." This was the only complaint uttered. I don't know what we should have done without Ransome. He worked with us, silent, too, with a little smile frozen on his lips. From time to time I murmured to him: "Go steady" — "Take it easy, Ransome" — and received a quick glance in reply.

When we had done all we could do to make things safe, he disappeared into his galley. Some time afterward, going forward for a look round, I caught sight of him through the open door. He sat upright on the locker in front of the stove, with his head leaning back against the bulkhead. His eyes were closed; his capable hands held open the front of his thin cotton shirt baring tragically his powerful chest, which heaved in painful and laboured gasps. He didn't hear me.

I retreated quietly and went straight on to the poop to relieve Frenchy, who by that time was beginning to look very sick. He gave me the course with great formality and tried to go off with a jaunty step, but reeled widely twice before getting out of my sight.

And then I remained all alone aft, steering my ship, which ran before the wind with a buoyant lift now and then, and even rolling a little. Presently Ransome appeared before me with a tray. The sight of food made me ravenous all at once. He took the wheel while I sat down of the after grating to eat my breakfast.

"This breeze seems to have done for our crowd," he murmured. "It just laid them low — all hands."

"Yes," I said. "I suppose you and I are the only two fit men in the ship."

"Frenchy says there's still a jump left in him. I don't know. It can't be much," continued Ransome with his wistful smile. "Good little man that. But suppose, sir, that this wind flies round when we are close to the land — what are we going to do with her?"

"If the wind shifts round heavily after we close in with the land she will either run ashore or get dismasted or both. We won't be able to do anything with her. She's running away with us now. All we can do is to steer her. She's a ship without a crew."

"Yes. All laid low," repeated Ransome quietly. "I do give them a look-in forward every now and then, but it's precious little I can do for them."

"I, and the ship, and every one on board of her, are very much indebted to you, Ransome," I said warmly.

He made as though he had not heard me, and steered in silence till I was ready to relieve him. He surrendered the wheel, picked up the tray, and for a parting shot informed me that Mr. Burns was awake and seemed to have a mind to come up on deck.

"I don't know how to prevent him, sir. I can't very well stop down below all the time."

It was clear that he couldn't. And sure enough Mr. Burns came on deck dragging himself painfully aft in his enormous overcoat. I beheld him with a natural dread. To have him around and raving about the wiles of a dead man while I had to steer a wildly rushing ship full of dying men was a rather dreadful prospect.

But his first remarks were quite sensible in meaning and tone. Apparently he had no recollection of the night scene. And if he had he didn't betray himself once. Neither did he talk very much. He sat on the skylight looking desperately ill at first, but that strong breeze, before which the last remnant of my crew had wilted down, seemed to blow a fresh stock of vigour into his frame with every gust. One could almost see the process.

By way of sanity test I alluded on purpose to the late captain. I was delighted to find that Mr. Burns did not display undue interest in the subject. He ran over the old tale of that savage ruffian's iniquities with a certain vindictive gusto and then concluded unexpectedly:

"I do believe, sir, that his brain began to go a year or more before he died."

A wonderful recovery. I could hardly spare it as much admiration as it deserved, for I had to give all my mind to the steering.

In comparison with the hopeless languour of the preceding days this was dizzy speed. Two ridges of foam streamed from the ship's bows; the wind sang in a strenuous note which under other circumstances would have expressed to me all the joy of life. Whenever the hauled-up mainsail started trying to slat and bang itself to pieces in its gear, Mr. Burns would look at me apprehensively.

"What would you have me to do, Mr. Burns? We can neither furl it nor set it. I only wish the old thing would thrash itself to pieces and be done with it. That beastly racket confuses me."

Mr. Burns wrung his hands, and cried out suddenly:

"How will you get the ship into harbour, sir, without men to handle her?"

And I couldn't tell him.

Well — it did get done about forty hours afterward. By the exorcising virtue of Mr. Burns' awful laugh, the malicious spectre had been laid, the evil spell broken, the curse removed. We were now in the hands of a kind and energetic Providence. It was rushing us on. . . .

I shall never forget the last night, dark, windy, and starry. I steered. Mr. Burns, after having obtained from me a solemn promise to give him a kick if anything happened, went frankly to sleep on the deck close to the binnacle. Convalescents need sleep. Ransome, his back propped against the mizzen-mast and a blanket over his legs, remained perfectly still, but I don't suppose he closed his eyes for a moment. That embodiment of jauntiness, Frenchy, still under the delusion that there was a "jump" left in him, had insisted on joining us; but mindful of discipline, had laid himself down as far on the forepart of the poop as he could get, alongside the bucket-rack.

And I steered, too tired for anxiety, too tired for connected thought. I had moments of grim exultation and then my heart would sink awfully at the thought of that fore-castle at the other end of the dark deck, full of fever-stricken men — some of them dying. By my fault. But never mind. Remorse must wait. I had to steer.

In the small hours the breeze weakened, then failed altogether. About five it returned, gentle enough, enabling us to head for the roadstead. Daybreak found Mr. Burns sitting wedged up with coils of rope on the stern-grating, and from the depths of his overcoat steering the ship with very white bony hands; while Ransome and I rushed along the decks letting go all the sheets and halliards by the run. We dashed next up on to the fore-castle head. The perspiration of labour and sheer nervousness simply poured off our heads as we toiled to get the anchors cock-billed. I dared not look at Ransome as we worked side by side. We exchanged curt words; I could hear him panting close to me and I avoided turning my eyes his way for fear of seeing him fall down and expire in the act of putting forth his strength — for what? Indeed for some distinct ideal.

The consummate seaman in him was aroused. He needed no directions. He knew what to do. Every effort, every movement was an act of consistent heroism. It was not for me to look at a man thus inspired.

At last all was ready and I heard him say:

“Hadn’t I better go down and open the compressors now, sir?”

“Yes. Do,” I said.

And even then I did not glance his way. After a time his voice came up from the main deck.

“When you like, sir. All clear on the windlass here.”

I made a sign to Mr. Burns to put the helm down and let both anchors go one after another, leaving the ship to take as much cable as she wanted. She took the best part of them both before she brought up. The loose sails coming aback ceased their maddening racket above my head. A perfect stillness reigned in the ship. And while I stood forward feeling a little giddy in that sudden peace, I caught faintly a moan or two and the incoherent mutterings of the sick in the forecastle.

As we had a signal for medical assistance flying on the mizzen it is a fact that before the ship was fairly at rest three steam launches from various men-of-war were alongside; and at least five naval surgeons had clambered on board. They stood in a knot gazing up and down the empty main deck, then looked aloft — where not a man could be seen, either.

I went toward them — a solitary figure, in a blue and gray striped sleeping suit and a pipe-clayed cork helmet on its head. Their disgust was extreme. They had expected surgical cases. Each one had brought his carving tools with him. But they soon got over their little disappointment. In less than five minutes one of the steam launches was rushing shoreward to order a big boat and some hospital people for the removal of the crew. The big steam pinnace went off to her ship to bring over a few bluejackets to furl my sails for me.

One of the surgeons had remained on board. He came out of the forecastle looking impenetrable, and noticed my inquiring gaze.

“There’s nobody dead in there, if that’s what you want to know,” he said deliberately. Then added in a tone of wonder: “The whole crew!”

“And very bad?”

“And very bad,” he repeated. His eyes were roaming all over the ship. “Heavens! What’s that?”

“That,” I said, glancing aft, “is Mr. Burns, my chief officer.”

Mr. Burns with his moribund head nodding on the stalk of his lean neck was a sight for any one to exclaim at. The surgeon asked:

“Is he going to the hospital, too?”

“Oh, no,” I said jocosely. “Mr. Burns can’t go on shore till the mainmast goes. I am very proud of him. He’s my only convalescent.”

“You look — ” began the doctor staring at me. But I interrupted him angrily:

“I am not ill.”

“No. . . . You look queer.”

“Well, you see, I have been seventeen days on deck.”

“Seventeen! . . . But you must have slept.”

"I suppose I must have. I don't know. But I'm certain that I didn't sleep for the last forty hours."

"Phew! . . . You will be going ashore presently I suppose?"

"As soon as ever I can. There's no end of business waiting for me there."

The surgeon released my hand, which he had taken while we talked, pulled out his pocket-book, wrote in it rapidly, tore out the page and offered it to me.

"I strongly advise you to get this prescription made up for yourself ashore. Unless I am much mistaken you will need it this evening."

"What is it, then?" I asked with suspicion.

"Sleeping draught," answered the surgeon curtly; and moving with an air of interest toward Mr. Burns he engaged him in conversation.

As I went below to dress to go ashore, Ransome followed me. He begged my pardon; he wished, too, to be sent ashore and paid off.

I looked at him in surprise. He was waiting for my answer with an air of anxiety.

"You don't mean to leave the ship!" I cried out.

"I do really, sir. I want to go and be quiet somewhere. Anywhere. The hospital will do."

"But, Ransome," I said. "I hate the idea of parting with you."

"I must go," he broke in. "I have a right!" . . . He gasped and a look of almost savage determination passed over his face. For an instant he was another being. And I saw under the worth and the comeliness of the man the humble reality of things. Life was a boon to him — this precarious hard life, and he was thoroughly alarmed about himself.

"Of course I shall pay you off if you wish it," I hastened to say. "Only I must ask you to remain on board till this afternoon. I can't leave Mr. Burns absolutely by himself in the ship for hours."

He softened at once and assured me with a smile and in his natural pleasant voice that he understood that very well.

When I returned on deck everything was ready for the removal of the men. It was the last ordeal of that episode which had been maturing and tempering my character — though I did not know it.

It was awful. They passed under my eyes one after another — each of them an embodied reproach of the bitterest kind, till I felt a sort of revolt wake up in me. Poor Frenchy had gone suddenly under. He was carried past me insensible, his comic face horribly flushed and as if swollen, breathing stertorously. He looked more like Mr. Punch than ever; a disgracefully intoxicated Mr. Punch.

The austere Gambril, on the contrary, had improved temporarily. He insisted on walking on his own feet to the rail — of course with assistance on each side of him. But he gave way to a sudden panic at the moment of being swung over the side and began to wail pitifully:

"Don't let them drop me, sir. Don't let them drop me, sir!" While I kept on shouting to him in most soothing accents: "All right, Gambril. They won't! They won't!"

It was no doubt very ridiculous. The bluejackets on our deck were grinning quietly, while even Ransome himself (much to the fore in lending a hand) had to enlarge his wistful smile for a fleeting moment.

I left for the shore in the steam pinnace, and on looking back beheld Mr. Burns actually standing up by the taffrail, still in his enormous woolly overcoat. The bright sunlight brought out his weirdness amazingly. He looked like a frightful and elaborate scarecrow set up on the poop of a death-stricken ship, set up to keep the seabirds from the corpses.

Our story had got about already in town and everybody on shore was most kind. The Marine Office let me off the port dues, and as there happened to be a shipwrecked crew staying in the Home I had no difficulty in obtaining as many men as I wanted. But when I inquired if I could see Captain Ellis for a moment I was told in accents of pity for my ignorance that our deputy-Neptune had retired and gone home on a pension about three weeks after I left the port. So I suppose that my appointment was the last act, outside the daily routine, of his official life.

It is strange how on coming ashore I was struck by the springy step, the lively eyes, the strong vitality of every one I met. It impressed me enormously. And amongst those I met there was Captain Giles, of course. It would have been very extraordinary if I had not met him. A prolonged stroll in the business part of the town was the regular employment of all his mornings when he was ashore.

I caught the glitter of the gold watch-chain across his chest ever so far away. He radiated benevolence.

“What is it I hear?” he queried with a “kind uncle” smile, after shaking hands. “Twenty-one days from Bangkok?”

“Is this all you’ve heard?” I said. “You must come to tiffin with me. I want you to know exactly what you have let me in for.”

He hesitated for almost a minute.

“Well — I will,” he said condescendingly at last.

We turned into the hotel. I found to my surprise that I could eat quite a lot. Then over the cleared table-cloth I unfolded to Captain Giles the history of these twenty days in all its professional and emotional aspects, while he smoked patiently the big cigar I had given him.

Then he observed sagely:

“You must feel jolly well tired by this time.”

“No,” I said. “Not tired. But I’ll tell you, Captain Giles, how I feel. I feel old. And I must be. All of you on shore look to me just a lot of skittish youngsters that have never known a care in the world.”

He didn’t smile. He looked insufferably exemplary. He declared:

“That will pass. But you do look older — it’s a fact.”

“Aha!” I said.

“No! No! The truth is that one must not make too much of anything in life, good or bad.”

“Live at half-speed,” I murmured perversely. “Not everybody can do that.”

“You’ll be glad enough presently if you can keep going even at that rate,” he retorted with his air of conscious virtue. “And there’s another thing: a man should stand up to his bad luck, to his mistakes, to his conscience and all that sort of thing. Why — what else would you have to fight against?”

I kept silent. I don’t know what he saw in my face but he asked abruptly:

“Why — you aren’t faint-hearted?”

“God only knows, Captain Giles,” was my sincere answer.

“That’s all right,” he said calmly. “You will learn soon how not to be faint-hearted. A man has got to learn everything — and that’s what so many of them youngsters don’t understand.”

“Well, I am no longer a youngster.”

“No,” he conceded. “Are you leaving soon?”

“I am going on board directly,” I said. “I shall pick up one of my anchors and heave in to half-cable on the other directly my new crew comes on board and I shall be off at daylight to-morrow!”

“You will,” grunted Captain Giles approvingly, “that’s the way. You’ll do.”

“What did you think? That I would want to take a week ashore for a rest?” I said, irritated by his tone. “There’s no rest for me till she’s out in the Indian Ocean and not much of it even then.”

He puffed at his cigar moodily, as if transformed.

“Yes. That’s what it amounts to,” he said in a musing tone. It was as if a ponderous curtain had rolled up disclosing an unexpected Captain Giles. But it was only for a moment, just the time to let him add, “Precious little rest in life for anybody. Better not think of it.”

We rose, left the hotel, and parted from each other in the street with a warm handshake, just as he began to interest me for the first time in our intercourse.

The first thing I saw when I got back to the ship was Ransome on the quarter-deck sitting quietly on his neatly lashed sea-chest.

I beckoned him to follow me into the saloon where I sat down to write a letter of recommendation for him to a man I knew on shore.

When finished I pushed it across the table. “It may be of some good to you when you leave the hospital.”

He took it, put it in his pocket. His eyes were looking away from me — nowhere. His face was anxiously set.

“How are you feeling now?” I asked.

“I don’t feel bad now, sir,” he answered stiffly. “But I am afraid of its coming on. . . .” The wistful smile came back on his lips for a moment. “I — I am in a blue funk about my heart, sir.”

I approached him with extended hand. His eyes not looking at me had a strained expression. He was like a man listening for a warning call.

“Won’t you shake hands, Ransome?” I said gently.

He exclaimed, flushed up dusky red, gave my hand a hard wrench — and next moment, left alone in the cabin, I listened to him going up the companion stairs cautiously, step by step, in mortal fear of starting into sudden anger our common enemy it was his hard fate to carry consciously within his faithful breast.

The Arrow of Gold

A STORY BETWEEN TWO NOTES

This novel was first published serially in Lloyd's Magazine from December 1918 to February 1920. The story is set in Marseille in the 1870s during the Third Carlist War. The characters of the novel are supporters of the Spanish Pretender Carlos, Duke of Madrid. The narrator of *The Arrow of Gold* has considerable involvement in the story and is unnamed, though some assume he is Conrad's regular narrator, Charles Marlow.

The first edition

Celui Qui N'a Connu Que Des Hommes
polis et raisonnables, ou ne connait pas
l'homme, ou ne le connait qu'a demi.

Caracteres.

To Richard Curle

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First Note

The pages which follow have been extracted from a pile of manuscript which was apparently meant for the eye of one woman only. She seems to have been the writer's childhood's friend. They had parted as children, or very little more than children. Years passed. Then something recalled to the woman the companion of her young days and she wrote to him: "I have been hearing of you lately. I know where life has brought you. You certainly selected your own road. But to us, left behind, it always looked as if you had struck out into a pathless desert. We always regarded you as a person that must be given up for lost. But you have turned up again; and though we may never see each other, my memory welcomes you and I confess to you I should like to know the incidents on the road which has led you to where you are now."

And he answers her: "I believe you are the only one now alive who remembers me as a child. I have heard of you from time to time, but I wonder what sort of person you are now. Perhaps if I did know I wouldn't dare put pen to paper. But I don't know. I only remember that we were great chums. In fact, I chummed with you even more than with your brothers. But I am like the pigeon that went away in the fable of the Two Pigeons. If I once start to tell you I would want you to feel that you have been there yourself. I may overtax your patience with the story of my life so different from yours, not only in all the facts but altogether in spirit. You may not understand. You may even be shocked. I say all this to myself; but I know I shall succumb! I have a distinct recollection that in the old days, when you were about fifteen, you always could make me do whatever you liked."

He succumbed. He begins his story for her with the minute narration of this adventure which took about twelve months to develop. In the form in which it is presented here it has been pruned of all allusions to their common past, of all asides, disquisitions, and explanations addressed directly to the friend of his childhood. And even as it is the whole thing is of considerable length. It seems that he had not only a memory but that he also knew how to remember. But as to that opinions may differ.

This, his first great adventure, as he calls it, begins in Marseilles. It ends there, too. Yet it might have happened anywhere. This does not mean that the people concerned could have come together in pure space. The locality had a definite importance. As to the time, it is easily fixed by the events at about the middle years of the seventies, when Don Carlos de Bourbon, encouraged by the general reaction of all Europe against the excesses of communistic Republicanism, made his attempt for the throne of Spain, arms in hand, amongst the hills and gorges of Guipuzcoa. It is perhaps the last instance of a Pretender's adventure for a Crown that History will have to record with the usual

grave moral disapproval tinged by a shamefaced regret for the departing romance. Historians are very much like other people.

However, History has nothing to do with this tale. Neither is the moral justification or condemnation of conduct aimed at here. If anything it is perhaps a little sympathy that the writer expects for his buried youth, as he lives it over again at the end of his insignificant course on this earth. Strange person — yet perhaps not so very different from ourselves.

A few words as to certain facts may be added.

It may seem that he was plunged very abruptly into this long adventure. But from certain passages (suppressed here because mixed up with irrelevant matter) it appears clearly that at the time of the meeting in the café, Mills had already gathered, in various quarters, a definite view of the eager youth who had been introduced to him in that ultra-legitimist salon. What Mills had learned represented him as a young gentleman who had arrived furnished with proper credentials and who apparently was doing his best to waste his life in an eccentric fashion, with a bohemian set (one poet, at least, emerged out of it later) on one side, and on the other making friends with the people of the Old Town, pilots, coasters, sailors, workers of all sorts. He pretended rather absurdly to be a seaman himself and was already credited with an ill-defined and vaguely illegal enterprise in the Gulf of Mexico. At once it occurred to Mills that this eccentric youngster was the very person for what the legitimist sympathizers had very much at heart just then: to organize a supply by sea of arms and ammunition to the Carlist detachments in the South. It was precisely to confer on that matter with Doña Rita that Captain Blunt had been despatched from Headquarters.

Mills got in touch with Blunt at once and put the suggestion before him. The Captain thought this the very thing. As a matter of fact, on that evening of Carnival, those two, Mills and Blunt, had been actually looking everywhere for our man. They had decided that he should be drawn into the affair if it could be done. Blunt naturally wanted to see him first. He must have estimated him a promising person, but, from another point of view, not dangerous. Thus lightly was the notorious (and at the same time mysterious) Monsieur George brought into the world; out of the contact of two minds which did not give a single thought to his flesh and blood.

Their purpose explains the intimate tone given to their first conversation and the sudden introduction of Doña Rita's history. Mills, of course, wanted to hear all about it. As to Captain Blunt — I suspect that, at the time, he was thinking of nothing else. In addition it was Doña Rita who would have to do the persuading; for, after all, such an enterprise with its ugly and desperate risks was not a trifle to put before a man — however young.

It cannot be denied that Mills seems to have acted somewhat unscrupulously. He himself appears to have had some doubt about it, at a given moment, as they were driving to the Prado. But perhaps Mills, with his penetration, understood very well the nature he was dealing with. He might even have envied it. But it's not my business to excuse Mills. As to him whom we may regard as Mills' victim it is obvious that he

has never harboured a single reproachful thought. For him Mills is not to be criticized. A remarkable instance of the great power of mere individuality over the young.

Part 1

Chapter 1

Certain streets have an atmosphere of their own, a sort of universal fame and the particular affection of their citizens. One of such streets is the Cannebière, and the jest: “If Paris had a Cannebière it would be a little Marseilles” is the jocular expression of municipal pride. I, too, I have been under the spell. For me it has been a street leading into the unknown.

There was a part of it where one could see as many as five big cafés in a resplendent row. That evening I strolled into one of them. It was by no means full. It looked deserted, in fact, festal and overlighted, but cheerful. The wonderful street was distinctly cold (it was an evening of carnival), I was very idle, and I was feeling a little lonely. So I went in and sat down.

The carnival time was drawing to an end. Everybody, high and low, was anxious to have the last fling. Companies of masks with linked arms and whooping like red Indians swept the streets in crazy rushes while gusts of cold mistral swayed the gas lights as far as the eye could reach. There was a touch of bedlam in all this.

Perhaps it was that which made me feel lonely, since I was neither masked, nor disguised, nor yelling, nor in any other way in harmony with the bedlam element of life. But I was not sad. I was merely in a state of sobriety. I had just returned from my second West Indies voyage. My eyes were still full of tropical splendour, my memory of my experiences, lawful and lawless, which had their charm and their thrill; for they had startled me a little and had amused me considerably. But they had left me untouched. Indeed they were other men’s adventures, not mine. Except for a little habit of responsibility which I had acquired they had not matured me. I was as young as before. Inconceivably young — still beautifully unthinking — infinitely receptive.

You may believe that I was not thinking of Don Carlos and his fight for a kingdom. Why should I? You don’t want to think of things which you meet every day in the newspapers and in conversation. I had paid some calls since my return and most of my acquaintance were legitimists and intensely interested in the events of the frontier of Spain, for political, religious, or romantic reasons. But I was not interested. Apparently I was not romantic enough. Or was it that I was even more romantic than all those good people? The affair seemed to me commonplace. That man was attending to his business of a Pretender.

On the front page of the illustrated paper I saw lying on a table near me, he looked picturesque enough, seated on a boulder, a big strong man with a square-cut beard, his hands resting on the hilt of a cavalry sabre — and all around him a landscape of savage mountains. He caught my eye on that spiritedly composed woodcut. (There were no inane snapshot-reproductions in those days.) It was the obvious romance for the use of royalists but it arrested my attention.

Just then some masks from outside invaded the café, dancing hand in hand in a single file led by a burly man with a cardboard nose. He gambolled in wildly and behind him twenty others perhaps, mostly Pierrots and Pierrettes holding each other by the hand and winding in and out between the chairs and tables: eyes shining in the holes of cardboard faces, breasts panting; but all preserving a mysterious silence.

They were people of the poorer sort (white calico with red spots, costumes), but amongst them there was a girl in a black dress sewn over with gold half moons, very high in the neck and very short in the skirt. Most of the ordinary clients of the café didn't even look up from their games or papers. I, being alone and idle, stared abstractedly. The girl costumed as Night wore a small black velvet mask, what is called in French a "loup." What made her daintiness join that obviously rough lot I can't imagine. Her uncovered mouth and chin suggested refined prettiness.

They filed past my table; the Night noticed perhaps my fixed gaze and throwing her body forward out of the wriggling chain shot out at me a slender tongue like a pink dart. I was not prepared for this, not even to the extent of an appreciative "Très foli," before she wriggled and hopped away. But having been thus distinguished I could do no less than follow her with my eyes to the door where the chain of hands being broken all the masks were trying to get out at once. Two gentlemen coming in out of the street stood arrested in the crush. The Night (it must have been her idiosyncrasy) put her tongue out at them, too. The taller of the two (he was in evening clothes under a light wide-open overcoat) with great presence of mind chucked her under the chin, giving me the view at the same time of a flash of white teeth in his dark, lean face. The other man was very different; fair, with smooth, ruddy cheeks and burly shoulders. He was wearing a grey suit, obviously bought ready-made, for it seemed too tight for his powerful frame.

That man was not altogether a stranger to me. For the last week or so I had been rather on the look-out for him in all the public places where in a provincial town men may expect to meet each other. I saw him for the first time (wearing that same grey ready-made suit) in a legitimist drawing-room where, clearly, he was an object of interest, especially to the women. I had caught his name as Monsieur Mills. The lady who had introduced me took the earliest opportunity to murmur into my ear: "A relation of Lord X." (Un proche parent de Lord X.) And then she added, casting up her eyes: "A good friend of the King." Meaning Don Carlos of course.

I looked at the proche parent; not on account of the parentage but marvelling at his air of ease in that cumbrous body and in such tight clothes, too. But presently the same lady informed me further: "He has come here amongst us un naufragé."

I became then really interested. I had never seen a shipwrecked person before. All the boyishness in me was aroused. I considered a shipwreck as an unavoidable event sooner or later in my future.

Meantime the man thus distinguished in my eyes glanced quietly about and never spoke unless addressed directly by one of the ladies present. There were more than a dozen people in that drawing-room, mostly women eating fine pastry and talking passionately. It might have been a Carlist committee meeting of a particularly fatuous character. Even my youth and inexperience were aware of that. And I was by a long way the youngest person in the room. That quiet Monsieur Mills intimidated me a little by his age (I suppose he was thirty-five), his massive tranquillity, his clear, watchful eyes. But the temptation was too great — and I addressed him impulsively on the subject of that shipwreck.

He turned his big fair face towards me with surprise in his keen glance, which (as though he had seen through me in an instant and found nothing objectionable) changed subtly into friendliness. On the matter of the shipwreck he did not say much. He only told me that it had not occurred in the Mediterranean, but on the other side of Southern France — in the Bay of Biscay. “But this is hardly the place to enter on a story of that kind,” he observed, looking round at the room with a faint smile as attractive as the rest of his rustic but well-bred personality.

I expressed my regret. I should have liked to hear all about it. To this he said that it was not a secret and that perhaps next time we met. . .

“But where can we meet?” I cried. “I don’t come often to this house, you know.”

“Where? Why on the Cannebière to be sure. Everybody meets everybody else at least once a day on the pavement opposite the Bourse.”

This was absolutely true. But though I looked for him on each succeeding day he was nowhere to be seen at the usual times. The companions of my idle hours (and all my hours were idle just then) noticed my preoccupation and chaffed me about it in a rather obvious way. They wanted to know whether she, whom I expected to see, was dark or fair; whether that fascination which kept me on tenterhooks of expectation was one of my aristocrats or one of my marine beauties: for they knew I had a footing in both these — shall we say circles? As to themselves they were the bohemian circle, not very wide — half a dozen of us led by a sculptor whom we called Prax for short. My own nick-name was “Young Ulysses.”

I liked it.

But chaff or no chaff they would have been surprised to see me leave them for the burly and sympathetic Mills. I was ready to drop any easy company of equals to approach that interesting man with every mental deference. It was not precisely because of that shipwreck. He attracted and interested me the more because he was not to be seen. The fear that he might have departed suddenly for England — (or for Spain) — caused me a sort of ridiculous depression as though I had missed a unique opportunity. And it was a joyful reaction which emboldened me to signal to him with a raised arm across that café.

I was abashed immediately afterwards, when I saw him advance towards my table with his friend. The latter was eminently elegant. He was exactly like one of those figures one can see of a fine May evening in the neighbourhood of the Opera-house in Paris. Very Parisian indeed. And yet he struck me as not so perfectly French as he ought to have been, as if one's nationality were an accomplishment with varying degrees of excellence. As to Mills, he was perfectly insular. There could be no doubt about him. They were both smiling faintly at me. The burly Mills attended to the introduction: "Captain Blunt."

We shook hands. The name didn't tell me much. What surprised me was that Mills should have remembered mine so well. I don't want to boast of my modesty but it seemed to me that two or three days was more than enough for a man like Mills to forget my very existence. As to the Captain, I was struck on closer view by the perfect correctness of his personality. Clothes, slight figure, clear-cut, thin, sun-tanned face, pose, all this was so good that it was saved from the danger of banality only by the mobile black eyes of a keenness that one doesn't meet every day in the south of France and still less in Italy. Another thing was that, viewed as an officer in mufti, he did not look sufficiently professional. That imperfection was interesting, too.

You may think that I am subtilizing my impressions on purpose, but you may take it from a man who has lived a rough, a very rough life, that it is the subtleties of personalities, and contacts, and events, that count for interest and memory — and pretty well nothing else. This — you see — is the last evening of that part of my life in which I did not know that woman. These are like the last hours of a previous existence. It isn't my fault that they are associated with nothing better at the decisive moment than the banal splendours of a gilded café and the bedlamite yells of carnival in the street.

We three, however (almost complete strangers to each other), had assumed attitudes of serious amiability round our table. A waiter approached for orders and it was then, in relation to my order for coffee, that the absolutely first thing I learned of Captain Blunt was the fact that he was a sufferer from insomnia. In his immovable way Mills began charging his pipe. I felt extremely embarrassed all at once, but became positively annoyed when I saw our Prax enter the café in a sort of mediaeval costume very much like what Faust wears in the third act. I have no doubt it was meant for a purely operatic Faust. A light mantle floated from his shoulders. He strode theatrically up to our table and addressing me as "Young Ulysses" proposed I should go outside on the fields of asphalt and help him gather a few marguerites to decorate a truly infernal supper which was being organized across the road at the Maison Dorée — upstairs. With expostulatory shakes of the head and indignant glances I called his attention to the fact that I was not alone. He stepped back a pace as if astonished by the discovery, took off his plumed velvet toque with a low obeisance so that the feathers swept the floor, and swaggered off the stage with his left hand resting on the hilt of the property dagger at his belt.

Meantime the well-connected but rustic Mills had been busy lighting his briar and the distinguished Captain sat smiling to himself. I was horribly vexed and apologized for that intrusion, saying that the fellow was a future great sculptor and perfectly harmless; but he had been swallowing lots of night air which had got into his head apparently.

Mills peered at me with his friendly but awfully searching blue eyes through the cloud of smoke he had wreathed about his big head. The slim, dark Captain's smile took on an amiable expression. Might he know why I was addressed as "Young Ulysses" by my friend? and immediately he added the remark with urbane playfulness that Ulysses was an astute person. Mills did not give me time for a reply. He struck in: "That old Greek was famed as a wanderer — the first historical seaman." He waved his pipe vaguely at me.

"Ah! Vraiment!" The polite Captain seemed incredulous and as if weary. "Are you a seaman? In what sense, pray?" We were talking French and he used the term *homme de mer*.

Again Mills interfered quietly. "In the same sense in which you are a military man." (*Homme de guerre*.)

It was then that I heard Captain Blunt produce one of his striking declarations. He had two of them, and this was the first.

"I live by my sword."

It was said in an extraordinary dandified manner which in conjunction with the matter made me forget my tongue in my head. I could only stare at him. He added more naturally: "2nd Reg. Castille, Cavalry." Then with marked stress in Spanish, "*En las filas legitimas*."

Mills was heard, unmoved, like Jove in his cloud: "He's on leave here."

"Of course I don't shout that fact on the housetops," the Captain addressed me pointedly, "any more than our friend his shipwreck adventure. We must not strain the toleration of the French authorities too much! It wouldn't be correct — and not very safe either."

I became suddenly extremely delighted with my company. A man who "lived by his sword," before my eyes, close at my elbow! So such people did exist in the world yet! I had not been born too late! And across the table with his air of watchful, unmoved benevolence, enough in itself to arouse one's interest, there was the man with the story of a shipwreck that mustn't be shouted on housetops. Why?

I understood very well why, when he told me that he had joined in the Clyde a small steamer chartered by a relative of his, "a very wealthy man," he observed (probably Lord X, I thought), to carry arms and other supplies to the Carlist army. And it was not a shipwreck in the ordinary sense. Everything went perfectly well to the last moment when suddenly the *Numancia* (a Republican ironclad) had appeared and chased them ashore on the French coast below Bayonne. In a few words, but with evident appreciation of the adventure, Mills described to us how he swam to the beach clad simply in a money belt and a pair of trousers. Shells were falling all round till

a tiny French gunboat came out of Bayonne and shoed the Numancia away out of territorial waters.

He was very amusing and I was fascinated by the mental picture of that tranquil man rolling in the surf and emerging breathless, in the costume you know, on the fair land of France, in the character of a smuggler of war material. However, they had never arrested or expelled him, since he was there before my eyes. But how and why did he get so far from the scene of his sea adventure was an interesting question. And I put it to him with most naïve indiscretion which did not shock him visibly. He told me that the ship being only stranded, not sunk, the contraband cargo aboard was doubtless in good condition. The French custom-house men were guarding the wreck. If their vigilance could be — h'm — removed by some means, or even merely reduced, a lot of these rifles and cartridges could be taken off quietly at night by certain Spanish fishing boats. In fact, salvaged for the Carlists, after all. He thought it could be done. . . .

I said with professional gravity that given a few perfectly quiet nights (rare on that coast) it could certainly be done.

Mr. Mills was not afraid of the elements. It was the highly inconvenient zeal of the French custom-house people that had to be dealt with in some way.

“Heavens!” I cried, astonished. “You can’t bribe the French Customs. This isn’t a South-American republic.”

“Is it a republic?” he murmured, very absorbed in smoking his wooden pipe.

“Well, isn’t it?”

He murmured again, “Oh, so little.” At this I laughed, and a faintly humorous expression passed over Mills’ face. No. Bribes were out of the question, he admitted. But there were many legitimist sympathies in Paris. A proper person could set them in motion and a mere hint from high quarters to the officials on the spot not to worry over-much about that wreck. . . .

What was most amusing was the cool, reasonable tone of this amazing project. Mr. Blunt sat by very detached, his eyes roamed here and there all over the café; and it was while looking upward at the pink foot of a fleshy and very much foreshortened goddess of some sort depicted on the ceiling in an enormous composition in the Italian style that he let fall casually the words, “She will manage it for you quite easily.”

“Every Carlist agent in Bayonne assured me of that,” said Mr. Mills. “I would have gone straight to Paris only I was told she had fled here for a rest; tired, discontented. Not a very encouraging report.”

“These flights are well known,” muttered Mr. Blunt. “You shall see her all right.”

“Yes. They told me that you . . . “

I broke in: “You mean to say that you expect a woman to arrange that sort of thing for you?”

“A trifle, for her,” Mr. Blunt remarked indifferently. “At that sort of thing women are best. They have less scruples.”

“More audacity,” interjected Mr. Mills almost in a whisper.

Mr. Blunt kept quiet for a moment, then: "You see," he addressed me in a most refined tone, "a mere man may suddenly find himself being kicked down the stairs."

I don't know why I should have felt shocked by that statement. It could not be because it was untrue. The other did not give me time to offer any remark. He inquired with extreme politeness what did I know of South American republics? I confessed that I knew very little of them. Wandering about the Gulf of Mexico I had a look-in here and there; and amongst others I had a few days in Haiti which was of course unique, being a negro republic. On this Captain Blunt began to talk of negroes at large. He talked of them with knowledge, intelligence, and a sort of contemptuous affection. He generalized, he particularized about the blacks; he told anecdotes. I was interested, a little incredulous, and considerably surprised. What could this man with such a boulevardier exterior that he looked positively like, an exile in a provincial town, and with his drawing-room manner — what could he know of negroes?

Mills, sitting silent with his air of watchful intelligence, seemed to read my thoughts, waved his pipe slightly and explained: "The Captain is from South Carolina."

"Oh," I murmured, and then after the slightest of pauses I heard the second of Mr. J. K. Blunt's declarations.

"Yes," he said. "Je suis Américain, catholique et gentil-homme," in a tone contrasting so strongly with the smile, which, as it were, underlined the uttered words, that I was at a loss whether to return the smile in kind or acknowledge the words with a grave little bow. Of course I did neither and there fell on us an odd, equivocal silence. It marked our final abandonment of the French language. I was the one to speak first, proposing that my companions should sup with me, not across the way, which would be riotous with more than one "infernal" supper, but in another much more select establishment in a side street away from the Cannebière. It flattered my vanity a little to be able to say that I had a corner table always reserved in the Salon des Palmiers, otherwise Salon Blanc, where the atmosphere was legitimist and extremely decorous besides — even in Carnival time. "Nine tenths of the people there," I said, "would be of your political opinions, if that's an inducement. Come along. Let's be festive," I encouraged them.

I didn't feel particularly festive. What I wanted was to remain in my company and break an inexplicable feeling of constraint of which I was aware. Mills looked at me steadily with a faint, kind smile.

"No," said Blunt. "Why should we go there? They will be only turning us out in the small hours, to go home and face insomnia. Can you imagine anything more disgusting?"

He was smiling all the time, but his deep-set eyes did not lend themselves to the expression of whimsical politeness which he tried to achieve. He had another suggestion to offer. Why shouldn't we adjourn to his rooms? He had there materials for a dish of his own invention for which he was famous all along the line of the Royal Cavalry outposts, and he would cook it for us. There were also a few bottles of some white wine, quite possible, which we could drink out of Venetian cut-glass goblets. A bivouac

feast, in fact. And he wouldn't turn us out in the small hours. Not he. He couldn't sleep.

Need I say I was fascinated by the idea? Well, yes. But somehow I hesitated and looked towards Mills, so much my senior. He got up without a word. This was decisive; for no obscure premonition, and of something indefinite at that, could stand against the example of his tranquil personality.

Chapter 2

The street in which Mr. Blunt lived presented itself to our eyes, narrow, silent, empty, and dark, but with enough gas-lamps in it to disclose its most striking feature: a quantity of flag-poles sticking out above many of its closed portals. It was the street of Consuls and I remarked to Mr. Blunt that coming out in the morning he could survey the flags of all nations almost — except his own. (The U. S. consulate was on the other side of the town.) He mumbled through his teeth that he took good care to keep clear of his own consulate.

“Are you afraid of the consul's dog?” I asked jocularly. The consul's dog weighed about a pound and a half and was known to the whole town as exhibited on the consular fore-arm in all places, at all hours, but mainly at the hour of the fashionable promenade on the Prado.

But I felt my jest misplaced when Mills growled low in my ear: “They are all Yankees there.”

I murmured a confused “Of course.”

Books are nothing. I discovered that I had never been aware before that the Civil War in America was not printed matter but a fact only about ten years old. Of course. He was a South Carolinian gentleman. I was a little ashamed of my want of tact. Meantime, looking like the conventional conception of a fashionable reveller, with his opera-hat pushed off his forehead, Captain Blunt was having some slight difficulty with his latch-key; for the house before which we had stopped was not one of those many-storied houses that made up the greater part of the street. It had only one row of windows above the ground floor. Dead walls abutting on to it indicated that it had a garden. Its dark front presented no marked architectural character, and in the flickering light of a street lamp it looked a little as though it had gone down in the world. The greater then was my surprise to enter a hall paved in black and white marble and in its dimness appearing of palatial proportions. Mr. Blunt did not turn up the small solitary gas-jet, but led the way across the black and white pavement past the end of the staircase, past a door of gleaming dark wood with a heavy bronze handle. It gave access to his rooms he said; but he took us straight on to the studio at the end of the passage.

It was rather a small place tacked on in the manner of a lean-to to the garden side of the house. A large lamp was burning brightly there. The floor was of mere flag-stones

but the few rugs scattered about though extremely worn were very costly. There was also there a beautiful sofa upholstered in pink figured silk, an enormous divan with many cushions, some splendid arm-chairs of various shapes (but all very shabby), a round table, and in the midst of these fine things a small common iron stove. Somebody must have been attending it lately, for the fire roared and the warmth of the place was very grateful after the bone-searching cold blasts of mistral outside.

Mills without a word flung himself on the divan and, propped on his arm, gazed thoughtfully at a distant corner where in the shadow of a monumental carved wardrobe an articulated dummy without head or hands but with beautifully shaped limbs composed in a shrinking attitude, seemed to be embarrassed by his stare.

As we sat enjoying the bivouac hospitality (the dish was really excellent and our host in a shabby grey jacket still looked the accomplished man-about-town) my eyes kept on straying towards that corner. Blunt noticed this and remarked that I seemed to be attracted by the Empress.

"It's disagreeable," I said. "It seems to lurk there like a shy skeleton at the feast. But why do you give the name of Empress to that dummy?"

"Because it sat for days and days in the robes of a Byzantine Empress to a painter. . . I wonder where he discovered these priceless stuffs. . . You knew him, I believe?"

Mills lowered his head slowly, then tossed down his throat some wine out of a Venetian goblet.

"This house is full of costly objects. So are all his other houses, so is his place in Paris — that mysterious Pavilion hidden away in Passy somewhere."

Mills knew the Pavilion. The wine had, I suppose, loosened his tongue. Blunt, too, lost something of his reserve. From their talk I gathered the notion of an eccentric personality, a man of great wealth, not so much solitary as difficult of access, a collector of fine things, a painter known only to very few people and not at all to the public market. But as meantime I had been emptying my Venetian goblet with a certain regularity (the amount of heat given out by that iron stove was amazing; it parched one's throat, and the straw-coloured wine didn't seem much stronger than so much pleasantly flavoured water) the voices and the impressions they conveyed acquired something fantastic to my mind. Suddenly I perceived that Mills was sitting in his shirt-sleeves. I had not noticed him taking off his coat. Blunt had unbuttoned his shabby jacket, exposing a lot of starched shirt-front with the white tie under his dark shaved chin. He had a strange air of insolence — or so it seemed to me. I addressed him much louder than I intended really.

"Did you know that extraordinary man?"

"To know him personally one had to be either very distinguished or very lucky. Mr. Mills here . . ."

"Yes, I have been lucky," Mills struck in. "It was my cousin who was distinguished. That's how I managed to enter his house in Paris — it was called the Pavilion — twice."

“And saw Doña Rita twice, too?” asked Blunt with an indefinite smile and a marked emphasis. Mills was also emphatic in his reply but with a serious face.

“I am not an easy enthusiast where women are concerned, but she was without doubt the most admirable find of his amongst all the priceless items he had accumulated in that house — the most admirable. . . .”

“Ah! But, you see, of all the objects there she was the only one that was alive,” pointed out Blunt with the slightest possible flavour of sarcasm.

“Immensely so,” affirmed Mills. “Not because she was restless, indeed she hardly ever moved from that couch between the windows — you know.”

“No. I don’t know. I’ve never been in there,” announced Blunt with that flash of white teeth so strangely without any character of its own that it was merely disturbing.

“But she radiated life,” continued Mills. “She had plenty of it, and it had a quality. My cousin and Henry Allègre had a lot to say to each other and so I was free to talk to her. At the second visit we were like old friends, which was absurd considering that all the chances were that we would never meet again in this world or in the next. I am not meddling with theology but it seems to me that in the Elysian fields she’ll have her place in a very special company.”

All this in a sympathetic voice and in his unmoved manner. Blunt produced another disturbing white flash and muttered:

“I should say mixed.” Then louder: “As for instance”

“As for instance Cleopatra,” answered Mills quietly. He added after a pause: “Who was not exactly pretty.”

“I should have thought rather a La Vallière,” Blunt dropped with an indifference of which one did not know what to make. He may have begun to be bored with the subject. But it may have been put on, for the whole personality was not clearly definable. I, however, was not indifferent. A woman is always an interesting subject and I was thoroughly awake to that interest. Mills pondered for a while with a sort of dispassionate benevolence, at last:

“Yes, Doña Rita as far as I know her is so varied in her simplicity that even that is possible,” he said. “Yes. A romantic resigned La Vallière . . . who had a big mouth.”

I felt moved to make myself heard.

“Did you know La Vallière, too?” I asked impertinently.

Mills only smiled at me. “No. I am not quite so old as that,” he said. “But it’s not very difficult to know facts of that kind about a historical personage. There were some ribald verses made at the time, and Louis XIV was congratulated on the possession — I really don’t remember how it goes — on the possession of:

“. . . de ce bec amoureux

Qui d’une oreille à l’autre va,

Tra là là.

or something of the sort. It needn’t be from ear to ear, but it’s a fact that a big mouth is often a sign of a certain generosity of mind and feeling. Young man, beware of women with small mouths. Beware of the others, too, of course; but a small mouth

is a fatal sign. Well, the royalist sympathizers can't charge Doña Rita with any lack of generosity from what I hear. Why should I judge her? I have known her for, say, six hours altogether. It was enough to feel the seduction of her native intelligence and of her splendid physique. And all that was brought home to me so quickly," he concluded, "because she had what some Frenchman has called the 'terrible gift of familiarity'."

Blunt had been listening moodily. He nodded assent.

"Yes!" Mills' thoughts were still dwelling in the past. "And when saying good-bye she could put in an instant an immense distance between herself and you. A slight stiffening of that perfect figure, a change of the physiognomy: it was like being dismissed by a person born in the purple. Even if she did offer you her hand — as she did to me — it was as if across a broad river. Trick of manner or a bit of truth peeping out? Perhaps she's really one of those inaccessible beings. What do you think, Blunt?"

It was a direct question which for some reason (as if my range of sensitiveness had been increased already) displeased or rather disturbed me strangely. Blunt seemed not to have heard it. But after a while he turned to me.

"That thick man," he said in a tone of perfect urbanity, "is as fine as a needle. All these statements about the seduction and then this final doubt expressed after only two visits which could not have included more than six hours altogether and this some three years ago! But it is Henry Allègre that you should ask this question, Mr. Mills."

"I haven't the secret of raising the dead," answered Mills good humouredly. "And if I had I would hesitate. It would seem such a liberty to take with a person one had known so slightly in life."

"And yet Henry Allègre is the only person to ask about her, after all this uninterrupted companionship of years, ever since he discovered her; all the time, every breathing moment of it, till, literally, his very last breath. I don't mean to say she nursed him. He had his confidential man for that. He couldn't bear women about his person. But then apparently he couldn't bear this one out of his sight. She's the only woman who ever sat to him, for he would never suffer a model inside his house. That's why the 'Girl in the Hat' and the 'Byzantine Empress' have that family air, though neither of them is really a likeness of Doña Rita. . . You know my mother?"

Mills inclined his body slightly and a fugitive smile vanished from his lips. Blunt's eyes were fastened on the very centre of his empty plate.

"Then perhaps you know my mother's artistic and literary associations," Blunt went on in a subtly changed tone. "My mother has been writing verse since she was a girl of fifteen. She's still writing verse. She's still fifteen — a spoiled girl of genius. So she requested one of her poet friends — no less than Versoy himself — to arrange for a visit to Henry Allègre's house. At first he thought he hadn't heard aright. You must know that for my mother a man that doesn't jump out of his skin for any woman's caprice is not chivalrous. But perhaps you do know? . . ."

Mills shook his head with an amused air. Blunt, who had raised his eyes from his plate to look at him, started afresh with great deliberation.

“She gives no peace to herself or her friends. My mother’s exquisitely absurd. You understand that all these painters, poets, art collectors (and dealers in bric-à-brac, he interjected through his teeth) of my mother are not in my way; but Versoy lives more like a man of the world. One day I met him at the fencing school. He was furious. He asked me to tell my mother that this was the last effort of his chivalry. The jobs she gave him to do were too difficult. But I daresay he had been pleased enough to show the influence he had in that quarter. He knew my mother would tell the world’s wife all about it. He’s a spiteful, gingery little wretch. The top of his head shines like a billiard ball. I believe he polishes it every morning with a cloth. Of course they didn’t get further than the big drawing-room on the first floor, an enormous drawing-room with three pairs of columns in the middle. The double doors on the top of the staircase had been thrown wide open, as if for a visit from royalty. You can picture to yourself my mother, with her white hair done in some 18th century fashion and her sparkling black eyes, penetrating into those splendours attended by a sort of bald-headed, vexed squirrel — and Henry Allègre coming forward to meet them like a severe prince with the face of a tombstone Crusader, big white hands, muffled silken voice, half-shut eyes, as if looking down at them from a balcony. You remember that trick of his, Mills?”

Mills emitted an enormous cloud of smoke out of his distended cheeks.

“I daresay he was furious, too,” Blunt continued dispassionately. “But he was extremely civil. He showed her all the ‘treasures’ in the room, ivories, enamels, miniatures, all sorts of monstrosities from Japan, from India, from Timbuctoo . . . for all I know. . . He pushed his condescension so far as to have the ‘Girl in the Hat’ brought down into the drawing-room — half length, unframed. They put her on a chair for my mother to look at. The ‘Byzantine Empress’ was already there, hung on the end wall — full length, gold frame weighing half a ton. My mother first overwhelms the ‘Master’ with thanks, and then absorbs herself in the adoration of the ‘Girl in the Hat.’ Then she sighs out: ‘It should be called Diaphanéité, if there is such a word. Ah! This is the last expression of modernity!’ She puts up suddenly her face-à-main and looks towards the end wall. ‘And that — Byzantium itself! Who was she, this sullen and beautiful Empress?’

“‘The one I had in my mind was Theodosia!’ Allègre consented to answer. ‘Originally a slave girl — from somewhere.’

“My mother can be marvellously indiscreet when the whim takes her. She finds nothing better to do than to ask the ‘Master’ why he took his inspiration for those two faces from the same model. No doubt she was proud of her discerning eye. It was really clever of her. Allègre, however, looked on it as a colossal impertinence; but he answered in his silkiest tones:

“‘Perhaps it is because I saw in that woman something of the women of all time.’

“My mother might have guessed that she was on thin ice there. She is extremely intelligent. Moreover, she ought to have known. But women can be miraculously dense sometimes. So she exclaims, ‘Then she is a wonder!’ And with some notion of being complimentary goes on to say that only the eyes of the discoverer of so many wonders

of art could have discovered something so marvellous in life. I suppose Allègre lost his temper altogether then; or perhaps he only wanted to pay my mother out, for all these 'Masters' she had been throwing at his head for the last two hours. He insinuates with the utmost politeness:

"As you are honouring my poor collection with a visit you may like to judge for yourself as to the inspiration of these two pictures. She is upstairs changing her dress after our morning ride. But she wouldn't be very long. She might be a little surprised at first to be called down like this, but with a few words of preparation and purely as a matter of art . . ."

"There were never two people more taken aback. Versoy himself confesses that he dropped his tall hat with a crash. I am a dutiful son, I hope, but I must say I should have liked to have seen the retreat down the great staircase. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

He laughed most undutifully and then his face twitched grimly.

"That implacable brute Allègre followed them down ceremoniously and put my mother into the fiacre at the door with the greatest deference. He didn't open his lips though, and made a great bow as the fiacre drove away. My mother didn't recover from her consternation for three days. I lunch with her almost daily and I couldn't imagine what was the matter. Then one day . . ."

He glanced round the table, jumped up and with a word of excuse left the studio by a small door in a corner. This startled me into the consciousness that I had been as if I had not existed for these two men. With his elbows propped on the table Mills had his hands in front of his face clasping the pipe from which he extracted now and then a puff of smoke, staring stolidly across the room.

I was moved to ask in a whisper:

"Do you know him well?"

"I don't know what he is driving at," he answered drily. "But as to his mother she is not as volatile as all that. I suspect it was business. It may have been a deep plot to get a picture out of Allègre for somebody. My cousin as likely as not. Or simply to discover what he had. The Blunts lost all their property and in Paris there are various ways of making a little money, without actually breaking anything. Not even the law. And Mrs. Blunt really had a position once — in the days of the Second Empire — and so. . ."

I listened open-mouthed to these things into which my West-Indian experiences could not have given me an insight. But Mills checked himself and ended in a changed tone.

"It's not easy to know what she would be at, either, in any given instance. For the rest, spotlessly honourable. A delightful, aristocratic old lady. Only poor."

A bump at the door silenced him and immediately Mr. John Blunt, Captain of Cavalry in the Army of Legitimity, first-rate cook (as to one dish at least), and generous host, entered clutching the necks of four more bottles between the fingers of his hand.

"I stumbled and nearly smashed the lot," he remarked casually. But even I, with all my innocence, never for a moment believed he had stumbled accidentally. During the

uncorking and the filling up of glasses a profound silence reigned; but neither of us took it seriously — any more than his stumble.

“One day,” he went on again in that curiously flavoured voice of his, “my mother took a heroic decision and made up her mind to get up in the middle of the night. You must understand my mother’s phraseology. It meant that she would be up and dressed by nine o’clock. This time it was not Versoy that was commanded for attendance, but I. You may imagine how delighted I was. . . .”

It was very plain to me that Blunt was addressing himself exclusively to Mills: Mills the mind, even more than Mills the man. It was as if Mills represented something initiated and to be reckoned with. I, of course, could have no such pretensions. If I represented anything it was a perfect freshness of sensations and a refreshing ignorance, not so much of what life may give one (as to that I had some ideas at least) but of what it really contains. I knew very well that I was utterly insignificant in these men’s eyes. Yet my attention was not checked by that knowledge. It’s true they were talking of a woman, but I was yet at the age when this subject by itself is not of overwhelming interest. My imagination would have been more stimulated probably by the adventures and fortunes of a man. What kept my interest from flagging was Mr. Blunt himself. The play of the white gleams of his smile round the suspicion of grimness of his tone fascinated me like a moral incongruity.

So at the age when one sleeps well indeed but does feel sometimes as if the need of sleep were a mere weakness of a distant old age, I kept easily awake; and in my freshness I was kept amused by the contrast of personalities, of the disclosed facts and moral outlook with the rough initiations of my West-Indian experience. And all these things were dominated by a feminine figure which to my imagination had only a floating outline, now invested with the grace of girlhood, now with the prestige of a woman; and indistinct in both these characters. For these two men had seen her, while to me she was only being “presented,” elusively, in vanishing words, in the shifting tones of an unfamiliar voice.

She was being presented to me now in the Bois de Boulogne at the early hour of the ultra-fashionable world (so I understood), on a light bay “bit of blood” attended on the off side by that Henry Allègre mounted on a dark brown powerful weight carrier; and on the other by one of Allègre’s acquaintances (the man had no real friends), distinguished frequenters of that mysterious Pavilion. And so that side of the frame in which that woman appeared to one down the perspective of the great Allée was not permanent. That morning when Mr. Blunt had to escort his mother there for the gratification of her irresistible curiosity (of which he highly disapproved) there appeared in succession, at that woman’s or girl’s bridle-hand, a cavalry general in red breeches, on whom she was smiling; a rising politician in a grey suit, who talked to her with great animation but left her side abruptly to join a personage in a red fez and mounted on a white horse; and then, some time afterwards, the vexed Mr. Blunt and his indiscreet mother (though I really couldn’t see where the harm was) had one more chance of a good stare. The third party that time was the Royal Pretender (Allègre had been painting his portrait

lately), whose hearty, sonorous laugh was heard long before the mounted trio came riding very slowly abreast of the Blunts. There was colour in the girl's face. She was not laughing. Her expression was serious and her eyes thoughtfully downcast. Blunt admitted that on that occasion the charm, brilliance, and force of her personality was adequately framed between those magnificently mounted, paladin-like attendants, one older than the other but the two composing together admirably in the different stages of their manhood. Mr. Blunt had never before seen Henry Allègre so close. Allègre was riding nearest to the path on which Blunt was dutifully giving his arm to his mother (they had got out of their fiacre) and wondering if that confounded fellow would have the impudence to take off his hat. But he did not. Perhaps he didn't notice. Allègre was not a man of wandering glances. There were silver hairs in his beard but he looked as solid as a statue. Less than three months afterwards he was gone.

"What was it?" asked Mills, who had not changed his pose for a very long time.

"Oh, an accident. But he lingered. They were on their way to Corsica. A yearly pilgrimage. Sentimental perhaps. It was to Corsica that he carried her off — I mean first of all."

There was the slightest contraction of Mr. Blunt's facial muscles. Very slight; but I, staring at the narrator after the manner of all simple souls, noticed it; the twitch of a pain which surely must have been mental. There was also a suggestion of effort before he went on: "I suppose you know how he got hold of her?" in a tone of ease which was astonishingly ill-assumed for such a worldly, self-controlled, drawing-room person.

Mills changed his attitude to look at him fixedly for a moment. Then he leaned back in his chair and with interest — I don't mean curiosity, I mean interest: "Does anybody know besides the two parties concerned?" he asked, with something as it were renewed (or was it refreshed?) in his unmoved quietness. "I ask because one has never heard any tales. I remember one evening in a restaurant seeing a man come in with a lady — a beautiful lady — very particularly beautiful, as though she had been stolen out of Mahomet's paradise. With Doña Rita it can't be anything as definite as that. But speaking of her in the same strain, I've always felt that she looked as though Allègre had caught her in the precincts of some temple . . . in the mountains."

I was delighted. I had never heard before a woman spoken about in that way, a real live woman that is, not a woman in a book. For this was no poetry and yet it seemed to put her in the category of visions. And I would have lost myself in it if Mr. Blunt had not, most unexpectedly, addressed himself to me.

"I told you that man was as fine as a needle."

And then to Mills: "Out of a temple? We know what that means." His dark eyes flashed: "And must it be really in the mountains?" he added.

"Or in a desert," conceded Mills, "if you prefer that. There have been temples in deserts, you know."

Blunt had calmed down suddenly and assumed a nonchalant pose.

"As a matter of fact, Henry Allègre caught her very early one morning in his own old garden full of thrushes and other small birds. She was sitting on a stone, a fragment of

some old balustrade, with her feet in the damp grass, and reading a tattered book of some kind. She had on a short, black, two-penny frock (*une petite robe de deux sous*) and there was a hole in one of her stockings. She raised her eyes and saw him looking down at her thoughtfully over that ambrosian beard of his, like Jove at a mortal. They exchanged a good long stare, for at first she was too startled to move; and then he murmured, "Restez donc." She lowered her eyes again on her book and after a while heard him walk away on the path. Her heart thumped while she listened to the little birds filling the air with their noise. She was not frightened. I am telling you this positively because she has told me the tale herself. What better authority can you have . . .?" Blunt paused.

"That's true. She's not the sort of person to lie about her own sensations," murmured Mills above his clasped hands.

"Nothing can escape his penetration," Blunt remarked to me with that equivocal urbanity which made me always feel uncomfortable on Mills' account. "Positively nothing." He turned to Mills again. "After some minutes of immobility — she told me — she arose from her stone and walked slowly on the track of that apparition. Allègre was nowhere to be seen by that time. Under the gateway of the extremely ugly tenement house, which hides the Pavilion and the garden from the street, the wife of the porter was waiting with her arms akimbo. At once she cried out to Rita: 'You were caught by our gentleman.'

"As a matter of fact, that old woman, being a friend of Rita's aunt, allowed the girl to come into the garden whenever Allègre was away. But Allègre's goings and comings were sudden and unannounced; and that morning, Rita, crossing the narrow, thronged street, had slipped in through the gateway in ignorance of Allègre's return and unseen by the porter's wife.

"The child, she was but little more than that then, expressed her regret of having perhaps got the kind porter's wife into trouble.

"The old woman said with a peculiar smile: 'Your face is not of the sort that gets other people into trouble. My gentleman wasn't angry. He says you may come in any morning you like.'

"Rita, without saying anything to this, crossed the street back again to the warehouse full of oranges where she spent most of her waking hours. Her dreaming, empty, idle, thoughtless, unperturbed hours, she calls them. She crossed the street with a hole in her stocking. She had a hole in her stocking not because her uncle and aunt were poor (they had around them never less than eight thousand oranges, mostly in cases) but because she was then careless and untidy and totally unconscious of her personal appearance. She told me herself that she was not even conscious then of her personal existence. She was a mere adjunct in the twilight life of her aunt, a Frenchwoman, and her uncle, the orange merchant, a Basque peasant, to whom her other uncle, the great man of the family, the priest of some parish in the hills near Tolosa, had sent her up at the age of thirteen or thereabouts for safe keeping. She is of peasant stock, you know. This is the true origin of the 'Girl in the Hat' and of the 'Byzantine Empress'

which excited my dear mother so much; of the mysterious girl that the privileged personalities great in art, in letters, in politics, or simply in the world, could see on the big sofa during the gatherings in Allègre's exclusive Pavilion: the Doña Rita of their respectful addresses, manifest and mysterious, like an object of art from some unknown period; the Doña Rita of the initiated Paris. Doña Rita and nothing more — unique and indefinable." He stopped with a disagreeable smile.

"And of peasant stock?" I exclaimed in the strangely conscious silence that fell between Mills and Blunt.

"Oh! All these Basques have been ennobled by Don Sanche II," said Captain Blunt moodily. "You see coats of arms carved over the doorways of the most miserable caserios. As far as that goes she's Doña Rita right enough whatever else she is or is not in herself or in the eyes of others. In your eyes, for instance, Mills. Eh?"

For a time Mills preserved that conscious silence.

"Why think about it at all?" he murmured coldly at last. "A strange bird is hatched sometimes in a nest in an unaccountable way and then the fate of such a bird is bound to be ill-defined, uncertain, questionable. And so that is how Henry Allègre saw her first? And what happened next?"

"What happened next?" repeated Mr. Blunt, with an affected surprise in his tone. "Is it necessary to ask that question? If you had asked how the next happened. . . But as you may imagine she hasn't told me anything about that. She didn't," he continued with polite sarcasm, "enlarge upon the facts. That confounded Allègre, with his impudent assumption of princely airs, must have (I shouldn't wonder) made the fact of his notice appear as a sort of favour dropped from Olympus. I really can't tell how the minds and the imaginations of such aunts and uncles are affected by such rare visitations. Mythology may give us a hint. There is the story of Danae, for instance."

"There is," remarked Mills calmly, "but I don't remember any aunt or uncle in that connection."

"And there are also certain stories of the discovery and acquisition of some unique objects of art. The sly approaches, the astute negotiations, the lying and the circumventing . . . for the love of beauty, you know."

With his dark face and with the perpetual smiles playing about his grimness, Mr. Blunt appeared to me positively satanic. Mills' hand was toying absently with an empty glass. Again they had forgotten my existence altogether.

"I don't know how an object of art would feel," went on Blunt, in an unexpectedly grating voice, which, however, recovered its tone immediately. "I don't know. But I do know that Rita herself was not a Danae, never, not at any time of her life. She didn't mind the holes in her stockings. She wouldn't mind holes in her stockings now. . . That is if she manages to keep any stockings at all," he added, with a sort of suppressed fury so funnily unexpected that I would have burst into a laugh if I hadn't been lost in astonishment of the simplest kind.

"No — really!" There was a flash of interest from the quiet Mills.

“Yes, really,” Blunt nodded and knitted his brows very devilishly indeed. “She may yet be left without a single pair of stockings.”

“The world’s a thief,” declared Mills, with the utmost composure. “It wouldn’t mind robbing a lonely traveller.”

“He is so subtle.” Blunt remembered my existence for the purpose of that remark and as usual it made me very uncomfortable. “Perfectly true. A lonely traveller. They are all in the scramble from the lowest to the highest. Heavens! What a gang! There was even an Archbishop in it.”

“Vous plaisantez,” said Mills, but without any marked show of incredulity.

“I joke very seldom,” Blunt protested earnestly. “That’s why I haven’t mentioned His Majesty — whom God preserve. That would have been an exaggeration. . . . However, the end is not yet. We were talking about the beginning. I have heard that some dealers in fine objects, quite mercenary people of course (my mother has an experience in that world), show sometimes an astonishing reluctance to part with some specimens, even at a good price. It must be very funny. It’s just possible that the uncle and the aunt have been rolling in tears on the floor, amongst their oranges, or beating their heads against the walls from rage and despair. But I doubt it. And in any case Allègre is not the sort of person that gets into any vulgar trouble. And it’s just possible that those people stood open-mouthed at all that magnificence. They weren’t poor, you know; therefore it wasn’t incumbent on them to be honest. They are still there in the old respectable warehouse, I understand. They have kept their position in their quartier, I believe. But they didn’t keep their niece. It might have been an act of sacrifice! For I seem to remember hearing that after attending for a while some school round the corner the child had been set to keep the books of that orange business. However it might have been, the first fact in Rita’s and Allègre’s common history is a journey to Italy, and then to Corsica. You know Allègre had a house in Corsica somewhere. She has it now as she has everything he ever had; and that Corsican palace is the portion that will stick the longest to Doña Rita, I imagine. Who would want to buy a place like that? I suppose nobody would take it for a gift. The fellow was having houses built all over the place. This very house where we are sitting belonged to him. Doña Rita has given it to her sister, I understand. Or at any rate the sister runs it. She is my landlady . . .”

“Her sister here!” I exclaimed. “Her sister!”

Blunt turned to me politely, but only for a long mute gaze. His eyes were in deep shadow and it struck me for the first time then that there was something fatal in that man’s aspect as soon as he fell silent. I think the effect was purely physical, but in consequence whatever he said seemed inadequate and as if produced by a commonplace, if uneasy, soul.

“Doña Rita brought her down from her mountains on purpose. She is asleep somewhere in this house, in one of the vacant rooms. She lets them, you know, at extortionate prices, that is, if people will pay them, for she is easily intimidated. You see, she has never seen such an enormous town before in her life, nor yet so many strange peo-

ple. She has been keeping house for the uncle-priest in some mountain gorge for years and years. It's extraordinary he should have let her go. There is something mysterious there, some reason or other. It's either theology or Family. The saintly uncle in his wild parish would know nothing of any other reasons. She wears a rosary at her waist. Directly she had seen some real money she developed a love of it. If you stay with me long enough, and I hope you will (I really can't sleep), you will see her going out to mass at half-past six; but there is nothing remarkable in her; just a peasant woman of thirty-four or so. A rustic nun. . . ."

I may as well say at once that we didn't stay as long as that. It was not that morning that I saw for the first time Therese of the whispering lips and downcast eyes slipping out to an early mass from the house of iniquity into the early winter murk of the city of perdition, in a world steeped in sin. No. It was not on that morning that I saw Doña Rita's incredible sister with her brown, dry face, her gliding motion, and her really nun-like dress, with a black handkerchief enfolding her head tightly, with the two pointed ends hanging down her back. Yes, nun-like enough. And yet not altogether. People would have turned round after her if those dartings out to the half-past six mass hadn't been the only occasion on which she ventured into the impious streets. She was frightened of the streets, but in a particular way, not as if of a danger but as if of a contamination. Yet she didn't fly back to her mountains because at bottom she had an indomitable character, a peasant tenacity of purpose, predatory instincts. . . .

No, we didn't remain long enough with Mr. Blunt to see even as much as her back glide out of the house on her prayerful errand. She was prayerful. She was terrible. Her one-ideal peasant mind was as inaccessible as a closed iron safe. She was fatal. . . . It's perfectly ridiculous to confess that they all seem fatal to me now; but writing to you like this in all sincerity I don't mind appearing ridiculous. I suppose fatality must be expressed, embodied, like other forces of this earth; and if so why not in such people as well as in other more glorious or more frightful figures?

We remained, however, long enough to let Mr. Blunt's half-hidden acrimony develop itself or prey on itself in further talk about the man Allègre and the girl Rita. Mr. Blunt, still addressing Mills with that story, passed on to what he called the second act, the disclosure, with, what he called, the characteristic Allègre impudence — which surpassed the impudence of kings, millionaires, or tramps, by many degrees — the revelation of Rita's existence to the world at large. It wasn't a very large world, but then it was most choicely composed. How is one to describe it shortly? In a sentence it was the world that rides in the morning in the Bois.

In something less than a year and a half from the time he found her sitting on a broken fragment of stone work buried in the grass of his wild garden, full of thrushes, starlings, and other innocent creatures of the air, he had given her amongst other accomplishments the art of sitting admirably on a horse, and directly they returned to Paris he took her out with him for their first morning ride.

"I leave you to judge of the sensation," continued Mr. Blunt, with a faint grimace, as though the words had an acrid taste in his mouth. "And the consternation," he

added venomously. "Many of those men on that great morning had some one of their womankind with them. But their hats had to go off all the same, especially the hats of the fellows who were under some sort of obligation to Allègre. You would be astonished to hear the names of people, of real personalities in the world, who, not to mince matters, owed money to Allègre. And I don't mean in the world of art only. In the first rout of the surprise some story of an adopted daughter was set abroad hastily, I believe. You know 'adopted' with a peculiar accent on the word — and it was plausible enough. I have been told that at that time she looked extremely youthful by his side, I mean extremely youthful in expression, in the eyes, in the smile. She must have been . . ."

Blunt pulled himself up short, but not so short as not to let the confused murmur of the word "adorable" reach our attentive ears.

The heavy Mills made a slight movement in his chair. The effect on me was more inward, a strange emotion which left me perfectly still; and for the moment of silence Blunt looked more fatal than ever.

"I understand it didn't last very long," he addressed us politely again. "And no wonder! The sort of talk she would have heard during that first springtime in Paris would have put an impress on a much less receptive personality; for of course Allègre didn't close his doors to his friends and this new apparition was not of the sort to make them keep away. After that first morning she always had somebody to ride at her bridle hand. Old Doyen, the sculptor, was the first to approach them. At that age a man may venture on anything. He rides a strange animal like a circus horse. Rita had spotted him out of the corner of her eye as he passed them, putting up his enormous paw in a still more enormous glove, airily, you know, like this" (Blunt waved his hand above his head), "to Allègre. He passes on. All at once he wheels his fantastic animal round and comes trotting after them. With the merest casual 'Bonjour, Allègre' he ranges close to her on the other side and addresses her, hat in hand, in that booming voice of his like a deferential roar of the sea very far away. His articulation is not good, and the first words she really made out were 'I am an old sculptor. . . Of course there is that habit. . . But I can see you through all that. . . '

He put his hat on very much on one side. 'I am a great sculptor of women,' he declared. 'I gave up my life to them, poor unfortunate creatures, the most beautiful, the wealthiest, the most loved. . . Two generations of them. . . Just look at me full in the eyes, mon enfant.'

"They stared at each other. Doña Rita confessed to me that the old fellow made her heart beat with such force that she couldn't manage to smile at him. And she saw his eyes run full of tears. He wiped them simply with the back of his hand and went on booming faintly. 'Thought so. You are enough to make one cry. I thought my artist's life was finished, and here you come along from devil knows where with this young friend of mine, who isn't a bad smearer of canvases — but it's marble and bronze that you want. . . I shall finish my artist's life with your face; but I shall want a bit of those shoulders, too. . . You hear, Allègre, I must have a bit of her shoulders, too. I can see

through the cloth that they are divine. If they aren't divine I will eat my hat. Yes, I will do your head and then — nunc dimittis.'

"These were the first words with which the world greeted her, or should I say civilization did; already both her native mountains and the cavern of oranges belonged to a prehistoric age. 'Why don't you ask him to come this afternoon?' Allègre's voice suggested gently. 'He knows the way to the house.'

"The old man said with extraordinary fervour, 'Oh, yes I will,' pulled up his horse and they went on. She told me that she could feel her heart-beats for a long time. The remote power of that voice, those old eyes full of tears, that noble and ruined face, had affected her extraordinarily she said. But perhaps what affected her was the shadow, the still living shadow of a great passion in the man's heart.

"Allègre remarked to her calmly: 'He has been a little mad all his life.'"

Chapter 3

Mills lowered the hands holding the extinct and even cold pipe before his big face.

"H'm, shoot an arrow into that old man's heart like this? But was there anything done?"

"A terra-cotta bust, I believe. Good? I don't know. I rather think it's in this house. A lot of things have been sent down from Paris here, when she gave up the Pavilion. When she goes up now she stays in hotels, you know. I imagine it is locked up in one of these things," went on Blunt, pointing towards the end of the studio where amongst the monumental presses of dark oak lurked the shy dummy which had worn the stiff robes of the Byzantine Empress and the amazing hat of the "Girl," rakishly. I wondered whether that dummy had travelled from Paris, too, and whether with or without its head. Perhaps that head had been left behind, having rolled into a corner of some empty room in the dismantled Pavilion. I represented it to myself very lonely, without features, like a turnip, with a mere peg sticking out where the neck should have been. And Mr. Blunt was talking on.

"There are treasures behind these locked doors, brocades, old jewels, unframed pictures, bronzes, chinoiseries, Japoneries."

He growled as much as a man of his accomplished manner and voice could growl. "I don't suppose she gave away all that to her sister, but I shouldn't be surprised if that timid rustic didn't lay a claim to the lot for the love of God and the good of the Church. . .

"And held on with her teeth, too," he added graphically.

Mills' face remained grave. Very grave. I was amused at those little venomous outbreaks of the fatal Mr. Blunt. Again I knew myself utterly forgotten. But I didn't feel dull and I didn't even feel sleepy. That last strikes me as strange at this distance of time, in regard of my tender years and of the depressing hour which precedes the dawn. We had been drinking that straw-coloured wine, too, I won't say like water (nobody

would have drunk water like that) but, well . . . and the haze of tobacco smoke was like the blue mist of great distances seen in dreams.

Yes, that old sculptor was the first who joined them in the sight of all Paris. It was that old glory that opened the series of companions of those morning rides; a series which extended through three successive Parisian spring-times and comprised a famous physiologist, a fellow who seemed to hint that mankind could be made immortal or at least everlastingly old; a fashionable philosopher and psychologist who used to lecture to enormous audiences of women with his tongue in his cheek (but never permitted himself anything of the kind when talking to Rita); that surly dandy Cabanel (but he only once, from mere vanity), and everybody else at all distinguished including also a celebrated person who turned out later to be a swindler. But he was really a genius. . . All this according to Mr. Blunt, who gave us all those details with a sort of languid zest covering a secret irritation.

“Apart from that, you know,” went on Mr. Blunt, “all she knew of the world of men and women (I mean till Allègre’s death) was what she had seen of it from the saddle two hours every morning during four months of the year or so. Absolutely all, with Allègre self-denyingly on her right hand, with that impenetrable air of guardianship. Don’t touch! He didn’t like his treasures to be touched unless he actually put some unique object into your hands with a sort of triumphant murmur, ‘Look close at that.’ Of course I only have heard all this. I am much too small a person, you understand, to even . . .”

He flashed his white teeth at us most agreeably, but the upper part of his face, the shadowed setting of his eyes, and the slight drawing in of his eyebrows gave a fatal suggestion. I thought suddenly of the definition he applied to himself: “Américain, catholique et gentil-homme” completed by that startling “I live by my sword” uttered in a light drawing-room tone tinged by a flavour of mockery lighter even than air.

He insisted to us that the first and only time he had seen Allègre a little close was that morning in the Bois with his mother. His Majesty (whom God preserve), then not even an active Pretender, flanked the girl, still a girl, on the other side, the usual companion for a month past or so. Allègre had suddenly taken it into his head to paint his portrait. A sort of intimacy had sprung up. Mrs. Blunt’s remark was that of the two striking horsemen Allègre looked the more kingly.

“The son of a confounded millionaire soap-boiler,” commented Mr. Blunt through his clenched teeth. “A man absolutely without parentage. Without a single relation in the world. Just a freak.”

“That explains why he could leave all his fortune to her,” said Mills.

“The will, I believe,” said Mr. Blunt moodily, “was written on a half sheet of paper, with his device of an Assyrian bull at the head. What the devil did he mean by it? Anyway it was the last time that she surveyed the world of men and women from the saddle. Less than three months later. . .”

“Allègre died and. . .” murmured Mills in an interested manner.

“And she had to dismount,” broke in Mr. Blunt grimly. “Dismount right into the middle of it. Down to the very ground, you understand. I suppose you can guess what that would mean. She didn’t know what to do with herself. She had never been on the ground. She . . . “

“Aha!” said Mills.

“Even eh! eh! if you like,” retorted Mr. Blunt, in an unrefined tone, that made me open my eyes, which were well opened before, still wider.

He turned to me with that horrible trick of his of commenting upon Mills as though that quiet man whom I admired, whom I trusted, and for whom I had already something resembling affection had been as much of a dummy as that other one lurking in the shadows, pitiful and headless in its attitude of alarmed chastity.

“Nothing escapes his penetration. He can perceive a haystack at an enormous distance when he is interested.”

I thought this was going rather too far, even to the borders of vulgarity; but Mills remained untroubled and only reached for his tobacco pouch.

“But that’s nothing to my mother’s interest. She can never see a haystack, therefore she is always so surprised and excited. Of course Doña Rita was not a woman about whom the newspapers insert little paragraphs. But Allègre was the sort of man. A lot came out in print about him and a lot was talked in the world about her; and at once my dear mother perceived a haystack and naturally became unreasonably absorbed in it. I thought her interest would wear out. But it didn’t. She had received a shock and had received an impression by means of that girl. My mother has never been treated with impertinence before, and the aesthetic impression must have been of extraordinary strength. I must suppose that it amounted to a sort of moral revolution, I can’t account for her proceedings in any other way. When Rita turned up in Paris a year and a half after Allègre’s death some shabby journalist (smart creature) hit upon the notion of alluding to her as the heiress of Mr. Allègre. ‘The heiress of Mr. Allègre has taken up her residence again amongst the treasures of art in that Pavilion so well known to the élite of the artistic, scientific, and political world, not to speak of the members of aristocratic and even royal families. . . ‘ You know the sort of thing. It appeared first in the Figaro, I believe. And then at the end a little phrase: ‘She is alone.’ She was in a fair way of becoming a celebrity of a sort. Daily little allusions and that sort of thing. Heaven only knows who stopped it. There was a rush of ‘old friends’ into that garden, enough to scare all the little birds away. I suppose one or several of them, having influence with the press, did it. But the gossip didn’t stop, and the name stuck, too, since it conveyed a very certain and very significant sort of fact, and of course the Venetian episode was talked about in the houses frequented by my mother. It was talked about from a royalist point of view with a kind of respect. It was even said that the inspiration and the resolution of the war going on now over the Pyrenees had come out from that head. . . Some of them talked as if she were the guardian angel of Legitimacy. You know what royalist gush is like.”

Mr. Blunt's face expressed sarcastic disgust. Mills moved his head the least little bit. Apparently he knew.

"Well, speaking with all possible respect, it seems to have affected my mother's brain. I was already with the royal army and of course there could be no question of regular postal communications with France. My mother hears or overhears somewhere that the heiress of Mr. Allègre is contemplating a secret journey. All the noble Salons were full of chatter about that secret naturally. So she sits down and pens an autograph: 'Madame, Informed that you are proceeding to the place on which the hopes of all the right thinking people are fixed, I trust to your womanly sympathy with a mother's anxious feelings, etc., etc.,' and ending with a request to take messages to me and bring news of me. . . The coolness of my mother!"

Most unexpectedly Mills was heard murmuring a question which seemed to me very odd.

"I wonder how your mother addressed that note?"

A moment of silence ensued.

"Hardly in the newspaper style, I should think," retorted Mr. Blunt, with one of his grins that made me doubt the stability of his feelings and the consistency of his outlook in regard to his whole tale. "My mother's maid took it in a fiacre very late one evening to the Pavilion and brought an answer scrawled on a scrap of paper: 'Write your messages at once' and signed with a big capital R. So my mother sat down again to her charming writing desk and the maid made another journey in a fiacre just before midnight; and ten days later or so I got a letter thrust into my hand at the avanzadas just as I was about to start on a night patrol, together with a note asking me to call on the writer so that she might allay my mother's anxieties by telling her how I looked.

"It was signed R only, but I guessed at once and nearly fell off my horse with surprise."

"You mean to say that Doña Rita was actually at the Royal Headquarters lately?" exclaimed Mills, with evident surprise. "Why, we — everybody — thought that all this affair was over and done with."

"Absolutely. Nothing in the world could be more done with than that episode. Of course the rooms in the hotel at Tolosa were retained for her by an order from Royal Headquarters. Two garret-rooms, the place was so full of all sorts of court people; but I can assure you that for the three days she was there she never put her head outside the door. General Mongroviejo called on her officially from the King. A general, not anybody of the household, you see. That's a distinct shade of the present relation. He stayed just five minutes. Some personage from the Foreign department at Headquarters was closeted for about a couple of hours. That was of course business. Then two officers from the staff came together with some explanations or instructions to her. Then Baron H., a fellow with a pretty wife, who had made so many sacrifices for the cause, raised a great to-do about seeing her and she consented to receive him for a moment. They say he was very much frightened by her arrival, but after the interview went away all smiles. Who else? Yes, the Archbishop came. Half an hour. This is more than is

necessary to give a blessing, and I can't conceive what else he had to give her. But I am sure he got something out of her. Two peasants from the upper valley were sent for by military authorities and she saw them, too. That friar who hangs about the court has been in and out several times. Well, and lastly, I myself. I got leave from the outposts. That was the first time I talked to her. I would have gone that evening back to the regiment, but the friar met me in the corridor and informed me that I would be ordered to escort that most loyal and noble lady back to the French frontier as a personal mission of the highest honour. I was inclined to laugh at him. He himself is a cheery and jovial person and he laughed with me quite readily — but I got the order before dark all right. It was rather a job, as the Alphonsists were attacking the right flank of our whole front and there was some considerable disorder there. I mounted her on a mule and her maid on another. We spent one night in a ruined old tower occupied by some of our infantry and got away at daybreak under the Alphonsist shells. The maid nearly died of fright and one of the troopers with us was wounded. To smuggle her back across the frontier was another job but it wasn't my job. It wouldn't have done for her to appear in sight of French frontier posts in the company of Carlist uniforms. She seems to have a fearless streak in her nature. At one time as we were climbing a slope absolutely exposed to artillery fire I asked her on purpose, being provoked by the way she looked about at the scenery, 'A little emotion, eh?' And she answered me in a low voice: 'Oh, yes! I am moved. I used to run about these hills when I was little.' And note, just then the trooper close behind us had been wounded by a shell fragment. He was swearing awfully and fighting with his horse. The shells were falling around us about two to the minute.

"Luckily the Alphonsist shells are not much better than our own. But women are funny. I was afraid the maid would jump down and clear out amongst the rocks, in which case we should have had to dismount and catch her. But she didn't do that; she sat perfectly still on her mule and shrieked. Just simply shrieked. Ultimately we came to a curiously shaped rock at the end of a short wooded valley. It was very still there and the sunshine was brilliant. I said to Doña Rita: 'We will have to part in a few minutes. I understand that my mission ends at this rock.' And she said: 'I know this rock well. This is my country.'

"Then she thanked me for bringing her there and presently three peasants appeared, waiting for us, two youths and one shaven old man, with a thin nose like a sword blade and perfectly round eyes, a character well known to the whole Carlist army. The two youths stopped under the trees at a distance, but the old fellow came quite close up and gazed at her, screwing up his eyes as if looking at the sun. Then he raised his arm very slowly and took his red boina off his bald head. I watched her smiling at him all the time. I daresay she knew him as well as she knew the old rock. Very old rock. The rock of ages — and the aged man — landmarks of her youth. Then the mules started walking smartly forward, with the three peasants striding alongside of them, and vanished between the trees. These fellows were most likely sent out by her uncle the Cura.

“It was a peaceful scene, the morning light, the bit of open country framed in steep stony slopes, a high peak or two in the distance, the thin smoke of some invisible caserios, rising straight up here and there. Far away behind us the guns had ceased and the echoes in the gorges had died out. I never knew what peace meant before. . .

“Nor since,” muttered Mr. Blunt after a pause and then went on. “The little stone church of her uncle, the holy man of the family, might have been round the corner of the next spur of the nearest hill. I dismounted to bandage the shoulder of my trooper. It was only a nasty long scratch. While I was busy about it a bell began to ring in the distance. The sound fell deliciously on the ear, clear like the morning light. But it stopped all at once. You know how a distant bell stops suddenly. I never knew before what stillness meant. While I was wondering at it the fellow holding our horses was moved to uplift his voice. He was a Spaniard, not a Basque, and he trolled out in Castilian that song you know,

“‘Oh bells of my native village,
I am going away . . . good-bye!’

He had a good voice. When the last note had floated away I remounted, but there was a charm in the spot, something particular and individual because while we were looking at it before turning our horses’ heads away the singer said: ‘I wonder what is the name of this place,’ and the other man remarked: ‘Why, there is no village here,’ and the first one insisted: ‘No, I mean this spot, this very place.’ The wounded trooper decided that it had no name probably. But he was wrong. It had a name. The hill, or the rock, or the wood, or the whole had a name. I heard of it by chance later. It was — Lastaola.”

A cloud of tobacco smoke from Mills’ pipe drove between my head and the head of Mr. Blunt, who, strange to say, yawned slightly. It seemed to me an obvious affectation on the part of that man of perfect manners, and, moreover, suffering from distressing insomnia.

“This is how we first met and how we first parted,” he said in a weary, indifferent tone. “It’s quite possible that she did see her uncle on the way. It’s perhaps on this occasion that she got her sister to come out of the wilderness. I have no doubt she had a pass from the French Government giving her the completest freedom of action. She must have got it in Paris before leaving.”

Mr. Blunt broke out into worldly, slightly cynical smiles.

“She can get anything she likes in Paris. She could get a whole army over the frontier if she liked. She could get herself admitted into the Foreign Office at one o’clock in the morning if it so pleased her. Doors fly open before the heiress of Mr. Allègre. She has inherited the old friends, the old connections . . . Of course, if she were a toothless old woman . . . But, you see, she isn’t. The ushers in all the ministries bow down to the ground therefore, and voices from the innermost sanctums take on an eager tone when they say, ‘Faites entrer.’ My mother knows something about it. She has followed her career with the greatest attention. And Rita herself is not even surprised. She accomplishes most extraordinary things, as naturally as buying a pair of gloves.

People in the shops are very polite and people in the world are like people in the shops. What did she know of the world? She had seen it only from the saddle. Oh, she will get your cargo released for you all right. How will she do it? . . . Well, when it's done — you follow me, Mills? — when it's done she will hardly know herself.”

“It's hardly possible that she shouldn't be aware,” Mills pronounced calmly.

“No, she isn't an idiot,” admitted Mr. Blunt, in the same matter-of-fact voice. “But she confessed to myself only the other day that she suffered from a sense of unreality. I told her that at any rate she had her own feelings surely. And she said to me: Yes, there was one of them at least about which she had no doubt; and you will never guess what it was. Don't try. I happen to know, because we are pretty good friends.”

At that moment we all changed our attitude slightly. Mills' staring eyes moved for a glance towards Blunt, I, who was occupying the divan, raised myself on the cushions a little and Mr. Blunt, with half a turn, put his elbow on the table.

“I asked her what it was. I don't see,” went on Mr. Blunt, with a perfectly horrible gentleness, “why I should have shown particular consideration to the heiress of Mr. Allègre. I don't mean to that particular mood of hers. It was the mood of weariness. And so she told me. It's fear. I will say it once again: Fear. . . .”

He added after a pause, “There can be not the slightest doubt of her courage. But she distinctly uttered the word fear.”

There was under the table the noise of Mills stretching his legs.

“A person of imagination,” he began, “a young, virgin intelligence, steeped for nearly five years in the talk of Allègre's studio, where every hard truth had been cracked and every belief had been worried into shreds. They were like a lot of intellectual dogs, you know . . .”

“Yes, yes, of course,” Blunt interrupted hastily, “the intellectual personality altogether adrift, a soul without a home . . . but I, who am neither very fine nor very deep, I am convinced that the fear is material.”

“Because she confessed to it being that?” insinuated Mills.

“No, because she didn't,” contradicted Blunt, with an angry frown and in an extremely suave voice. “In fact, she bit her tongue. And considering what good friends we are (under fire together and all that) I conclude that there is nothing there to boast of. Neither is my friendship, as a matter of fact.”

Mills' face was the very perfection of indifference. But I who was looking at him, in my innocence, to discover what it all might mean, I had a notion that it was perhaps a shade too perfect.

“My leave is a farce,” Captain Blunt burst out, with a most unexpected exasperation. “As an officer of Don Carlos, I have no more standing than a bandit. I ought to have been interned in those filthy old barracks in Avignon a long time ago. . . . Why am I not? Because Doña Rita exists and for no other reason on earth. Of course it's known that I am about. She has only to whisper over the wires to the Minister of the Interior, ‘Put that bird in a cage for me,’ and the thing would be done without any more formalities

than that. . . Sad world this," he commented in a changed tone. "Nowadays a gentleman who lives by his sword is exposed to that sort of thing."

It was then for the first time I heard Mr. Mills laugh. It was a deep, pleasant, kindly note, not very loud and altogether free from that quality of derision that spoils so many laughs and gives away the secret hardness of hearts. But neither was it a very joyous laugh.

"But the truth of the matter is that I am 'en mission,'" continued Captain Blunt. "I have been instructed to settle some things, to set other things going, and, by my instructions, Doña Rita is to be the intermediary for all those objects. And why? Because every bald head in this Republican Government gets pink at the top whenever her dress rustles outside the door. They bow with immense deference when the door opens, but the bow conceals a smirk because of those Venetian days. That confounded Versoy shoved his nose into that business; he says accidentally. He saw them together on the Lido and (those writing fellows are horrible) he wrote what he calls a vignette (I suppose accidentally, too) under that very title. There was in it a Prince and a lady and a big dog. He described how the Prince on landing from the gondola emptied his purse into the hands of a picturesque old beggar, while the lady, a little way off, stood gazing back at Venice with the dog romantically stretched at her feet. One of Versoy's beautiful prose vignettes in a great daily that has a literary column. But some other papers that didn't care a cent for literature rehashed the mere fact. And that's the sort of fact that impresses your political man, especially if the lady is, well, such as she is . . ."

He paused. His dark eyes flashed fatally, away from us, in the direction of the shy dummy; and then he went on with cultivated cynicism.

"So she rushes down here. Overdone, weary, rest for her nerves. Nonsense. I assure you she has no more nerves than I have."

I don't know how he meant it, but at that moment, slim and elegant, he seemed a mere bundle of nerves himself, with the flitting expressions on his thin, well-bred face, with the restlessness of his meagre brown hands amongst the objects on the table. With some pipe ash amongst a little spilt wine his forefinger traced a capital R. Then he looked into an empty glass profoundly. I have a notion that I sat there staring and listening like a yokel at a play. Mills' pipe was lying quite a foot away in front of him, empty, cold. Perhaps he had no more tobacco. Mr. Blunt assumed his dandified air — nervously.

"Of course her movements are commented on in the most exclusive drawing-rooms and also in other places, also exclusive, but where the gossip takes on another tone. There they are probably saying that she has got a 'coup de coeur' for some one. Whereas I think she is utterly incapable of that sort of thing. That Venetian affair, the beginning of it and the end of it, was nothing but a coup de tête, and all those activities in which I am involved, as you see (by order of Headquarters, ha, ha, ha!), are nothing but that, all this connection, all this intimacy into which I have dropped . . . Not to speak of

my mother, who is delightful, but as irresponsible as one of those crazy princesses that shock their Royal families. . . .“

He seemed to bite his tongue and I observed that Mills' eyes seemed to have grown wider than I had ever seen them before. In that tranquil face it was a great play of feature. "An intimacy," began Mr. Blunt, with an extremely refined grimness of tone, "an intimacy with the heiress of Mr. Allègre on the part of . . . on my part, well, it isn't exactly . . . it's open . . . well, I leave it to you, what does it look like?"

"Is there anybody looking on?" Mills let fall, gently, through his kindly lips.

"Not actually, perhaps, at this moment. But I don't need to tell a man of the world, like you, that such things cannot remain unseen. And that they are, well, compromising, because of the mere fact of the fortune."

Mills got on his feet, looked for his jacket and after getting into it made himself heard while he looked for his hat.

"Whereas the woman herself is, so to speak, priceless."

Mr. Blunt muttered the word "Obviously."

By then we were all on our feet. The iron stove glowed no longer and the lamp, surrounded by empty bottles and empty glasses, had grown dimmer.

I know that I had a great shiver on getting away from the cushions of the divan.

"We will meet again in a few hours," said Mr. Blunt.

"Don't forget to come," he said, addressing me. "Oh, yes, do. Have no scruples. I am authorized to make invitations."

He must have noticed my shyness, my surprise, my embarrassment. And indeed I didn't know what to say.

"I assure you there isn't anything incorrect in your coming," he insisted, with the greatest civility. "You will be introduced by two good friends, Mills and myself. Surely you are not afraid of a very charming woman. . . ."

I was not afraid, but my head swam a little and I only looked at him mutely.

"Lunch precisely at midday. Mills will bring you along. I am sorry you two are going. I shall throw myself on the bed for an hour or two, but I am sure I won't sleep."

He accompanied us along the passage into the black-and-white hall, where the low gas flame glimmered forlornly. When he opened the front door the cold blast of the mistral rushing down the street of the Consuls made me shiver to the very marrow of my bones.

Mills and I exchanged but a few words as we walked down towards the centre of the town. In the chill tempestuous dawn he strolled along musingly, disregarding the discomfort of the cold, the depressing influence of the hour, the desolation of the empty streets in which the dry dust rose in whirls in front of us, behind us, flew upon us from the side streets. The masks had gone home and our footsteps echoed on the flagstones with unequal sound as of men without purpose, without hope.

"I suppose you will come," said Mills suddenly.

"I really don't know," I said.

“Don’t you? Well, remember I am not trying to persuade you; but I am staying at the Hôtel de Louvre and I shall leave there at a quarter to twelve for that lunch. At a quarter to twelve, not a minute later. I suppose you can sleep?”

I laughed.

“Charming age, yours,” said Mills, as we came out on the quays. Already dim figures of the workers moved in the biting dawn and the masted forms of ships were coming out dimly, as far as the eye could reach down the old harbour.

“Well,” Mills began again, “you may oversleep yourself.”

This suggestion was made in a cheerful tone, just as we shook hands at the lower end of the Cannebière. He looked very burly as he walked away from me. I went on towards my lodgings. My head was very full of confused images, but I was really too tired to think.

Part 2

Chapter 1

Sometimes I wonder yet whether Mills wished me to oversleep myself or not: that is, whether he really took sufficient interest to care. His uniform kindness of manner made it impossible for me to tell. And I can hardly remember my own feelings. Did I care? The whole recollection of that time of my life has such a peculiar quality that the beginning and the end of it are merged in one sensation of profound emotion, continuous and overpowering, containing the extremes of exultation, full of careless joy and of an invincible sadness — like a day-dream. The sense of all this having been gone through as if in one great rush of imagination is all the stronger in the distance of time, because it had something of that quality even then: of fate unprovoked, of events that didn't cast any shadow before.

Not that those events were in the least extraordinary. They were, in truth, commonplace. What to my backward glance seems startling and a little awful is their punctualness and inevitability. Mills was punctual. Exactly at a quarter to twelve he appeared under the lofty portal of the Hôtel de Louvre, with his fresh face, his ill-fitting grey suit, and enveloped in his own sympathetic atmosphere.

How could I have avoided him? To this day I have a shadowy conviction of his inherent distinction of mind and heart, far beyond any man I have ever met since. He was unavoidable: and of course I never tried to avoid him. The first sight on which his eyes fell was a victoria pulled up before the hotel door, in which I sat with no sentiment I can remember now but that of some slight shyness. He got in without a moment's hesitation, his friendly glance took me in from head to foot and (such was his peculiar gift) gave me a pleasurable sensation.

After we had gone a little way I couldn't help saying to him with a bashful laugh: "You know, it seems very extraordinary that I should be driving out with you like this."

He turned to look at me and in his kind voice:

"You will find everything extremely simple," he said. "So simple that you will be quite able to hold your own. I suppose you know that the world is selfish, I mean the majority of the people in it, often unconsciously I must admit, and especially people with a mission, with a fixed idea, with some fantastic object in view, or even with only some fantastic illusion. That doesn't mean that they have no scruples. And I don't know that at this moment I myself am not one of them."

"That, of course, I can't say," I retorted.

"I haven't seen her for years," he said, "and in comparison with what she was then she must be very grown up by now. From what we heard from Mr. Blunt she had experiences which would have matured her more than they would teach her. There are of course people that are not teachable. I don't know that she is one of them. But as to maturity that's quite another thing. Capacity for suffering is developed in every human being worthy of the name."

"Captain Blunt doesn't seem to be a very happy person," I said. "He seems to have a grudge against everybody. People make him wince. The things they do, the things they say. He must be awfully mature."

Mills gave me a sidelong look. It met mine of the same character and we both smiled without openly looking at each other. At the end of the Rue de Rome the violent chilly breath of the mistral enveloped the victoria in a great widening of brilliant sunshine without heat. We turned to the right, circling at a stately pace about the rather mean obelisk which stands at the entrance to the Prado.

"I don't know whether you are mature or not," said Mills humorously. "But I think you will do. You . . ."

"Tell me," I interrupted, "what is really Captain Blunt's position there?"

And I nodded at the alley of the Prado opening before us between the rows of the perfectly leafless trees.

"Thoroughly false, I should think. It doesn't accord either with his illusions or his pretensions, or even with the real position he has in the world. And so what between his mother and the General Headquarters and the state of his own feelings he. . ."

"He is in love with her," I interrupted again.

"That wouldn't make it any easier. I'm not at all sure of that. But if so it can't be a very idealistic sentiment. All the warmth of his idealism is concentrated upon a certain 'Américain, Catholique et gentil-homme. . .'"

The smile which for a moment dwelt on his lips was not unkind.

"At the same time he has a very good grip of the material conditions that surround, as it were, the situation."

"What do you mean? That Doña Rita" (the name came strangely familiar to my tongue) "is rich, that she has a fortune of her own?"

"Yes, a fortune," said Mills. "But it was Allègre's fortune before. . . And then there is Blunt's fortune: he lives by his sword. And there is the fortune of his mother, I assure you a perfectly charming, clever, and most aristocratic old lady, with the most distinguished connections. I really mean it. She doesn't live by her sword. She . . . she lives by her wits. I have a notion that those two dislike each other heartily at times. . . Here we are."

The victoria stopped in the side alley, bordered by the low walls of private grounds. We got out before a wrought-iron gateway which stood half open and walked up a circular drive to the door of a large villa of a neglected appearance. The mistral howled in the sunshine, shaking the bare bushes quite furiously. And everything was bright and hard, the air was hard, the light was hard, the ground under our feet was hard.

The door at which Mills rang came open almost at once. The maid who opened it was short, dark, and slightly pockmarked. For the rest, an obvious "femme-de-chambre," and very busy. She said quickly, "Madame has just returned from her ride," and went up the stairs leaving us to shut the front door ourselves.

The staircase had a crimson carpet. Mr. Blunt appeared from somewhere in the hall. He was in riding breeches and a black coat with ample square skirts. This get-up suited him but it also changed him extremely by doing away with the effect of flexible slimness he produced in his evening clothes. He looked to me not at all himself but rather like a brother of the man who had been talking to us the night before. He carried about him a delicate perfume of scented soap. He gave us a flash of his white teeth and said:

"It's a perfect nuisance. We have just dismounted. I will have to lurch as I am. A lifelong habit of beginning her day on horseback. She pretends she is unwell unless she does. I daresay, when one thinks there has been hardly a day for five or six years that she didn't begin with a ride. That's the reason she is always rushing away from Paris where she can't go out in the morning alone. Here, of course, it's different. And as I, too, am a stranger here I can go out with her. Not that I particularly care to do it."

These last words were addressed to Mills specially, with the addition of a mumbled remark: "It's a confounded position." Then calmly to me with a swift smile: "We have been talking of you this morning. You are expected with impatience."

"Thank you very much," I said, "but I can't help asking myself what I am doing here."

The upward cast in the eyes of Mills who was facing the staircase made us both, Blunt and I, turn round. The woman of whom I had heard so much, in a sort of way in which I had never heard a woman spoken of before, was coming down the stairs, and my first sensation was that of profound astonishment at this evidence that she did really exist. And even then the visual impression was more of colour in a picture than of the forms of actual life. She was wearing a wrapper, a sort of dressing-gown of pale blue silk embroidered with black and gold designs round the neck and down the front, lapped round her and held together by a broad belt of the same material. Her slippers were of the same colour, with black bows at the instep. The white stairs, the deep crimson of the carpet, and the light blue of the dress made an effective combination of colour to set off the delicate carnation of that face, which, after the first glance given to the whole person, drew irresistibly your gaze to itself by an indefinable quality of charm beyond all analysis and made you think of remote races, of strange generations, of the faces of women sculptured on immemorial monuments and of those lying unsung in their tombs. While she moved downwards from step to step with slightly lowered eyes there flashed upon me suddenly the recollection of words heard at night, of Allègre's words about her, of there being in her "something of the women of all time."

At the last step she raised her eyelids, treated us to an exhibition of teeth as dazzling as Mr. Blunt's and looking even stronger; and indeed, as she approached us she brought home to our hearts (but after all I am speaking only for myself) a vivid sense of her

physical perfection in beauty of limb and balance of nerves, and not so much of grace, probably, as of absolute harmony.

She said to us, "I am sorry I kept you waiting." Her voice was low pitched, penetrating, and of the most seductive gentleness. She offered her hand to Mills very frankly as to an old friend. Within the extraordinarily wide sleeve, lined with black silk, I could see the arm, very white, with a pearly gleam in the shadow. But to me she extended her hand with a slight stiffening, as it were a recoil of her person, combined with an extremely straight glance. It was a finely shaped, capable hand. I bowed over it, and we just touched fingers. I did not look then at her face.

Next moment she caught sight of some envelopes lying on the round marble-topped table in the middle of the hall. She seized one of them with a wonderfully quick, almost feline, movement and tore it open, saying to us, "Excuse me, I must . . . Do go into the dining-room. Captain Blunt, show the way."

Her widened eyes stared at the paper. Mr. Blunt threw one of the doors open, but before we passed through it we heard a petulant exclamation accompanied by childlike stamping with both feet and ending in a laugh which had in it a note of contempt.

The door closed behind us; we had been abandoned by Mr. Blunt. He had remained on the other side, possibly to soothe. The room in which we found ourselves was long like a gallery and ended in a rotunda with many windows. It was long enough for two fireplaces of red polished granite. A table laid out for four occupied very little space. The floor inlaid in two kinds of wood in a bizarre pattern was highly waxed, reflecting objects like still water.

Before very long Doña Rita and Blunt rejoined us and we sat down around the table; but before we could begin to talk a dramatically sudden ring at the front door stilled our incipient animation. Doña Rita looked at us all in turn, with surprise and, as it were, with suspicion. "How did he know I was here?" she whispered after looking at the card which was brought to her. She passed it to Blunt, who passed it to Mills, who made a faint grimace, dropped it on the table-cloth, and only whispered to me, "A journalist from Paris."

"He has run me to earth," said Doña Rita. "One would bargain for peace against hard cash if these fellows weren't always ready to snatch at one's very soul with the other hand. It frightens me."

Her voice floated mysterious and penetrating from her lips, which moved very little. Mills was watching her with sympathetic curiosity. Mr. Blunt muttered: "Better not make the brute angry." For a moment Doña Rita's face, with its narrow eyes, its wide brow, and high cheek bones, became very still; then her colour was a little heightened. "Oh," she said softly, "let him come in. He would be really dangerous if he had a mind — you know," she said to Mills.

The person who had provoked all those remarks and as much hesitation as though he had been some sort of wild beast astonished me on being admitted, first by the beauty of his white head of hair and then by his paternal aspect and the innocent simplicity of his manner. They laid a cover for him between Mills and Doña Rita, who

quite openly removed the envelopes she had brought with her, to the other side of her plate. As openly the man's round china-blue eyes followed them in an attempt to make out the handwriting of the addresses.

He seemed to know, at least slightly, both Mills and Blunt. To me he gave a stare of stupid surprise. He addressed our hostess.

"Resting? Rest is a very good thing. Upon my word, I thought I would find you alone. But you have too much sense. Neither man nor woman has been created to live alone. . . ." After this opening he had all the talk to himself. It was left to him pointedly, and I verily believe that I was the only one who showed an appearance of interest. I couldn't help it. The others, including Mills, sat like a lot of deaf and dumb people. No. It was even something more detached. They sat rather like a very superior lot of waxworks, with the fixed but indetermined facial expression and with that odd air wax figures have of being aware of their existence being but a sham.

I was the exception; and nothing could have marked better my status of a stranger, the completest possible stranger in the moral region in which those people lived, moved, enjoying or suffering their incomprehensible emotions. I was as much of a stranger as the most hopeless castaway stumbling in the dark upon a hut of natives and finding them in the grip of some situation appertaining to the mentalities, prejudices, and problems of an undiscovered country — of a country of which he had not even had one single clear glimpse before.

It was even worse in a way. It ought to have been more disconcerting. For, pursuing the image of the cast-away blundering upon the complications of an unknown scheme of life, it was I, the castaway, who was the savage, the simple innocent child of nature. Those people were obviously more civilized than I was. They had more rites, more ceremonies, more complexity in their sensations, more knowledge of evil, more varied meanings to the subtle phrases of their language. Naturally! I was still so young! And yet I assure you, that just then I lost all sense of inferiority. And why? Of course the carelessness and the ignorance of youth had something to do with that. But there was something else besides. Looking at Doña Rita, her head leaning on her hand, with her dark lashes lowered on the slightly flushed cheek, I felt no longer alone in my youth. That woman of whom I had heard these things I have set down with all the exactness of unfailing memory, that woman was revealed to me young, younger than anybody I had ever seen, as young as myself (and my sensation of my youth was then very acute); revealed with something peculiarly intimate in the conviction, as if she were young exactly in the same way in which I felt myself young; and that therefore no misunderstanding between us was possible and there could be nothing more for us to know about each other. Of course this sensation was momentary, but it was illuminating; it was a light which could not last, but it left no darkness behind. On the contrary, it seemed to have kindled magically somewhere within me a glow of assurance, of unaccountable confidence in myself: a warm, steady, and eager sensation of my individual life beginning for good there, on that spot, in that sense of solidarity, in that seduction.

Chapter 2

For this, properly speaking wonderful, reason I was the only one of the company who could listen without constraint to the unbidden guest with that fine head of white hair, so beautifully kept, so magnificently waved, so artistically arranged that respect could not be felt for it any more than for a very expensive wig in the window of a hair-dresser. In fact, I had an inclination to smile at it. This proves how unconstrained I felt. My mind was perfectly at liberty; and so of all the eyes in that room mine was the only pair able to look about in easy freedom. All the other listeners' eyes were cast down, including Mills' eyes, but that I am sure was only because of his perfect and delicate sympathy. He could not have been concerned otherwise.

The intruder devoured the cutlets — if they were cutlets. Notwithstanding my perfect liberty of mind I was not aware of what we were eating. I have a notion that the lunch was a mere show, except of course for the man with the white hair, who was really hungry and who, besides, must have had the pleasant sense of dominating the situation. He stooped over his plate and worked his jaw deliberately while his blue eyes rolled incessantly; but as a matter of fact he never looked openly at any one of us. Whenever he laid down his knife and fork he would throw himself back and start retailing in a light tone some Parisian gossip about prominent people.

He talked first about a certain politician of mark. His "dear Rita" knew him. His costume dated back to '48, he was made of wood and parchment and still swathed his neck in a white cloth; and even his wife had never been seen in a low-necked dress. Not once in her life. She was buttoned up to the chin like her husband. Well, that man had confessed to him that when he was engaged in political controversy, not on a matter of principle but on some special measure in debate, he felt ready to kill everybody.

He interrupted himself for a comment. "I am something like that myself. I believe it's a purely professional feeling. Carry one's point whatever it is. Normally I couldn't kill a fly. My sensibility is too acute for that. My heart is too tender also. Much too tender. I am a Republican. I am a Red. As to all our present masters and governors, all those people you are trying to turn round your little finger, they are all horrible Royalists in disguise. They are plotting the ruin of all the institutions to which I am devoted. But I have never tried to spoil your little game, Rita. After all, it's but a little game. You know very well that two or three fearless articles, something in my style, you know, would soon put a stop to all that underhand backing of your king. I am calling him king because I want to be polite to you. He is an adventurer, a blood-thirsty, murderous adventurer, for me, and nothing else. Look here, my dear child, what are you knocking yourself about for? For the sake of that bandit? Allons donc! A pupil of Henry Allègre can have no illusions of that sort about any man. And such a pupil, too! Ah, the good old days in the Pavilion! Don't think I claim any particular intimacy. It was just enough to enable me to offer my services to you, Rita, when our poor friend died. I found myself handy and so I came. It so happened that I was the first. You remember, Rita? What made it possible for everybody to get on with our poor dear

Allègre was his complete, equable, and impartial contempt for all mankind. There is nothing in that against the purest democratic principles; but that you, Rita, should elect to throw so much of your life away for the sake of a Royal adventurer, it really knocks me over. For you don't love him. You never loved him, you know."

He made a snatch at her hand, absolutely pulled it away from under her head (it was quite startling) and retaining it in his grasp, proceeded to a paternal patting of the most impudent kind. She let him go on with apparent insensibility. Meanwhile his eyes strayed round the table over our faces. It was very trying. The stupidity of that wandering stare had a paralysing power. He talked at large with husky familiarity.

"Here I come, expecting to find a good sensible girl who had seen at last the vanity of all those things; half-light in the rooms; surrounded by the works of her favourite poets, and all that sort of thing. I say to myself: I must just run in and see the dear wise child, and encourage her in her good resolutions. . . And I fall into the middle of an intime lunch-party. For I suppose it is intime. Eh? Very? H'm, yes . . . "

He was really appalling. Again his wandering stare went round the table, with an expression incredibly incongruous with the words. It was as though he had borrowed those eyes from some idiot for the purpose of that visit. He still held Doña Rita's hand, and, now and then, patted it.

"It's discouraging," he cooed. "And I believe not one of you here is a Frenchman. I don't know what you are all about. It's beyond me. But if we were a Republic — you know I am an old Jacobin, sans-culotte and terrorist — if this were a real Republic with the Convention sitting and a Committee of Public Safety attending to national business, you would all get your heads cut off. Ha, ha . . . I am joking, ha, ha! . . . and serve you right, too. Don't mind my little joke."

While he was still laughing he released her hand and she leaned her head on it again without haste. She had never looked at him once.

During the rather humiliating silence that ensued he got a leather cigar case like a small valise out of his pocket, opened it and looked with critical interest at the six cigars it contained. The tireless femme-de-chambre set down a tray with coffee cups on the table. We each (glad, I suppose, of something to do) took one, but he, to begin with, sniffed at his. Doña Rita continued leaning on her elbow, her lips closed in a reposeful expression of peculiar sweetness. There was nothing drooping in her attitude. Her face with the delicate carnation of a rose and downcast eyes was as if veiled in firm immobility and was so appealing that I had an insane impulse to walk round and kiss the forearm on which it was leaning; that strong, well-shaped forearm, gleaming not like marble but with a living and warm splendour. So familiar had I become already with her in my thoughts! Of course I didn't do anything of the sort. It was nothing uncontrollable, it was but a tender longing of a most respectful and purely sentimental kind. I performed the act in my thought quietly, almost solemnly, while the creature with the silver hair leaned back in his chair, puffing at his cigar, and began to speak again.

It was all apparently very innocent talk. He informed his “dear Rita” that he was really on his way to Monte Carlo. A lifelong habit of his at this time of the year; but he was ready to run back to Paris if he could do anything for his “chère enfant,” run back for a day, for two days, for three days, for any time; miss Monte Carlo this year altogether, if he could be of the slightest use and save her going herself. For instance he could see to it that proper watch was kept over the Pavilion stuffed with all these art treasures. What was going to happen to all those things? . . . Making herself heard for the first time Doña Rita murmured without moving that she had made arrangements with the police to have it properly watched. And I was enchanted by the almost imperceptible play of her lips.

But the anxious creature was not reassured. He pointed out that things had been stolen out of the Louvre, which was, he dared say, even better watched. And there was that marvellous cabinet on the landing, black lacquer with silver herons, which alone would repay a couple of burglars. A wheelbarrow, some old sacking, and they could trundle it off under people’s noses.

“Have you thought it all out?” she asked in a cold whisper, while we three sat smoking to give ourselves a countenance (it was certainly no enjoyment) and wondering what we would hear next.

No, he had not. But he confessed that for years and years he had been in love with that cabinet. And anyhow what was going to happen to the things? The world was greatly exercised by that problem. He turned slightly his beautifully groomed white head so as to address Mr. Blunt directly.

“I had the pleasure of meeting your mother lately.”

Mr. Blunt took his time to raise his eyebrows and flash his teeth at him before he dropped negligently, “I can’t imagine where you could have met my mother.”

“Why, at Bing’s, the curio-dealer,” said the other with an air of the heaviest possible stupidity. And yet there was something in these few words which seemed to imply that if Mr. Blunt was looking for trouble he would certainly get it. “Bing was bowing her out of his shop, but he was so angry about something that he was quite rude even to me afterwards. I don’t think it’s very good for Madame votre mère to quarrel with Bing. He is a Parisian personality. He’s quite a power in his sphere. All these fellows’ nerves are upset from worry as to what will happen to the Allègre collection. And no wonder they are nervous. A big art event hangs on your lips, my dear, great Rita. And by the way, you too ought to remember that it isn’t wise to quarrel with people. What have you done to that poor Azzolati? Did you really tell him to get out and never come near you again, or something awful like that? I don’t doubt that he was of use to you or to your king. A man who gets invitations to shoot with the President at Rambouillet! I saw him only the other evening; I heard he had been winning immensely at cards; but he looked perfectly wretched, the poor fellow. He complained of your conduct — oh, very much! He told me you had been perfectly brutal with him. He said to me: ‘I am no good for anything, mon cher. The other day at Rambouillet, whenever I had a hare at the end of my gun I would think of her cruel words and my eyes would run

full of tears. I missed every shot' . . . You are not fit for diplomatic work, you know, ma chère. You are a mere child at it. When you want a middle-aged gentleman to do anything for you, you don't begin by reducing him to tears. I should have thought any woman would have known that much. A nun would have known that much. What do you say? Shall I run back to Paris and make it up for you with Azzolati?"

He waited for her answer. The compression of his thin lips was full of significance. I was surprised to see our hostess shake her head negatively the least bit, for indeed by her pose, by the thoughtful immobility of her face she seemed to be a thousand miles away from us all, lost in an infinite reverie.

He gave it up. "Well, I must be off. The express for Nice passes at four o'clock. I will be away about three weeks and then you shall see me again. Unless I strike a run of bad luck and get cleaned out, in which case you shall see me before then."

He turned to Mills suddenly.

"Will your cousin come south this year, to that beautiful villa of his at Cannes?"

Mills hardly deigned to answer that he didn't know anything about his cousin's movements.

"A grand seigneur combined with a great connoisseur," opined the other heavily. His mouth had gone slack and he looked a perfect and grotesque imbecile under his wig-like crop of white hair. Positively I thought he would begin to slobber. But he attacked Blunt next.

"Are you on your way down, too? A little flutter. . . It seems to me you haven't been seen in your usual Paris haunts of late. Where have you been all this time?"

"Don't you know where I have been?" said Mr. Blunt with great precision.

"No, I only ferret out things that may be of some use to me," was the unexpected reply, uttered with an air of perfect vacancy and swallowed by Mr. Blunt in blank silence.

At last he made ready to rise from the table. "Think over what I have said, my dear Rita."

"It's all over and done with," was Doña Rita's answer, in a louder tone than I had ever heard her use before. It thrilled me while she continued: "I mean, this thinking." She was back from the remoteness of her meditation, very much so indeed. She rose and moved away from the table, inviting by a sign the other to follow her; which he did at once, yet slowly and as it were warily.

It was a conference in the recess of a window. We three remained seated round the table from which the dark maid was removing the cups and the plates with brusque movements. I gazed frankly at Doña Rita's profile, irregular, animated, and fascinating in an undefinable way, at her well-shaped head with the hair twisted high up and apparently held in its place by a gold arrow with a jewelled shaft. We couldn't hear what she said, but the movement of her lips and the play of her features were full of charm, full of interest, expressing both audacity and gentleness. She spoke with fire without raising her voice. The man listened round-shouldered, but seeming much too stupid to understand. I could see now and then that he was speaking, but he was

inaudible. At one moment Doña Rita turned her head to the room and called out to the maid, "Give me my hand-bag off the sofa."

At this the other was heard plainly, "No, no," and then a little lower, "You have no tact, Rita. . . ." Then came her argument in a low, penetrating voice which I caught, "Why not? Between such old friends." However, she waved away the hand-bag, he calmed down, and their voices sank again. Presently I saw him raise her hand to his lips, while with her back to the room she continued to contemplate out of the window the bare and untidy garden. At last he went out of the room, throwing to the table an airy "Bonjour, bonjour," which was not acknowledged by any of us three.

Chapter 3

Mills got up and approached the figure at the window. To my extreme surprise, Mr. Blunt, after a moment of obviously painful hesitation, hastened out after the man with the white hair.

In consequence of these movements I was left to myself and I began to be uncomfortably conscious of it when Doña Rita, near the window, addressed me in a raised voice.

"We have no confidences to exchange, Mr. Mills and I."

I took this for an encouragement to join them. They were both looking at me. Doña Rita added, "Mr. Mills and I are friends from old times, you know."

Bathed in the softened reflection of the sunshine, which did not fall directly into the room, standing very straight with her arms down, before Mills, and with a faint smile directed to me, she looked extremely young, and yet mature. There was even, for a moment, a slight dimple in her cheek.

"How old, I wonder?" I said, with an answering smile.

"Oh, for ages, for ages," she exclaimed hastily, frowning a little, then she went on addressing herself to Mills, apparently in continuation of what she was saying before.

. . . "This man's is an extreme case, and yet perhaps it isn't the worst. But that's the sort of thing. I have no account to render to anybody, but I don't want to be dragged along all the gutters where that man picks up his living."

She had thrown her head back a little but there was no scorn, no angry flash under the dark-lashed eyelids. The words did not ring. I was struck for the first time by the even, mysterious quality of her voice.

"Will you let me suggest," said Mills, with a grave, kindly face, "that being what you are, you have nothing to fear?"

"And perhaps nothing to lose," she went on without bitterness. "No. It isn't fear. It's a sort of dread. You must remember that no nun could have had a more protected life. Henry Allègre had his greatness. When he faced the world he also masked it. He was big enough for that. He filled the whole field of vision for me."

"You found that enough?" asked Mills.

“Why ask now?” she remonstrated. “The truth — the truth is that I never asked myself. Enough or not there was no room for anything else. He was the shadow and the light and the form and the voice. He would have it so. The morning he died they came to call me at four o’clock. I ran into his room bare-footed. He recognized me and whispered, ‘You are flawless.’ I was very frightened. He seemed to think, and then said very plainly, ‘Such is my character. I am like that.’ These were the last words he spoke. I hardly noticed them then. I was thinking that he was lying in a very uncomfortable position and I asked him if I should lift him up a little higher on the pillows. You know I am very strong. I could have done it. I had done it before. He raised his hand off the blanket just enough to make a sign that he didn’t want to be touched. It was the last gesture he made. I hung over him and then — and then I nearly ran out of the house just as I was, in my night-gown. I think if I had been dressed I would have run out of the garden, into the street — run away altogether. I had never seen death. I may say I had never heard of it. I wanted to run from it.”

She paused for a long, quiet breath. The harmonized sweetness and daring of her face was made pathetic by her downcast eyes.

“Fuir la mort,” she repeated, meditatively, in her mysterious voice.

Mills’ big head had a little movement, nothing more. Her glance glided for a moment towards me like a friendly recognition of my right to be there, before she began again.

“My life might have been described as looking at mankind from a fourth-floor window for years. When the end came it was like falling out of a balcony into the street. It was as sudden as that. Once I remember somebody was telling us in the Pavilion a tale about a girl who jumped down from a fourth-floor window. . . For love, I believe,” she interjected very quickly, “and came to no harm. Her guardian angel must have slipped his wings under her just in time. He must have. But as to me, all I know is that I didn’t break anything — not even my heart. Don’t be shocked, Mr. Mills. It’s very likely that you don’t understand.”

“Very likely,” Mills assented, unmoved. “But don’t be too sure of that.”

“Henry Allègre had the highest opinion of your intelligence,” she said unexpectedly and with evident seriousness. “But all this is only to tell you that when he was gone I found myself down there unhurt, but dazed, bewildered, not sufficiently stunned. It so happened that that creature was somewhere in the neighbourhood. How he found out. . . But it’s his business to find out things. And he knows, too, how to worm his way in anywhere. Indeed, in the first days he was useful and somehow he made it look as if Heaven itself had sent him. In my distress I thought I could never sufficiently repay. . . Well, I have been paying ever since.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mills softly. “In hard cash?”

“Oh, it’s really so little,” she said. “I told you it wasn’t the worst case. I stayed on in that house from which I nearly ran away in my nightgown. I stayed on because I didn’t know what to do next. He vanished as he had come on the track of something else, I suppose. You know he really has got to get his living some way or other. But don’t think I was deserted. On the contrary. People were coming and going, all sorts of

people that Henry Allègre used to know — or had refused to know. I had a sensation of plotting and intriguing around me, all the time. I was feeling morally bruised, sore all over, when, one day, Don Rafael de Villarel sent in his card. A grandee. I didn't know him, but, as you are aware, there was hardly a personality of mark or position that hasn't been talked about in the Pavilion before me. Of him I had only heard that he was a very austere and pious person, always at Mass, and that sort of thing. I saw a frail little man with a long, yellow face and sunken fanatical eyes, an Inquisitor, an unfrocked monk. One missed a rosary from his thin fingers. He gazed at me terribly and I couldn't imagine what he might want. I waited for him to pull out a crucifix and sentence me to the stake there and then. But no; he dropped his eyes and in a cold, righteous sort of voice informed me that he had called on behalf of the prince — he called him His Majesty. I was amazed by the change. I wondered now why he didn't slip his hands into the sleeves of his coat, you know, as begging Friars do when they come for a subscription. He explained that the Prince asked for permission to call and offer me his condolences in person. We had seen a lot of him our last two months in Paris that year. Henry Allègre had taken a fancy to paint his portrait. He used to ride with us nearly every morning. Almost without thinking I said I should be pleased. Don Rafael was shocked at my want of formality, but bowed to me in silence, very much as a monk bows, from the waist. If he had only crossed his hands flat on his chest it would have been perfect. Then, I don't know why, something moved me to make him a deep curtsy as he backed out of the room, leaving me suddenly impressed, not only with him but with myself too. I had my door closed to everybody else that afternoon and the Prince came with a very proper sorrowful face, but five minutes after he got into the room he was laughing as usual, made the whole little house ring with it. You know his big, irresistible laugh. . . .”

“No,” said Mills, a little abruptly, “I have never seen him.”

“No,” she said, surprised, “and yet you . . .”

“I understand,” interrupted Mills. “All this is purely accidental. You must know that I am a solitary man of books but with a secret taste for adventure which somehow came out; surprising even me.”

She listened with that enigmatic, still, under the eyelids glance, and a friendly turn of the head.

“I know you for a frank and loyal gentleman. . . Adventure — and books? Ah, the books! Haven't I turned stacks of them over! Haven't I? . . .”

“Yes,” murmured Mills. “That's what one does.”

She put out her hand and laid it lightly on Mills' sleeve.

“Listen, I don't need to justify myself, but if I had known a single woman in the world, if I had only had the opportunity to observe a single one of them, I would have been perhaps on my guard. But you know I hadn't. The only woman I had anything to do with was myself, and they say that one can't know oneself. It never entered my head to be on my guard against his warmth and his terrible obviousness. You and he were the only two, infinitely different, people, who didn't approach me as if I had been a

precious object in a collection, an ivory carving or a piece of Chinese porcelain. That's why I have kept you in my memory so well. Oh! you were not obvious! As to him — I soon learned to regret I was not some object, some beautiful, carved object of bone or bronze; a rare piece of porcelain, *pâte dure*, not *pâte tendre*. A pretty specimen."

"Rare, yes. Even unique," said Mills, looking at her steadily with a smile. "But don't try to depreciate yourself. You were never pretty. You are not pretty. You are worse."

Her narrow eyes had a mischievous gleam. "Do you find such sayings in your books?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact I have," said Mills, with a little laugh, "found this one in a book. It was a woman who said that of herself. A woman far from common, who died some few years ago. She was an actress. A great artist."

"A great! . . . Lucky person! She had that refuge, that garment, while I stand here with nothing to protect me from evil fame; a naked temperament for any wind to blow upon. Yes, greatness in art is a protection. I wonder if there would have been anything in me if I had tried? But Henry Allègre would never let me try. He told me that whatever I could achieve would never be good enough for what I was. The perfection of flattery! Was it that he thought I had not talent of any sort? It's possible. He would know. I've had the idea since that he was jealous. He wasn't jealous of mankind any more than he was afraid of thieves for his collection; but he may have been jealous of what he could see in me, of some passion that could be aroused. But if so he never repented. I shall never forget his last words. He saw me standing beside his bed, defenceless, symbolic and forlorn, and all he found to say was, 'Well, I am like that.'"

I forgot myself in watching her. I had never seen anybody speak with less play of facial muscles. In the fullness of its life her face preserved a sort of immobility. The words seemed to form themselves, fiery or pathetic, in the air, outside her lips. Their design was hardly disturbed; a design of sweetness, gravity, and force as if born from the inspiration of some artist; for I had never seen anything to come up to it in nature before or since.

All this was part of the enchantment she cast over me; and I seemed to notice that Mills had the aspect of a man under a spell. If he too was a captive then I had no reason to feel ashamed of my surrender.

"And you know," she began again abruptly, "that I have been accustomed to all the forms of respect."

"That's true," murmured Mills, as if involuntarily.

"Well, yes," she reaffirmed. "My instinct may have told me that my only protection was obscurity, but I didn't know how and where to find it. Oh, yes, I had that instinct . . . But there were other instincts and . . . How am I to tell you? I didn't know how to be on guard against myself, either. Not a soul to speak to, or to get a warning from. Some woman soul that would have known, in which perhaps I could have seen my own reflection. I assure you the only woman that ever addressed me directly, and that was in writing, was . . ."

She glanced aside, saw Mr. Blunt returning from the hall and added rapidly in a lowered voice,

“His mother.”

The bright, mechanical smile of Mr. Blunt gleamed at us right down the room, but he didn't, as it were, follow it in his body. He swerved to the nearest of the two big fireplaces and finding some cigarettes on the mantelpiece remained leaning on his elbow in the warmth of the bright wood fire. I noticed then a bit of mute play. The heiress of Henry Allègre, who could secure neither obscurity nor any other alleviation to that invidious position, looked as if she would speak to Blunt from a distance; but in a moment the confident eagerness of her face died out as if killed by a sudden thought. I didn't know then her shrinking from all falsehood and evasion; her dread of insincerity and disloyalty of every kind. But even then I felt that at the very last moment her being had recoiled before some shadow of a suspicion. And it occurred to me, too, to wonder what sort of business Mr. Blunt could have had to transact with our odious visitor, of a nature so urgent as to make him run out after him into the hall? Unless to beat him a little with one of the sticks that were to be found there? White hair so much like an expensive wig could not be considered a serious protection. But it couldn't have been that. The transaction, whatever it was, had been much too quiet. I must say that none of us had looked out of the window and that I didn't know when the man did go or if he was gone at all. As a matter of fact he was already far away; and I may just as well say here that I never saw him again in my life. His passage across my field of vision was like that of other figures of that time: not to be forgotten, a little fantastic, infinitely enlightening for my contempt, darkening for my memory which struggles still with the clear lights and the ugly shadows of those unforgotten days.

Chapter 4

It was past four o'clock before I left the house, together with Mills. Mr. Blunt, still in his riding costume, escorted us to the very door. He asked us to send him the first fiacre we met on our way to town. “It's impossible to walk in this get-up through the streets,” he remarked, with his brilliant smile.

At this point I propose to transcribe some notes I made at the time in little black books which I have hunted up in the litter of the past; very cheap, common little note-books that by the lapse of years have acquired a touching dimness of aspect, the frayed, worn-out dignity of documents.

Expression on paper has never been my forte. My life had been a thing of outward manifestations. I never had been secret or even systematically taciturn about my simple occupations which might have been foolish but had never required either caution or mystery. But in those four hours since midday a complete change had come over me. For good or evil I left that house committed to an enterprise that could not be talked

about; which would have appeared to many senseless and perhaps ridiculous, but was certainly full of risks, and, apart from that, commanded discretion on the ground of simple loyalty. It would not only close my lips but it would to a certain extent cut me off from my usual haunts and from the society of my friends; especially of the light-hearted, young, harum-scarum kind. This was unavoidable. It was because I felt myself thrown back upon my own thoughts and forbidden to seek relief amongst other lives — it was perhaps only for that reason at first I started an irregular, fragmentary record of my days.

I made these notes not so much to preserve the memory (one cared not for any to-morrow then) but to help me to keep a better hold of the actuality. I scribbled them on shore and I scribbled them on the sea; and in both cases they are concerned not only with the nature of the facts but with the intensity of my sensations. It may be, too, that I learned to love the sea for itself only at that time. Woman and the sea revealed themselves to me together, as it were: two mistresses of life's values. The illimitable greatness of the one, the unfathomable seduction of the other working their immemorial spells from generation to generation fell upon my heart at last: a common fortune, an unforgettable memory of the sea's formless might and of the sovereign charm in that woman's form wherein there seemed to beat the pulse of divinity rather than blood.

I begin here with the notes written at the end of that very day.

— Parted with Mills on the quay. We had walked side by side in absolute silence. The fact is he is too old for me to talk to him freely. For all his sympathy and seriousness I don't know what note to strike and I am not at all certain what he thinks of all this. As we shook hands at parting, I asked him how much longer he expected to stay. And he answered me that it depended on R. She was making arrangements for him to cross the frontier. He wanted to see the very ground on which the Principle of Legitimacy was actually asserting itself arms in hand. It sounded to my positive mind the most fantastic thing in the world, this elimination of personalities from what seemed but the merest political, dynastic adventure. So it wasn't Doña Rita, it wasn't Blunt, it wasn't the Pretender with his big infectious laugh, it wasn't all that lot of politicians, archbishops, and generals, of monks, guerrilleros, and smugglers by sea and land, of dubious agents and shady speculators and undoubted swindlers, who were pushing their fortunes at the risk of their precious skins. No. It was the Legitimist Principle asserting itself! Well, I would accept the view but with one reservation. All the others might have been merged into the idea, but I, the latest recruit, I would not be merged in the Legitimist Principle. Mine was an act of independent assertion. Never before had I felt so intensely aware of my personality. But I said nothing of that to Mills. I only told him I thought we had better not be seen very often together in the streets. He agreed. Hearty handshake. Looked affectionately after his broad back. It never occurred to him to turn his head. What was I in comparison with the Principle of Legitimacy?

Late that night I went in search of Dominic. That Mediterranean sailor was just the man I wanted. He had a great experience of all unlawful things that can be done on the seas and he brought to the practice of them much wisdom and audacity. That I didn't know where he lived was nothing since I knew where he loved. The proprietor of a small, quiet café on the quay, a certain Madame Léonore, a woman of thirty-five with an open Roman face and intelligent black eyes, had captivated his heart years ago. In that café with our heads close together over a marble table, Dominic and I held an earnest and endless confabulation while Madame Léonore, rustling a black silk skirt, with gold earrings, with her raven hair elaborately dressed and something nonchalant in her movements, would take occasion, in passing to and fro, to rest her hand for a moment on Dominic's shoulder. Later when the little café had emptied itself of its habitual customers, mostly people connected with the work of ships and cargoes, she came quietly to sit at our table and looking at me very hard with her black, sparkling eyes asked Dominic familiarly what had happened to his Signorino. It was her name for me. I was Dominic's Signorino. She knew me by no other; and our connection has always been somewhat of a riddle to her. She said that I was somehow changed since she saw me last. In her rich voice she urged Dominic only to look at my eyes. I must have had some piece of luck come to me either in love or at cards, she bantered. But Dominic answered half in scorn that I was not of the sort that runs after that kind of luck. He stated generally that there were some young gentlemen very clever in inventing new ways of getting rid of their time and their money. However, if they needed a sensible man to help them he had no objection himself to lend a hand. Dominic's general scorn for the beliefs, and activities, and abilities of upper-class people covered the Principle of Legitimacy amply; but he could not resist the opportunity to exercise his special faculties in a field he knew of old. He had been a desperate smuggler in his younger days. We settled the purchase of a fast sailing craft. Agreed that it must be a balancelle and something altogether out of the common. He knew of one suitable but she was in Corsica. Offered to start for Bastia by mail-boat in the morning. All the time the handsome and mature Madame Léonore sat by, smiling faintly, amused at her great man joining like this in a frolic of boys. She said the last words of that evening: "You men never grow up," touching lightly the grey hair above his temple.

A fortnight later.

. . . In the afternoon to the Prado. Beautiful day. At the moment of ringing at the door a strong emotion of an anxious kind. Why? Down the length of the dining-room in the rotunda part full of afternoon light Doña R., sitting cross-legged on the divan in the attitude of a very old idol or a very young child and surrounded by many cushions, waves her hand from afar pleasantly surprised, exclaiming: "What! Back already!" I give her all the details and we talk for two hours across a large brass bowl containing a little water placed between us, lighting cigarettes and dropping them, innumerable, puffed at, yet untasted in the overwhelming interest of the conversation. Found her very quick in taking the points and very intelligent in her suggestions. All formality

soon vanished between us and before very long I discovered myself sitting cross-legged, too, while I held forth on the qualities of different Mediterranean sailing craft and on the romantic qualifications of Dominic for the task. I believe I gave her the whole history of the man, mentioning even the existence of Madame Léonore, since the little café would have to be the headquarters of the marine part of the plot.

She murmured, "Ah! Une belle Romaine," thoughtfully. She told me that she liked to hear people of that sort spoken of in terms of our common humanity. She observed also that she wished to see Dominic some day; to set her eyes for once on a man who could be absolutely depended on. She wanted to know whether he had engaged himself in this adventure solely for my sake.

I said that no doubt it was partly that. We had been very close associates in the West Indies from where we had returned together, and he had a notion that I could be depended on, too. But mainly, I suppose, it was from taste. And there was in him also a fine carelessness as to what he did and a love of venturesome enterprise.

"And you," she said. "Is it carelessness, too?"

"In a measure," I said. "Within limits."

"And very soon you will get tired."

"When I do I will tell you. But I may also get frightened. I suppose you know there are risks, I mean apart from the risk of life."

"As for instance," she said.

"For instance, being captured, tried, and sentenced to what they call 'the galleys,' in Ceuta."

"And all this from that love for . . ."

"Not for Legitimacy," I interrupted the inquiry lightly. "But what's the use asking such questions? It's like asking the veiled figure of fate. It doesn't know its own mind nor its own heart. It has no heart. But what if I were to start asking you — who have a heart and are not veiled to my sight?" She dropped her charming adolescent head, so firm in modelling, so gentle in expression. Her uncovered neck was round like the shaft of a column. She wore the same wrapper of thick blue silk. At that time she seemed to live either in her riding habit or in that wrapper folded tightly round her and open low to a point in front. Because of the absence of all trimming round the neck and from the deep view of her bare arms in the wide sleeve this garment seemed to be put directly on her skin and gave one the impression of one's nearness to her body which would have been troubling but for the perfect unconsciousness of her manner. That day she carried no barbarous arrow in her hair. It was parted on one side, brushed back severely, and tied with a black ribbon, without any bronze mist about her forehead or temple. This smoothness added to the many varieties of her expression also that of child-like innocence.

Great progress in our intimacy brought about unconsciously by our enthusiastic interest in the matter of our discourse and, in the moments of silence, by the sympathetic current of our thoughts. And this rapidly growing familiarity (truly, she had a terrible gift for it) had all the varieties of earnestness: serious, excited, ardent, and

even gay. She laughed in contralto; but her laugh was never very long; and when it had ceased, the silence of the room with the light dying in all its many windows seemed to lie about me warmed by its vibration.

As I was preparing to take my leave after a longish pause into which we had fallen as into a vague dream, she came out of it with a start and a quiet sigh. She said, "I had forgotten myself." I took her hand and was raising it naturally, without premeditation, when I felt suddenly the arm to which it belonged become insensible, passive, like a stuffed limb, and the whole woman go inanimate all over! Brusquely I dropped the hand before it reached my lips; and it was so lifeless that it fell heavily on to the divan.

I remained standing before her. She raised to me not her eyes but her whole face, inquisitively — perhaps in appeal.

"No! This isn't good enough for me," I said.

The last of the light gleamed in her long enigmatic eyes as if they were precious enamel in that shadowy head which in its immobility suggested a creation of a distant past: immortal art, not transient life. Her voice had a profound quietness. She excused herself.

"It's only habit — or instinct — or what you like. I have had to practise that in self-defence lest I should be tempted sometimes to cut the arm off."

I remembered the way she had abandoned this very arm and hand to the white-haired ruffian. It rendered me gloomy and idiotically obstinate.

"Very ingenious. But this sort of thing is of no use to me," I declared.

"Make it up," suggested her mysterious voice, while her shadowy figure remained unmoved, indifferent amongst the cushions.

I didn't stir either. I refused in the same low tone.

"No. Not before you give it to me yourself some day."

"Yes — some day," she repeated in a breath in which there was no irony but rather hesitation, reluctance what did I know?

I walked away from the house in a curious state of gloomy satisfaction with myself.

And this is the last extract. A month afterwards.

— This afternoon going up to the Villa I was for the first time accompanied in my way by some misgivings. To-morrow I sail.

First trip and therefore in the nature of a trial trip; and I can't overcome a certain gnawing emotion, for it is a trip that mustn't fail. In that sort of enterprise there is no room for mistakes. Of all the individuals engaged in it will every one be intelligent enough, faithful enough, bold enough? Looking upon them as a whole it seems impossible; but as each has got only a limited part to play they may be found sufficient each for his particular trust. And will they be all punctual, I wonder? An enterprise that hangs on the punctuality of many people, no matter how well disposed and even heroic, hangs on a thread. This I have perceived to be also the greatest of Dominic's concerns. He, too, wonders. And when he breathes his doubts the smile lurking under the dark curl of his moustaches is not reassuring.

But there is also something exciting in such speculations and the road to the Villa seemed to me shorter than ever before.

Let in by the silent, ever-active, dark lady's maid, who is always on the spot and always on the way somewhere else, opening the door with one hand, while she passes on, turning on one for a moment her quick, black eyes, which just miss being lustrous, as if some one had breathed on them lightly.

On entering the long room I perceive Mills established in an armchair which he had dragged in front of the divan. I do the same to another and there we sit side by side facing R., tenderly amiable yet somehow distant among her cushions, with an immemorial seriousness in her long, shaded eyes and her fugitive smile hovering about but never settling on her lips. Mills, who is just back from over the frontier, must have been asking R. whether she had been worried again by her devoted friend with the white hair. At least I concluded so because I found them talking of the heart-broken Azzolati. And after having answered their greetings I sit and listen to Rita addressing Mills earnestly.

"No, I assure you Azzolati had done nothing to me. I knew him. He was a frequent visitor at the Pavilion, though I, personally, never talked with him very much in Henry Allègre's lifetime. Other men were more interesting, and he himself was rather reserved in his manner to me. He was an international politician and financier — a nobody. He, like many others, was admitted only to feed and amuse Henry Allègre's scorn of the world, which was insatiable — I tell you."

"Yes," said Mills. "I can imagine."

"But I know. Often when we were alone Henry Allègre used to pour it into my ears. If ever anybody saw mankind stripped of its clothes as the child sees the king in the German fairy tale, it's I! Into my ears! A child's! Too young to die of fright. Certainly not old enough to understand — or even to believe. But then his arm was about me. I used to laugh, sometimes. Laugh! At this destruction — at these ruins!"

"Yes," said Mills, very steady before her fire. "But you have at your service the everlasting charm of life; you are a part of the indestructible."

"Am I? . . . But there is no arm about me now. The laugh! Where is my laugh? Give me back my laugh. . . ."

And she laughed a little on a low note. I don't know about Mills, but the subdued shadowy vibration of it echoed in my breast which felt empty for a moment and like a large space that makes one giddy.

"The laugh is gone out of my heart, which at any rate used to feel protected. That feeling's gone, too. And I myself will have to die some day."

"Certainly," said Mills in an unaltered voice. "As to this body you . . ."

"Oh, yes! Thanks. It's a very poor jest. Change from body to body as travellers used to change horses at post houses. I've heard of this before. . . ."

"I've no doubt you have," Mills put on a submissive air. "But are we to hear any more about Azzolati?"

“You shall. Listen. I had heard that he was invited to shoot at Rambouillet — a quiet party, not one of these great shoots. I hear a lot of things. I wanted to have a certain information, also certain hints conveyed to a diplomatic personage who was to be there, too. A personage that would never let me get in touch with him though I had tried many times.”

“Incredible!” mocked Mills solemnly.

“The personage mistrusts his own susceptibility. Born cautious,” explained Doña Rita crisply with the slightest possible quiver of her lips. “Suddenly I had the inspiration to make use of Azzolati, who had been reminding me by a constant stream of messages that he was an old friend. I never took any notice of those pathetic appeals before. But in this emergency I sat down and wrote a note asking him to come and dine with me in my hotel. I suppose you know I don’t live in the Pavilion. I can’t bear the Pavilion now. When I have to go there I begin to feel after an hour or so that it is haunted. I seem to catch sight of somebody I know behind columns, passing through doorways, vanishing here and there. I hear light footsteps behind closed doors. . . My own!”

Her eyes, her half-parted lips, remained fixed till Mills suggested softly, “Yes, but Azzolati.”

Her rigidity vanished like a flake of snow in the sunshine. “Oh! Azzolati. It was a most solemn affair. It had occurred to me to make a very elaborate toilet. It was most successful. Azzolati looked positively scared for a moment as though he had got into the wrong suite of rooms. He had never before seen me en toilette, you understand. In the old days once out of my riding habit I would never dress. I draped myself, you remember, Monsieur Mills. To go about like that suited my indolence, my longing to feel free in my body, as at that time when I used to herd goats. . . But never mind. My aim was to impress Azzolati. I wanted to talk to him seriously.”

There was something whimsical in the quick beat of her eyelids and in the subtle quiver of her lips. “And behold! the same notion had occurred to Azzolati. Imagine that for this tête-à-tête dinner the creature had got himself up as if for a reception at court. He displayed a brochette of all sorts of decorations on the lapel of his frac and had a broad ribbon of some order across his shirt front. An orange ribbon. Bavarian, I should say. Great Roman Catholic, Azzolati. It was always his ambition to be the banker of all the Bourbons in the world. The last remnants of his hair were dyed jet black and the ends of his moustache were like knitting needles. He was disposed to be as soft as wax in my hands. Unfortunately I had had some irritating interviews during the day. I was keeping down sudden impulses to smash a glass, throw a plate on the floor, do something violent to relieve my feelings. His submissive attitude made me still more nervous. He was ready to do anything in the world for me providing that I would promise him that he would never find my door shut against him as long as he lived. You understand the impudence of it, don’t you? And his tone was positively abject, too. I snapped back at him that I had no door, that I was a nomad. He bowed ironically till his nose nearly touched his plate but begged me to remember that to his personal knowledge I had four houses of my own about the world. And you know this

made me feel a homeless outcast more than ever — like a little dog lost in the street — not knowing where to go. I was ready to cry and there the creature sat in front of me with an imbecile smile as much as to say ‘here is a poser for you. . . .’ I gnashed my teeth at him. Quietly, you know . . . I suppose you two think that I am stupid.”

She paused as if expecting an answer but we made no sound and she continued with a remark.

“I have days like that. Often one must listen to false protestations, empty words, strings of lies all day long, so that in the evening one is not fit for anything, not even for truth if it comes in one’s way. That idiot treated me to a piece of brazen sincerity which I couldn’t stand. First of all he began to take me into his confidence; he boasted of his great affairs, then started groaning about his overstrained life which left him no time for the amenities of existence, for beauty, or sentiment, or any sort of ease of heart. His heart! He wanted me to sympathize with his sorrows. Of course I ought to have listened. One must pay for service. Only I was nervous and tired. He bored me. I told him at last that I was surprised that a man of such immense wealth should still keep on going like this reaching for more and more. I suppose he must have been sipping a good deal of wine while we talked and all at once he let out an atrocity which was too much for me. He had been moaning and sentimentalizing but then suddenly he showed me his fangs. ‘No,’ he cries, ‘you can’t imagine what a satisfaction it is to feel all that penniless, beggarly lot of the dear, honest, meritorious poor wriggling and slobbering under one’s boots.’ You may tell me that he is a contemptible animal anyhow, but you should have heard the tone! I felt my bare arms go cold like ice. A moment before I had been hot and faint with sheer boredom. I jumped up from the table, rang for Rose, and told her to bring me my fur cloak. He remained in his chair leering at me curiously. When I had the fur on my shoulders and the girl had gone out of the room I gave him the surprise of his life. ‘Take yourself off instantly,’ I said. ‘Go trample on the poor if you like but never dare speak to me again.’ At this he leaned his head on his arm and sat so long at the table shading his eyes with his hand that I had to ask, calmly — you know — whether he wanted me to have him turned out into the corridor. He fetched an enormous sigh. ‘I have only tried to be honest with you, Rita.’ But by the time he got to the door he had regained some of his impudence. ‘You know how to trample on a poor fellow, too,’ he said. ‘But I don’t mind being made to wriggle under your pretty shoes, Rita. I forgive you. I thought you were free from all vulgar sentimentalism and that you had a more independent mind. I was mistaken in you, that’s all.’ With that he pretends to dash a tear from his eye-crocodile! — and goes out, leaving me in my fur by the blazing fire, my teeth going like castanets. . . . Did you ever hear of anything so stupid as this affair?” she concluded in a tone of extreme candour and a profound unreadable stare that went far beyond us both. And the stillness of her lips was so perfect directly she ceased speaking that I wondered whether all this had come through them or only had formed itself in my mind.

Presently she continued as if speaking for herself only.

“It’s like taking the lids off boxes and seeing ugly toads staring at you. In every one. Every one. That’s what it is having to do with men more than mere — Good-morning — Good evening. And if you try to avoid meddling with their lids, some of them will take them off themselves. And they don’t even know, they don’t even suspect what they are showing you. Certain confidences — they don’t see it — are the bitterest kind of insult. I suppose Azzolati imagines himself a noble beast of prey. Just as some others imagine themselves to be most delicate, noble, and refined gentlemen. And as likely as not they would trade on a woman’s troubles — and in the end make nothing of that either. Idiots!”

The utter absence of all anger in this spoken meditation gave it a character of touching simplicity. And as if it had been truly only a meditation we conducted ourselves as though we had not heard it. Mills began to speak of his experiences during his visit to the army of the Legitimist King. And I discovered in his speeches that this man of books could be graphic and picturesque. His admiration for the devotion and bravery of the army was combined with the greatest distaste for what he had seen of the way its great qualities were misused. In the conduct of this great enterprise he had seen a deplorable levity of outlook, a fatal lack of decision, an absence of any reasoned plan.

He shook his head.

“I feel that you of all people, Doña Rita, ought to be told the truth. I don’t know exactly what you have at stake.”

She was rosy like some impassive statue in a desert in the flush of the dawn.

“Not my heart,” she said quietly. “You must believe that.”

“I do. Perhaps it would have been better if you. . . .”

“No, Monsieur le Philosophe. It would not have been better. Don’t make that serious face at me,” she went on with tenderness in a playful note, as if tenderness had been her inheritance of all time and playfulness the very fibre of her being. “I suppose you think that a woman who has acted as I did and has not staked her heart on it is . . . How do you know to what the heart responds as it beats from day to day?”

“I wouldn’t judge you. What am I before the knowledge you were born to? You are as old as the world.”

She accepted this with a smile. I who was innocently watching them was amazed to discover how much a fleeting thing like that could hold of seduction without the help of any other feature and with that unchanging glance.

“With me it is pun d’onor. To my first independent friend.”

“You were soon parted,” ventured Mills, while I sat still under a sense of oppression.

“Don’t think for a moment that I have been scared off,” she said. “It is they who were frightened. I suppose you heard a lot of Headquarters gossip?”

“Oh, yes,” Mills said meaningly. “The fair and the dark are succeeding each other like leaves blown in the wind dancing in and out. I suppose you have noticed that leaves blown in the wind have a look of happiness.”

“Yes,” she said, “that sort of leaf is dead. Then why shouldn’t it look happy? And so I suppose there is no uneasiness, no occasion for fears amongst the ‘responsibles.’”

“Upon the whole not. Now and then a leaf seems as if it would stick. There is for instance Madame . . .”

“Oh, I don’t want to know, I understand it all, I am as old as the world.”

“Yes,” said Mills thoughtfully, “you are not a leaf, you might have been a tornado yourself.”

“Upon my word,” she said, “there was a time that they thought I could carry him off, away from them all — beyond them all. Verily, I am not very proud of their fears. There was nothing reckless there worthy of a great passion. There was nothing sad there worthy of a great tenderness.”

“And is this the word of the Venetian riddle?” asked Mills, fixing her with his keen eyes.

“If it pleases you to think so, Señor,” she said indifferently. The movement of her eyes, their veiled gleam became mischievous when she asked, “And Don Juan Blunt, have you seen him over there?”

“I fancy he avoided me. Moreover, he is always with his regiment at the outposts. He is a most valorous captain. I heard some people describe him as foolhardy.”

“Oh, he needn’t seek death,” she said in an indefinable tone. “I mean as a refuge. There will be nothing in his life great enough for that.”

“You are angry. You miss him, I believe, Doña Rita.”

“Angry? No! Weary. But of course it’s very inconvenient. I can’t very well ride out alone. A solitary amazon swallowing the dust and the salt spray of the Corniche promenade would attract too much attention. And then I don’t mind you two knowing that I am afraid of going out alone.”

“Afraid?” we both exclaimed together.

“You men are extraordinary. Why do you want me to be courageous? Why shouldn’t I be afraid? Is it because there is no one in the world to care what would happen to me?”

There was a deep-down vibration in her tone for the first time. We had not a word to say. And she added after a long silence:

“There is a very good reason. There is a danger.”

With wonderful insight Mills affirmed at once:

“Something ugly.”

She nodded slightly several times. Then Mills said with conviction:

“Ah! Then it can’t be anything in yourself. And if so . . .”

I was moved to extravagant advice.

“You should come out with me to sea then. There may be some danger there but there’s nothing ugly to fear.”

She gave me a startled glance quite unusual with her, more than wonderful to me; and suddenly as though she had seen me for the first time she exclaimed in a tone of compunction:

“Oh! And there is this one, too! Why! Oh, why should he run his head into danger for those things that will all crumble into dust before long?”

I said: "You won't crumble into dust." And Mills chimed in:

"That young enthusiast will always have his sea."

We were all standing up now. She kept her eyes on me, and repeated with a sort of whimsical enviousness:

"The sea! The violet sea — and he is longing to rejoin it! . . . At night! Under the stars! . . . A lovers' meeting," she went on, thrilling me from head to foot with those two words, accompanied by a wistful smile pointed by a suspicion of mockery. She turned away.

"And you, Monsieur Mills?" she asked.

"I am going back to my books," he declared with a very serious face. "My adventure is over."

"Each one to his love," she bantered us gently. "Didn't I love books, too, at one time! They seemed to contain all wisdom and hold a magic power, too. Tell me, Monsieur Mills, have you found amongst them in some black-letter volume the power of foretelling a poor mortal's destiny, the power to look into the future? Anybody's future . . ." Mills shook his head. . . "What, not even mine?" she coaxed as if she really believed in a magic power to be found in books.

Mills shook his head again. "No, I have not the power," he said. "I am no more a great magician, than you are a poor mortal. You have your ancient spells. You are as old as the world. Of us two it's you that are more fit to foretell the future of the poor mortals on whom you happen to cast your eyes."

At these words she cast her eyes down and in the moment of deep silence I watched the slight rising and falling of her breast. Then Mills pronounced distinctly: "Good-bye, old Enchantress."

They shook hands cordially. "Good-bye, poor Magician," she said.

Mills made as if to speak but seemed to think better of it. Doña Rita returned my distant bow with a slight, charmingly ceremonious inclination of her body.

"Bon voyage and a happy return," she said formally.

I was following Mills through the door when I heard her voice behind us raised in recall:

"Oh, a moment . . . I forgot . . ."

I turned round. The call was for me, and I walked slowly back wondering what she could have forgotten. She waited in the middle of the room with lowered head, with a mute gleam in her deep blue eyes. When I was near enough she extended to me without a word her bare white arm and suddenly pressed the back of her hand against my lips. I was too startled to seize it with rapture. It detached itself from my lips and fell slowly by her side. We had made it up and there was nothing to say. She turned away to the window and I hurried out of the room.

Part 3

Chapter 1

It was on our return from that first trip that I took Dominic up to the Villa to be presented to Doña Rita. If she wanted to look on the embodiment of fidelity, resource, and courage, she could behold it all in that man. Apparently she was not disappointed. Neither was Dominic disappointed. During the half-hour's interview they got into touch with each other in a wonderful way as if they had some common and secret standpoint in life. Maybe it was their common lawlessness, and their knowledge of things as old as the world. Her seduction, his recklessness, were both simple, masterful and, in a sense, worthy of each other.

Dominic was, I won't say awed by this interview. No woman could awe Dominic. But he was, as it were, rendered thoughtful by it, like a man who had not so much an experience as a sort of revelation vouchsafed to him. Later, at sea, he used to refer to La Señora in a particular tone and I knew that henceforth his devotion was not for me alone. And I understood the inevitability of it extremely well. As to Doña Rita she, after Dominic left the room, had turned to me with animation and said: "But he is perfect, this man." Afterwards she often asked after him and used to refer to him in conversation. More than once she said to me: "One would like to put the care of one's personal safety into the hands of that man. He looks as if he simply couldn't fail one." I admitted that this was very true, especially at sea. Dominic couldn't fail. But at the same time I rather chaffed Rita on her preoccupation as to personal safety that so often cropped up in her talk.

"One would think you were a crowned head in a revolutionary world," I used to tell her.

"That would be different. One would be standing then for something, either worth or not worth dying for. One could even run away then and be done with it. But I can't run away unless I got out of my skin and left that behind. Don't you understand? You are very stupid . . ." But she had the grace to add, "On purpose."

I don't know about the on purpose. I am not certain about the stupidity. Her words bewildered one often and bewilderment is a sort of stupidity. I remedied it by simply disregarding the sense of what she said. The sound was there and also her poignant heart-gripping presence giving occupation enough to one's faculties. In the power of those things over one there was mystery enough. It was more absorbing than the mere obscurity of her speeches. But I daresay she couldn't understand that.

Hence, at times, the amusing outbreaks of temper in word and gesture that only strengthened the natural, the invincible force of the spell. Sometimes the brass bowl would get upset or the cigarette box would fly up, dropping a shower of cigarettes on the floor. We would pick them up, re-establish everything, and fall into a long silence, so close that the sound of the first word would come with all the pain of a separation.

It was at that time, too, that she suggested I should take up my quarters in her house in the street of the Consuls. There were certain advantages in that move. In my present abode my sudden absences might have been in the long run subject to comment. On the other hand, the house in the street of Consuls was a known out-post of Legitimacy. But then it was covered by the occult influence of her who was referred to in confidential talks, secret communications, and discreet whispers of Royalist salons as: "Madame de Lastaola."

That was the name which the heiress of Henry Allègre had decided to adopt when, according to her own expression, she had found herself precipitated at a moment's notice into the crowd of mankind. It is strange how the death of Henry Allègre, which certainly the poor man had not planned, acquired in my view the character of a heartless desertion. It gave one a glimpse of amazing egoism in a sentiment to which one could hardly give a name, a mysterious appropriation of one human being by another as if in defiance of unexpressed things and for an unheard-of satisfaction of an inconceivable pride. If he had hated her he could not have flung that enormous fortune more brutally at her head. And his unrepentant death seemed to lift for a moment the curtain on something lofty and sinister like an Olympian's caprice.

Doña Rita said to me once with humorous resignation: "You know, it appears that one must have a name. That's what Henry Allègre's man of business told me. He was quite impatient with me about it. But my name, amigo, Henry Allègre had taken from me like all the rest of what I had been once. All that is buried with him in his grave. It wouldn't have been true. That is how I felt about it. So I took that one." She whispered to herself: "Lastaola," not as if to test the sound but as if in a dream.

To this day I am not quite certain whether it was the name of any human habitation, a lonely caserío with a half-effaced carving of a coat of arms over its door, or of some hamlet at the dead end of a ravine with a stony slope at the back. It might have been a hill for all I know or perhaps a stream. A wood, or perhaps a combination of all these: just a bit of the earth's surface. Once I asked her where exactly it was situated and she answered, waving her hand cavalierly at the dead wall of the room: "Oh, over there." I thought that this was all that I was going to hear but she added moodily, "I used to take my goats there, a dozen or so of them, for the day. From after my uncle had said his Mass till the ringing of the evening bell."

I saw suddenly the lonely spot, sketched for me some time ago by a few words from Mr. Blunt, populated by the agile, bearded beasts with cynical heads, and a little misty figure dark in the sunlight with a halo of dishevelled rust-coloured hair about its head.

The epithet of rust-coloured comes from her. It was really tawny. Once or twice in my hearing she had referred to "my rust-coloured hair" with laughing vexation. Even

then it was unruly, abhorring the restraints of civilization, and often in the heat of a dispute getting into the eyes of Madame de Lastaola, the possessor of coveted art treasures, the heiress of Henry Allègre. She proceeded in a reminiscent mood, with a faint flash of gaiety all over her face, except her dark blue eyes that moved so seldom out of their fixed scrutiny of things invisible to other human beings.

“The goats were very good. We clambered amongst the stones together. They beat me at that game. I used to catch my hair in the bushes.”

“Your rust-coloured hair,” I whispered.

“Yes, it was always this colour. And I used to leave bits of my frock on thorns here and there. It was pretty thin, I can tell you. There wasn’t much at that time between my skin and the blue of the sky. My legs were as sunburnt as my face; but really I didn’t tan very much. I had plenty of freckles though. There were no looking-glasses in the Presbytery but uncle had a piece not bigger than my two hands for his shaving. One Sunday I crept into his room and had a peep at myself. And wasn’t I startled to see my own eyes looking at me! But it was fascinating, too. I was about eleven years old then, and I was very friendly with the goats, and I was as shrill as a cicada and as slender as a match. Heavens! When I overhear myself speaking sometimes, or look at my limbs, it doesn’t seem to be possible. And yet it is the same one. I do remember every single goat. They were very clever. Goats are no trouble really; they don’t scatter much. Mine never did even if I had to hide myself out of their sight for ever so long.”

It was but natural to ask her why she wanted to hide, and she uttered vaguely what was rather a comment on my question:

“It was like fate.” But I chose to take it otherwise, teasingly, because we were often like a pair of children.

“Oh, really,” I said, “you talk like a pagan. What could you know of fate at that time? What was it like? Did it come down from Heaven?”

“Don’t be stupid. It used to come along a cart-track that was there and it looked like a boy. Wasn’t he a little devil though. You understand, I couldn’t know that. He was a wealthy cousin of mine. Round there we are all related, all cousins — as in Brittany. He wasn’t much bigger than myself but he was older, just a boy in blue breeches and with good shoes on his feet, which of course interested and impressed me. He yelled to me from below, I screamed to him from above, he came up and sat down near me on a stone, never said a word, let me look at him for half an hour before he condescended to ask me who I was. And the airs he gave himself! He quite intimidated me sitting there perfectly dumb. I remember trying to hide my bare feet under the edge of my skirt as I sat below him on the ground.

“C’est comique, eh!” she interrupted herself to comment in a melancholy tone. I looked at her sympathetically and she went on:

“He was the only son from a rich farmhouse two miles down the slope. In winter they used to send him to school at Tolosa. He had an enormous opinion of himself; he was going to keep a shop in a town by and by and he was about the most dissatisfied creature I have ever seen. He had an unhappy mouth and unhappy eyes and he was

always wretched about something: about the treatment he received, about being kept in the country and chained to work. He was moaning and complaining and threatening all the world, including his father and mother. He used to curse God, yes, that boy, sitting there on a piece of rock like a wretched little Prometheus with a sparrow pecking at his miserable little liver. And the grand scenery of mountains all round, ha, ha, ha!”

She laughed in contralto: a penetrating sound with something generous in it; not infectious, but in others provoking a smile.

“Of course I, poor little animal, I didn’t know what to make of it, and I was even a little frightened. But at first because of his miserable eyes I was sorry for him, almost as much as if he had been a sick goat. But, frightened or sorry, I don’t know how it is, I always wanted to laugh at him, too, I mean from the very first day when he let me admire him for half an hour. Yes, even then I had to put my hand over my mouth more than once for the sake of good manners, you understand. And yet, you know, I was never a laughing child.

“One day he came up and sat down very dignified a little bit away from me and told me he had been thrashed for wandering in the hills.

“‘To be with me?’ I asked. And he said: ‘To be with you! No. My people don’t know what I do.’ I can’t tell why, but I was annoyed. So instead of raising a clamour of pity over him, which I suppose he expected me to do, I asked him if the thrashing hurt very much. He got up, he had a switch in his hand, and walked up to me, saying, ‘I will soon show you.’ I went stiff with fright; but instead of slashing at me he dropped down by my side and kissed me on the cheek. Then he did it again, and by that time I was gone dead all over and he could have done what he liked with the corpse but he left off suddenly and then I came to life again and I bolted away. Not very far. I couldn’t leave the goats altogether. He chased me round and about the rocks, but of course I was too quick for him in his nice town boots. When he got tired of that game he started throwing stones. After that he made my life very lively for me. Sometimes he used to come on me unawares and then I had to sit still and listen to his miserable ravings, because he would catch me round the waist and hold me very tight. And yet, I often felt inclined to laugh. But if I caught sight of him at a distance and tried to dodge out of the way he would start stoning me into a shelter I knew of and then sit outside with a heap of stones at hand so that I daren’t show the end of my nose for hours. He would sit there and rave and abuse me till I would burst into a crazy laugh in my hole; and then I could see him through the leaves rolling on the ground and biting his fists with rage. Didn’t he hate me! At the same time I was often terrified. I am convinced now that if I had started crying he would have rushed in and perhaps strangled me there. Then as the sun was about to set he would make me swear that I would marry him when I was grown up. ‘Swear, you little wretched beggar,’ he would yell to me. And I would swear. I was hungry, and I didn’t want to be made black and blue all over with stones. Oh, I swore ever so many times to be his wife. Thirty times a month for two months. I couldn’t help myself. It was no use complaining to my sister Therese. When I showed her my bruises and tried to tell her a little about my trouble

she was quite scandalized. She called me a sinful girl, a shameless creature. I assure you it puzzled my head so that, between Therese my sister and José the boy, I lived in a state of idiocy almost. But luckily at the end of the two months they sent him away from home for good. Curious story to happen to a goatherd living all her days out under God's eye, as my uncle the Cura might have said. My sister Therese was keeping house in the Presbytery. She's a terrible person."

"I have heard of your sister Therese," I said.

"Oh, you have! Of my big sister Therese, six, ten years older than myself perhaps? She just comes a little above my shoulder, but then I was always a long thing. I never knew my mother. I don't even know how she looked. There are no paintings or photographs in our farmhouses amongst the hills. I haven't even heard her described to me. I believe I was never good enough to be told these things. Therese decided that I was a lump of wickedness, and now she believes that I will lose my soul altogether unless I take some steps to save it. Well, I have no particular taste that way. I suppose it is annoying to have a sister going fast to eternal perdition, but there are compensations. The funniest thing is that it's Therese, I believe, who managed to keep me out of the Presbytery when I went out of my way to look in on them on my return from my visit to the Quartel Real last year. I couldn't have stayed much more than half an hour with them anyway, but still I would have liked to get over the old doorstep. I am certain that Therese persuaded my uncle to go out and meet me at the bottom of the hill. I saw the old man a long way off and I understood how it was. I dismounted at once and met him on foot. We had half an hour together walking up and down the road. He is a peasant priest, he didn't know how to treat me. And of course I was uncomfortable, too. There wasn't a single goat about to keep me in countenance. I ought to have embraced him. I was always fond of the stern, simple old man. But he drew himself up when I approached him and actually took off his hat to me. So simple as that! I bowed my head and asked for his blessing. And he said 'I would never refuse a blessing to a good Legitimist.' So stern as that! And when I think that I was perhaps the only girl of the family or in the whole world that he ever in his priest's life patted on the head! When I think of that I . . . I believe at that moment I was as wretched as he was himself. I handed him an envelope with a big red seal which quite startled him. I had asked the Marquis de Villarel to give me a few words for him, because my uncle has a great influence in his district; and the Marquis penned with his own hand some compliments and an inquiry about the spirit of the population. My uncle read the letter, looked up at me with an air of mournful awe, and begged me to tell his excellency that the people were all for God, their lawful King and their old privileges. I said to him then, after he had asked me about the health of His Majesty in an awfully gloomy tone — I said then: 'There is only one thing that remains for me to do, uncle, and that is to give you two pounds of the very best snuff I have brought here for you.' What else could I have got for the poor old man? I had no trunks with me. I had to leave behind a spare pair of shoes in the hotel to make room in my little bag for that snuff. And fancy! That old priest absolutely pushed the parcel away. I could have

thrown it at his head; but I thought suddenly of that hard, prayerful life, knowing nothing of any ease or pleasure in the world, absolutely nothing but a pinch of snuff now and then. I remembered how wretched he used to be when he lacked a copper or two to get some snuff with. My face was hot with indignation, but before I could fly out at him I remembered how simple he was. So I said with great dignity that as the present came from the King and as he wouldn't receive it from my hand there was nothing else for me to do but to throw it into the brook; and I made as if I were going to do it, too. He shouted: 'Stay, unhappy girl! Is it really from His Majesty, whom God preserve?' I said contemptuously, 'Of course.' He looked at me with great pity in his eyes, sighed deeply, and took the little tin from my hand. I suppose he imagined me in my abandoned way wheedling the necessary cash out of the King for the purchase of that snuff. You can't imagine how simple he is. Nothing was easier than to deceive him; but don't imagine I deceived him from the vainglory of a mere sinner. I lied to the dear man, simply because I couldn't bear the idea of him being deprived of the only gratification his big, ascetic, gaunt body ever knew on earth. As I mounted my mule to go away he murmured coldly: 'God guard you, Señora!' Señora! What sternness! We were off a little way already when his heart softened and he shouted after me in a terrible voice: 'The road to Heaven is repentance!' And then, after a silence, again the great shout 'Repentance!' thundered after me. Was that sternness or simplicity, I wonder? Or a mere unmeaning superstition, a mechanical thing? If there lives anybody completely honest in this world, surely it must be my uncle. And yet — who knows?

"Would you guess what was the next thing I did? Directly I got over the frontier I wrote from Bayonne asking the old man to send me out my sister here. I said it was for the service of the King. You see, I had thought suddenly of that house of mine in which you once spent the night talking with Mr. Mills and Don Juan Blunt. I thought it would do extremely well for Carlist officers coming this way on leave or on a mission. In hotels they might have been molested, but I knew that I could get protection for my house. Just a word from the ministry in Paris to the Prefect. But I wanted a woman to manage it for me. And where was I to find a trustworthy woman? How was I to know one when I saw her? I don't know how to talk to women. Of course my Rose would have done for me that or anything else; but what could I have done myself without her? She has looked after me from the first. It was Henry Allègre who got her for me eight years ago. I don't know whether he meant it for a kindness but she's the only human being on whom I can lean. She knows . . . What doesn't she know about me! She has never failed to do the right thing for me unasked. I couldn't part with her. And I couldn't think of anybody else but my sister.

"After all it was somebody belonging to me. But it seemed the wildest idea. Yet she came at once. Of course I took care to send her some money. She likes money. As to my uncle there is nothing that he wouldn't have given up for the service of the King. Rose went to meet her at the railway station. She told me afterwards that there had been no need for me to be anxious about her recognizing Mademoiselle Therese. There was nobody else in the train that could be mistaken for her. I should think not! She had

made for herself a dress of some brown stuff like a nun's habit and had a crooked stick and carried all her belongings tied up in a handkerchief. She looked like a pilgrim to a saint's shrine. Rose took her to the house. She asked when she saw it: 'And does this big place really belong to our Rita?' My maid of course said that it was mine. 'And how long did our Rita live here?' — 'Madame has never seen it unless perhaps the outside, as far as I know. I believe Mr. Allègre lived here for some time when he was a young man.' — 'The sinner that's dead?' — 'Just so,' says Rose. You know nothing ever startles Rose. 'Well, his sins are gone with him,' said my sister, and began to make herself at home.

"Rose was going to stop with her for a week but on the third day she was back with me with the remark that Mlle. Therese knew her way about very well already and preferred to be left to herself. Some little time afterwards I went to see that sister of mine. The first thing she said to me, 'I wouldn't have recognized you, Rita,' and I said, 'What a funny dress you have, Therese, more fit for the portress of a convent than for this house.' — 'Yes,' she said, 'and unless you give this house to me, Rita, I will go back to our country. I will have nothing to do with your life, Rita. Your life is no secret for me.'

"I was going from room to room and Therese was following me. 'I don't know that my life is a secret to anybody,' I said to her, 'but how do you know anything about it?' And then she told me that it was through a cousin of ours, that horrid wretch of a boy, you know. He had finished his schooling and was a clerk in a Spanish commercial house of some kind, in Paris, and apparently had made it his business to write home whatever he could hear about me or ferret out from those relations of mine with whom I lived as a girl. I got suddenly very furious. I raged up and down the room (we were alone upstairs), and Therese scuttled away from me as far as the door. I heard her say to herself, 'It's the evil spirit in her that makes her like this.' She was absolutely convinced of that. She made the sign of the cross in the air to protect herself. I was quite astounded. And then I really couldn't help myself. I burst into a laugh. I laughed and laughed; I really couldn't stop till Therese ran away. I went downstairs still laughing and found her in the hall with her face to the wall and her fingers in her ears kneeling in a corner. I had to pull her out by the shoulders from there. I don't think she was frightened; she was only shocked. But I don't suppose her heart is desperately bad, because when I dropped into a chair feeling very tired she came and knelt in front of me and put her arms round my waist and entreated me to cast off from me my evil ways with the help of saints and priests. Quite a little programme for a reformed sinner. I got away at last. I left her sunk on her heels before the empty chair looking after me. 'I pray for you every night and morning, Rita,' she said. — 'Oh, yes. I know you are a good sister,' I said to her. I was letting myself out when she called after me, 'And what about this house, Rita?' I said to her, 'Oh, you may keep it till the day I reform and enter a convent.' The last I saw of her she was still on her knees looking after me with her mouth open. I have seen her since several times, but our intercourse is, at any rate on her side, as of a frozen nun with some great lady. But I believe she

really knows how to make men comfortable. Upon my word I think she likes to look after men. They don't seem to be such great sinners as women are. I think you could do worse than take up your quarters at number 10. She will no doubt develop a saintly sort of affection for you, too."

I don't know that the prospect of becoming a favourite of Doña Rita's peasant sister was very fascinating to me. If I went to live very willingly at No. 10 it was because everything connected with Doña Rita had for me a peculiar fascination. She had only passed through the house once as far as I knew; but it was enough. She was one of those beings that leave a trace. I am not unreasonable — I mean for those that knew her. That is, I suppose, because she was so unforgettable. Let us remember the tragedy of Azzolati the ruthless, the ridiculous financier with a criminal soul (or shall we say heart) and facile tears. No wonder, then, that for me, who may flatter myself without undue vanity with being much finer than that grotesque international intriguer, the mere knowledge that Doña Rita had passed through the very rooms in which I was going to live between the strenuous times of the sea-expeditions, was enough to fill my inner being with a great content. Her glance, her darkly brilliant blue glance, had run over the walls of that room which most likely would be mine to slumber in. Behind me, somewhere near the door, Therese, the peasant sister, said in a funnily compassionate tone and in an amazingly landlady-of-a-boarding-house spirit of false persuasiveness:

"You will be very comfortable here, Señor. It is so peaceful here in the street. Sometimes one may think oneself in a village. It's only a hundred and twenty-five francs for the friends of the King. And I shall take such good care of you that your very heart will be able to rest."

Chapter 2

Doña Rita was curious to know how I got on with her peasant sister and all I could say in return for that inquiry was that the peasant sister was in her own way amiable. At this she clicked her tongue amusingly and repeated a remark she had made before: "She likes young men. The younger the better." The mere thought of those two women being sisters aroused one's wonder. Physically they were altogether of different design. It was also the difference between living tissue of glowing loveliness with a divine breath, and a hard hollow figure of baked clay.

Indeed Therese did somehow resemble an achievement, wonderful enough in its way, in unglazed earthenware. The only gleam perhaps that one could find on her was that of her teeth, which one used to get between her dull lips unexpectedly, startlingly, and a little inexplicably, because it was never associated with a smile. She smiled with compressed mouth. It was indeed difficult to conceive of those two birds coming from the same nest. And yet . . . Contrary to what generally happens, it was when one saw those two women together that one lost all belief in the possibility of their relationship near or far. It extended even to their common humanity. One, as it were,

doubted it. If one of the two was representative, then the other was either something more or less than human. One wondered whether these two women belonged to the same scheme of creation. One was secretly amazed to see them standing together, speaking to each other, having words in common, understanding each other. And yet! . . . Our psychological sense is the crudest of all; we don't know, we don't perceive how superficial we are. The simplest shades escape us, the secret of changes, of relations. No, upon the whole, the only feature (and yet with enormous differences) which Therese had in common with her sister, as I told Doña Rita, was amiability.

"For, you know, you are a most amiable person yourself," I went on. "It's one of your characteristics, of course much more precious than in other people. You transmute the commonest traits into gold of your own; but after all there are no new names. You are amiable. You were most amiable to me when I first saw you."

"Really. I was not aware. Not specially . . ."

"I had never the presumption to think that it was special. Moreover, my head was in a whirl. I was lost in astonishment first of all at what I had been listening to all night. Your history, you know, a wonderful tale with a flavour of wine in it and wreathed in clouds, with that amazing decapitated, mutilated dummy of a woman lurking in a corner, and with Blunt's smile gleaming through a fog, the fog in my eyes, from Mills' pipe, you know. I was feeling quite inanimate as to body and frightfully stimulated as to mind all the time. I had never heard anything like that talk about you before. Of course I wasn't sleepy, but still I am not used to do altogether without sleep like Blunt . . ."

"Kept awake all night listening to my story!" She marvelled.

"Yes. You don't think I am complaining, do you? I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Blunt in a ragged old jacket and a white tie and that incisive polite voice of his seemed strange and weird. It seemed as though he were inventing it all rather angrily. I had doubts as to your existence."

"Mr. Blunt is very much interested in my story."

"Anybody would be," I said. "I was. I didn't sleep a wink. I was expecting to see you soon — and even then I had my doubts."

"As to my existence?"

"It wasn't exactly that, though of course I couldn't tell that you weren't a product of Captain Blunt's sleeplessness. He seemed to dread exceedingly to be left alone and your story might have been a device to detain us . . ."

"He hasn't enough imagination for that," she said.

"It didn't occur to me. But there was Mills, who apparently believed in your existence. I could trust Mills. My doubts were about the propriety. I couldn't see any good reason for being taken to see you. Strange that it should be my connection with the sea which brought me here to the Villa."

"Unexpected perhaps."

"No. I mean particularly strange and significant."

"Why?"

“Because my friends are in the habit of telling me (and each other) that the sea is my only love. They were always chaffing me because they couldn’t see or guess in my life at any woman, open or secret. . .”

“And is that really so?” she inquired negligently.

“Why, yes. I don’t mean to say that I am like an innocent shepherd in one of those interminable stories of the eighteenth century. But I don’t throw the word love about indiscriminately. It may be all true about the sea; but some people would say that they love sausages.”

“You are horrible.”

“I am surprised.”

“I mean your choice of words.”

“And you have never uttered a word yet that didn’t change into a pearl as it dropped from your lips. At least not before me.”

She glanced down deliberately and said, “This is better. But I don’t see any of them on the floor.”

“It’s you who are horrible in the implications of your language. Don’t see any on the floor! Haven’t I caught up and treasured them all in my heart? I am not the animal from which sausages are made.”

She looked at me suavely and then with the sweetest possible smile breathed out the word: “No.”

And we both laughed very loud. O! days of innocence! On this occasion we parted from each other on a light-hearted note. But already I had acquired the conviction that there was nothing more lovable in the world than that woman; nothing more life-giving, inspiring, and illuminating than the emanation of her charm. I meant it absolutely — not excepting the light of the sun.

From this there was only one step further to take. The step into a conscious surrender; the open perception that this charm, warming like a flame, was also all-revealing like a great light; giving new depth to shades, new brilliance to colours, an amazing vividness to all sensations and vitality to all thoughts: so that all that had been lived before seemed to have been lived in a drab world and with a languid pulse.

A great revelation this. I don’t mean to say it was soul-shaking. The soul was already a captive before doubt, anguish, or dismay could touch its surrender and its exaltation. But all the same the revelation turned many things into dust; and, amongst others, the sense of the careless freedom of my life. If that life ever had any purpose or any aim outside itself I would have said that it threw a shadow across its path. But it hadn’t. There had been no path. But there was a shadow, the inseparable companion of all light. No illumination can sweep all mystery out of the world. After the departed darkness the shadows remain, more mysterious because as if more enduring; and one feels a dread of them from which one was free before. What if they were to be victorious at the last? They, or what perhaps lurks in them: fear, deception, desire, disillusion — all silent at first before the song of triumphant love vibrating in the light. Yes. Silent. Even desire itself! All silent. But not for long!

This was, I think, before the third expedition. Yes, it must have been the third, for I remember that it was boldly planned and that it was carried out without a hitch. The tentative period was over; all our arrangements had been perfected. There was, so to speak, always an unfailing smoke on the hill and an unfailing lantern on the shore. Our friends, mostly bought for hard cash and therefore valuable, had acquired confidence in us. This, they seemed to say, is no unfathomable roguery of penniless adventurers. This is but the reckless enterprise of men of wealth and sense and needn't be inquired into. The young caballero has got real gold pieces in the belt he wears next his skin; and the man with the heavy moustaches and unbelieving eyes is indeed very much of a man. They gave to Dominic all their respect and to me a great show of deference; for I had all the money, while they thought that Dominic had all the sense. That judgment was not exactly correct. I had my share of judgment and audacity which surprises me now that the years have chilled the blood without dimming the memory. I remember going about the business with light-hearted, clear-headed recklessness which, according as its decisions were sudden or considered, made Dominic draw his breath through his clenched teeth, or look hard at me before he gave me either a slight nod of assent or a sarcastic "Oh, certainly" — just as the humour of the moment prompted him.

One night as we were lying on a bit of dry sand under the lee of a rock, side by side, watching the light of our little vessel dancing away at sea in the windy distance, Dominic spoke suddenly to me.

"I suppose Alphonso and Carlos, Carlos and Alphonso, they are nothing to you, together or separately?"

I said: "Dominic, if they were both to vanish from the earth together or separately it would make no difference to my feelings."

He remarked: "Just so. A man mourns only for his friends. I suppose they are no more friends to you than they are to me. Those Carlists make a great consumption of cartridges. That is well. But why should we do all those mad things that you will insist on us doing till my hair," he pursued with grave, mocking exaggeration, "till my hair tries to stand up on my head? and all for that Carlos, let God and the devil each guard his own, for that Majesty as they call him, but after all a man like another and — no friend."

"Yes, why?" I murmured, feeling my body nestled at ease in the sand.

It was very dark under the overhanging rock on that night of clouds and of wind that died and rose and died again. Dominic's voice was heard speaking low between the short gusts.

"Friend of the Señora, eh?"

"That's what the world says, Dominic."

"Half of what the world says are lies," he pronounced dogmatically. "For all his majesty he may be a good enough man. Yet he is only a king in the mountains and tomorrow he may be no more than you. Still a woman like that — one, somehow, would grudge her to a better king. She ought to be set up on a high pillar for people that

walk on the ground to raise their eyes up to. But you are otherwise, you gentlemen. You, for instance, Monsieur, you wouldn't want to see her set up on a pillar."

"That sort of thing, Dominic," I said, "that sort of thing, you understand me, ought to be done early."

He was silent for a time. And then his manly voice was heard in the shadow of the rock.

"I see well enough what you mean. I spoke of the multitude, that only raise their eyes. But for kings and suchlike that is not enough. Well, no heart need despair; for there is not a woman that wouldn't at some time or other get down from her pillar for no bigger bribe perhaps than just a flower which is fresh to-day and withered to-morrow. And then, what's the good of asking how long any woman has been up there? There is a true saying that lips that have been kissed do not lose their freshness."

I don't know what answer I could have made. I imagine Dominic thought himself unanswerable. As a matter of fact, before I could speak, a voice came to us down the face of the rock crying secretly, "Olà, down there! All is safe ashore."

It was the boy who used to hang about the stable of a muleteer's inn in a little shallow valley with a shallow little stream in it, and where we had been hiding most of the day before coming down to the shore. We both started to our feet and Dominic said, "A good boy that. You didn't hear him either come or go above our heads. Don't reward him with more than one peseta, Señor, whatever he does. If you were to give him two he would go mad at the sight of so much wealth and throw up his job at the Fonda, where he is so useful to run errands, in that way he has of skimming along the paths without displacing a stone."

Meantime he was busying himself with striking a fire to set alight a small heap of dry sticks he had made ready beforehand on that spot which in all the circuit of the Bay was perfectly screened from observation from the land side.

The clear flame shooting up revealed him in the black cloak with a hood of a Mediterranean sailor. His eyes watched the dancing dim light to seaward. And he talked the while.

"The only fault you have, Señor, is being too generous with your money. In this world you must give sparingly. The only things you may deal out without counting, in this life of ours which is but a little fight and a little love, is blows to your enemy and kisses to a woman. . . . Ah! here they are coming in."

I noticed the dancing light in the dark west much closer to the shore now. Its motion had altered. It swayed slowly as it ran towards us, and, suddenly, the darker shadow as of a great pointed wing appeared gliding in the night. Under it a human voice shouted something confidently.

"Bueno," muttered Dominic. From some receptacle I didn't see he poured a lot of water on the blaze, like a magician at the end of a successful incantation that had called out a shadow and a voice from the immense space of the sea. And his hooded figure vanished from my sight in a great hiss and the warm feel of ascending steam.

“That’s all over,” he said, “and now we go back for more work, more toil, more trouble, more exertion with hands and feet, for hours and hours. And all the time the head turned over the shoulder, too.”

We were climbing a precipitous path sufficiently dangerous in the dark, Dominic, more familiar with it, going first and I scrambling close behind in order that I might grab at his cloak if I chanced to slip or miss my footing. I remonstrated against this arrangement as we stopped to rest. I had no doubt I would grab at his cloak if I felt myself falling. I couldn’t help doing that. But I would probably only drag him down with me.

With one hand grasping a shadowy bush above his head he growled that all this was possible, but that it was all in the bargain, and urged me onwards.

When we got on to the level that man whose even breathing no exertion, no danger, no fear or anger could disturb, remarked as we strode side by side:

“I will say this for us, that we are carrying out all this deadly foolishness as conscientiously as though the eyes of the Señora were on us all the time. And as to risk, I suppose we take more than she would approve of, I fancy, if she ever gave a moment’s thought to us out here. Now, for instance, in the next half hour, we may come any moment on three carabineers who would let off their pieces without asking questions. Even your way of flinging money about cannot make safety for men set on defying a whole big country for the sake of — what is it exactly? — the blue eyes, or the white arms of the Señora.”

He kept his voice equably low. It was a lonely spot and but for a vague shape of a dwarf tree here and there we had only the flying clouds for company. Very far off a tiny light twinkled a little way up the seaward shoulder of an invisible mountain. Dominic moved on.

“Fancy yourself lying here, on this wild spot, with a leg smashed by a shot or perhaps with a bullet in your side. It might happen. A star might fall. I have watched stars falling in scores on clear nights in the Atlantic. And it was nothing. The flash of a pinch of gunpowder in your face may be a bigger matter. Yet somehow it’s pleasant as we stumble in the dark to think of our Señora in that long room with a shiny floor and all that lot of glass at the end, sitting on that divan, you call it, covered with carpets as if expecting a king indeed. And very still . . .”

He remembered her — whose image could not be dismissed.

I laid my hand on his shoulder.

“That light on the mountain side flickers exceedingly, Dominic. Are we in the path?”

He addressed me then in French, which was between us the language of more formal moments.

“Prenez mon bras, monsieur. Take a firm hold, or I will have you stumbling again and falling into one of those beastly holes, with a good chance to crack your head. And there is no need to take offence. For, speaking with all respect, why should you, and I with you, be here on this lonely spot, barking our shins in the dark on the way to a

confounded flickering light where there will be no other supper but a piece of a stale sausage and a draught of leathery wine out of a stinking skin. Pah!”

I had good hold of his arm. Suddenly he dropped the formal French and pronounced in his inflexible voice:

“For a pair of white arms, Señor. Bueno.”

He could understand.

Chapter 3

On our return from that expedition we came gliding into the old harbour so late that Dominic and I, making for the café kept by Madame Léonore, found it empty of customers, except for two rather sinister fellows playing cards together at a corner table near the door. The first thing done by Madame Léonore was to put her hands on Dominic’s shoulders and look at arm’s length into the eyes of that man of audacious deeds and wild stratagems who smiled straight at her from under his heavy and, at that time, uncurled moustaches.

Indeed we didn’t present a neat appearance, our faces unshaven, with the traces of dried salt sprays on our smarting skins and the sleeplessness of full forty hours filming our eyes. At least it was so with me who saw as through a mist Madame Léonore moving with her mature nonchalant grace, setting before us wine and glasses with a faint swish of her ample black skirt. Under the elaborate structure of black hair her jet-black eyes sparkled like good-humoured stars and even I could see that she was tremendously excited at having this lawless wanderer Dominic within her reach and as it were in her power. Presently she sat down by us, touched lightly Dominic’s curly head silvered on the temples (she couldn’t really help it), gazed at me for a while with a quizzical smile, observed that I looked very tired, and asked Dominic whether for all that I was likely to sleep soundly to-night.

“I don’t know,” said Dominic, “He’s young. And there is always the chance of dreams.”

“What do you men dream of in those little barques of yours tossing for months on the water?”

“Mostly of nothing,” said Dominic. “But it has happened to me to dream of furious fights.”

“And of furious loves, too, no doubt,” she caught him up in a mocking voice.

“No, that’s for the waking hours,” Dominic drawled, basking sleepily with his head between his hands in her ardent gaze. “The waking hours are longer.”

“They must be, at sea,” she said, never taking her eyes off him. “But I suppose you do talk of your loves sometimes.”

“You may be sure, Madame Léonore,” I interjected, noticing the hoarseness of my voice, “that you at any rate are talked about a lot at sea.”

"I am not so sure of that now. There is that strange lady from the Prado that you took him to see, Signorino. She went to his head like a glass of wine into a tender youngster's. He is such a child, and I suppose that I am another. Shame to confess it, the other morning I got a friend to look after the café for a couple of hours, wrapped up my head, and walked out there to the other end of the town. . . . Look at these two sitting up! And I thought they were so sleepy and tired, the poor fellows!"

She kept our curiosity in suspense for a moment.

"Well, I have seen your marvel, Dominic," she continued in a calm voice. "She came flying out of the gate on horseback and it would have been all I would have seen of her if — and this is for you, Signorino — if she hadn't pulled up in the main alley to wait for a very good-looking cavalier. He had his moustaches so, and his teeth were very white when he smiled at her. But his eyes are too deep in his head for my taste. I didn't like it. It reminded me of a certain very severe priest who used to come to our village when I was young; younger even than your marvel, Dominic."

"It was no priest in disguise, Madame Léonore," I said, amused by her expression of disgust. "That's an American."

"Ah! Un Americano! Well, never mind him. It was her that I went to see."

"What! Walked to the other end of the town to see Doña Rita!" Dominic addressed her in a low bantering tone. "Why, you were always telling me you couldn't walk further than the end of the quay to save your life — or even mine, you said."

"Well, I did; and I walked back again and between the two walks I had a good look. And you may be sure — that will surprise you both — that on the way back — oh, Santa Madre, wasn't it a long way, too — I wasn't thinking of any man at sea or on shore in that connection."

"No. And you were not thinking of yourself, either, I suppose," I said. Speaking was a matter of great effort for me, whether I was too tired or too sleepy, I can't tell. "No, you were not thinking of yourself. You were thinking of a woman, though."

"Si. As much a woman as any of us that ever breathed in the world. Yes, of her! Of that very one! You see, we women are not like you men, indifferent to each other unless by some exception. Men say we are always against one another but that's only men's conceit. What can she be to me? I am not afraid of the big child here," and she tapped Dominic's forearm on which he rested his head with a fascinated stare. "With us two it is for life and death, and I am rather pleased that there is something yet in him that can catch fire on occasion. I would have thought less of him if he hadn't been able to get out of hand a little, for something really fine. As for you, Signorino," she turned on me with an unexpected and sarcastic sally, "I am not in love with you yet." She changed her tone from sarcasm to a soft and even dreamy note. "A head like a gem," went on that woman born in some by-street of Rome, and a plaything for years of God knows what obscure fates. "Yes, Dominic! Antica. I haven't been haunted by a face since — since I was sixteen years old. It was the face of a young cavalier in the street. He was on horseback, too. He never looked at me, I never saw him again, and

I loved him for — for days and days and days. That was the sort of face he had. And her face is of the same sort. She had a man's hat, too, on her head. So high!"

"A man's hat on her head," remarked with profound displeasure Dominic, to whom this wonder, at least, of all the wonders of the earth, was apparently unknown.

"Si. And her face has haunted me. Not so long as that other but more touchingly because I am no longer sixteen and this is a woman. Yes, I did think of her, I myself was once that age and I, too, had a face of my own to show to the world, though not so superb. And I, too, didn't know why I had come into the world any more than she does."

"And now you know," Dominic growled softly, with his head still between his hands.

She looked at him for a long time, opened her lips but in the end only sighed lightly.

"And what do you know of her, you who have seen her so well as to be haunted by her face?" I asked.

I wouldn't have been surprised if she had answered me with another sigh. For she seemed only to be thinking of herself and looked not in my direction. But suddenly she roused up.

"Of her?" she repeated in a louder voice. "Why should I talk of another woman? And then she is a great lady."

At this I could not repress a smile which she detected at once.

"Isn't she? Well, no, perhaps she isn't; but you may be sure of one thing, that she is both flesh and shadow more than any one that I have seen. Keep that well in your mind: She is for no man! She would be vanishing out of their hands like water that cannot be held."

I caught my breath. "Inconstant," I whispered.

"I don't say that. Maybe too proud, too wilful, too full of pity. Signorino, you don't know much about women. And you may learn something yet or you may not; but what you learn from her you will never forget."

"Not to be held," I murmured; and she whom the quayside called Madame Léonore closed her outstretched hand before my face and opened it at once to show its emptiness in illustration of her expressed opinion. Dominic never moved.

I wished good-night to these two and left the café for the fresh air and the dark spaciousness of the quays augmented by all the width of the old Port where between the trails of light the shadows of heavy hulls appeared very black, merging their outlines in a great confusion. I left behind me the end of the Cannebière, a wide vista of tall houses and much-lighted pavements losing itself in the distance with an extinction of both shapes and lights. I slunk past it with only a side glance and sought the dimness of quiet streets away from the centre of the usual night gaieties of the town. The dress I wore was just that of a sailor come ashore from some coaster, a thick blue woollen shirt or rather a sort of jumper with a knitted cap like a tam-o'-shanter worn very much on one side and with a red tuft of wool in the centre. This was even the reason why I had lingered so long in the café. I didn't want to be recognized in the streets in that costume and still less to be seen entering the house in the street of the Consuls. At

that hour when the performances were over and all the sensible citizens in their beds I didn't hesitate to cross the Place of the Opera. It was dark, the audience had already dispersed. The rare passers-by I met hurrying on their last affairs of the day paid no attention to me at all. The street of the Consuls I expected to find empty, as usual at that time of the night. But as I turned a corner into it I overtook three people who must have belonged to the locality. To me, somehow, they appeared strange. Two girls in dark cloaks walked ahead of a tall man in a top hat. I slowed down, not wishing to pass them by, the more so that the door of the house was only a few yards distant. But to my intense surprise those people stopped at it and the man in the top hat, producing a latchkey, let his two companions through, followed them, and with a heavy slam cut himself off from my astonished self and the rest of mankind.

In the stupid way people have I stood and meditated on the sight, before it occurred to me that this was the most useless thing to do. After waiting a little longer to let the others get away from the hall I entered in my turn. The small gas-jet seemed not to have been touched ever since that distant night when Mills and I trod the black-and-white marble hall for the first time on the heels of Captain Blunt — who lived by his sword. And in the dimness and solitude which kept no more trace of the three strangers than if they had been the merest ghosts I seemed to hear the ghostly murmur, “*Américain, Catholique et gentilhomme. Amér. . .*” Unseen by human eye I ran up the flight of steps swiftly and on the first floor stepped into my sitting-room of which the door was open . . . “*et gentilhomme.*” I tugged at the bell pull and somewhere down below a bell rang as unexpected for Therese as a call from a ghost.

I had no notion whether Therese could hear me. I seemed to remember that she slept in any bed that happened to be vacant. For all I knew she might have been asleep in mine. As I had no matches on me I waited for a while in the dark. The house was perfectly still. Suddenly without the slightest preliminary sound light fell into the room and Therese stood in the open door with a candlestick in her hand.

She had on her peasant brown skirt. The rest of her was concealed in a black shawl which covered her head, her shoulders, arms, and elbows completely, down to her waist. The hand holding the candle protruded from that envelope which the other invisible hand clasped together under her very chin. And her face looked like a face in a painting. She said at once:

“You startled me, my young Monsieur.”

She addressed me most frequently in that way as though she liked the very word “young.” Her manner was certainly peasant-like with a sort of plaint in the voice, while the face was that of a serving Sister in some small and rustic convent.

“I meant to do it,” I said. “I am a very bad person.”

“The young are always full of fun,” she said as if she were gloating over the idea. “It is very pleasant.”

“But you are very brave,” I chaffed her, “for you didn't expect a ring, and after all it might have been the devil who pulled the bell.”

“It might have been. But a poor girl like me is not afraid of the devil. I have a pure heart. I have been to confession last evening. No. But it might have been an assassin that pulled the bell ready to kill a poor harmless woman. This is a very lonely street. What could prevent you to kill me now and then walk out again free as air?”

While she was talking like this she had lighted the gas and with the last words she glided through the bedroom door leaving me thunderstruck at the unexpected character of her thoughts.

I couldn't know that there had been during my absence a case of atrocious murder which had affected the imagination of the whole town; and though Therese did not read the papers (which she imagined to be full of impieties and immoralities invented by godless men) yet if she spoke at all with her kind, which she must have done at least in shops, she could not have helped hearing of it. It seems that for some days people could talk of nothing else. She returned gliding from the bedroom hermetically sealed in her black shawl just as she had gone in, with the protruding hand holding the lighted candle and relieved my perplexity as to her morbid turn of mind by telling me something of the murder story in a strange tone of indifference even while referring to its most horrible features. “That's what carnal sin (*pêché de chair*) leads to,” she commented severely and passed her tongue over her thin lips. “And then the devil furnishes the occasion.”

“I can't imagine the devil inciting me to murder you, Therese,” I said, “and I didn't like that ready way you took me for an example, as it were. I suppose pretty near every lodger might be a potential murderer, but I expected to be made an exception.”

With the candle held a little below her face, with that face of one tone and without relief she looked more than ever as though she had come out of an old, cracked, smoky painting, the subject of which was altogether beyond human conception. And she only compressed her lips.

“All right,” I said, making myself comfortable on a sofa after pulling off my boots. “I suppose any one is liable to commit murder all of a sudden. Well, have you got many murderers in the house?”

“Yes,” she said, “it's pretty good. Upstairs and downstairs,” she sighed. “God sees to it.”

“And by the by, who is that grey-headed murderer in a tall hat whom I saw shepherding two girls into this house?”

She put on a candid air in which one could detect a little of her peasant cunning.

“Oh, yes. They are two dancing girls at the Opera, sisters, as different from each other as I and our poor Rita. But they are both virtuous and that gentleman, their father, is very severe with them. Very severe indeed, poor motherless things. And it seems to be such a sinful occupation.”

“I bet you make them pay a big rent, Therese. With an occupation like that . . .”

She looked at me with eyes of invincible innocence and began to glide towards the door, so smoothly that the flame of the candle hardly swayed. “Good-night,” she murmured.

“Good-night, Mademoiselle.”

Then in the very doorway she turned right round as a marionette would turn.

“Oh, you ought to know, my dear young Monsieur, that Mr. Blunt, the dear handsome man, has arrived from Navarre three days ago or more. Oh,” she added with a priceless air of compunction, “he is such a charming gentleman.”

And the door shut after her.

Chapter 4

That night I passed in a state, mostly open-eyed, I believe, but always on the border between dreams and waking. The only thing absolutely absent from it was the feeling of rest. The usual sufferings of a youth in love had nothing to do with it. I could leave her, go away from her, remain away from her, without an added pang or any augmented consciousness of that torturing sentiment of distance so acute that often it ends by wearing itself out in a few days. Far or near was all one to me, as if one could never get any further but also never any nearer to her secret: the state like that of some strange wild faiths that get hold of mankind with the cruel mystic grip of unattainable perfection, robbing them of both liberty and felicity on earth. A faith presents one with some hope, though. But I had no hope, and not even desire as a thing outside myself, that would come and go, exhaust or excite. It was in me just like life was in me; that life of which a popular saying affirms that “it is sweet.” For the general wisdom of mankind will always stop short on the limit of the formidable.

What is best in a state of brimful, equable suffering is that it does away with the gnawings of petty sensations. Too far gone to be sensible to hope and desire I was spared the inferior pangs of elation and impatience. Hours with her or hours without her were all alike, all in her possession! But still there are shades and I will admit that the hours of that morning were perhaps a little more difficult to get through than the others. I had sent word of my arrival of course. I had written a note. I had rung the bell. Therese had appeared herself in her brown garb and as monachal as ever. I had said to her:

“Have this sent off at once.”

She had gazed at the addressed envelope, smiled (I was looking up at her from my desk), and at last took it up with an effort of sanctimonious repugnance. But she remained with it in her hand looking at me as though she were piously gloating over something she could read in my face.

“Oh, that Rita, that Rita,” she murmured. “And you, too! Why are you trying, you, too, like the others, to stand between her and the mercy of God? What’s the good of all this to you? And you such a nice, dear, young gentleman. For no earthly good only making all the kind saints in heaven angry, and our mother ashamed in her place amongst the blessed.”

“Mademoiselle Therese,” I said, “vous êtes folle.”

I believed she was crazy. She was cunning, too. I added an imperious: "Allez," and with a strange docility she glided out without another word. All I had to do then was to get dressed and wait till eleven o'clock.

The hour struck at last. If I could have plunged into a light wave and been transported instantaneously to Doña Rita's door it would no doubt have saved me an infinity of pangs too complex for analysis; but as this was impossible I elected to walk from end to end of that long way. My emotions and sensations were childlike and chaotic inasmuch that they were very intense and primitive, and that I lay very helpless in their unrelaxing grasp. If one could have kept a record of one's physical sensations it would have been a fine collection of absurdities and contradictions. Hardly touching the ground and yet leaden-footed; with a sinking heart and an excited brain; hot and trembling with a secret faintness, and yet as firm as a rock and with a sort of indifference to it all, I did reach the door which was frightfully like any other commonplace door, but at the same time had a fateful character: a few planks put together — and an awful symbol; not to be approached without awe — and yet coming open in the ordinary way to the ring of the bell.

It came open. Oh, yes, very much as usual. But in the ordinary course of events the first sight in the hall should have been the back of the ubiquitous, busy, silent maid hurrying off and already distant. But not at all! She actually waited for me to enter. I was extremely taken aback and I believe spoke to her for the first time in my life.

"Bonjour, Rose."

She dropped her dark eyelids over those eyes that ought to have been lustrous but were not, as if somebody had breathed on them the first thing in the morning. She was a girl without smiles. She shut the door after me, and not only did that but in the incredible idleness of that morning she, who had never a moment to spare, started helping me off with my overcoat. It was positively embarrassing from its novelty. While busying herself with those trifles she murmured without any marked intention:

"Captain Blunt is with Madame."

This didn't exactly surprise me. I knew he had come up to town; I only happened to have forgotten his existence for the moment. I looked at the girl also without any particular intention. But she arrested my movement towards the dining-room door by a low, hurried, if perfectly unemotional appeal:

"Monsieur George!"

That of course was not my name. It served me then as it will serve for this story. In all sorts of strange places I was alluded to as "that young gentleman they call Monsieur George." Orders came from "Monsieur George" to men who nodded knowingly. Events pivoted about "Monsieur George." I haven't the slightest doubt that in the dark and tortuous streets of the old Town there were fingers pointed at my back: there goes "Monsieur George." I had been introduced discreetly to several considerable persons as "Monsieur George." I had learned to answer to the name quite naturally; and to simplify matters I was also "Monsieur George" in the street of the Consuls and in the Villa on the Prado. I verily believe that at that time I had the feeling that the name of

George really belonged to me. I waited for what the girl had to say. I had to wait some time, though during that silence she gave no sign of distress or agitation. It was for her obviously a moment of reflection. Her lips were compressed a little in a characteristic, capable manner. I looked at her with a friendliness I really felt towards her slight, unattractive, and dependable person.

“Well,” I said at last, rather amused by this mental hesitation. I never took it for anything else. I was sure it was not distrust. She appreciated men and things and events solely in relation to Doña Rita’s welfare and safety. And as to that I believed myself above suspicion. At last she spoke.

“Madame is not happy.” This information was given to me not emotionally but as it were officially. It hadn’t even a tone of warning. A mere statement. Without waiting to see the effect she opened the dining-room door, not to announce my name in the usual way but to go in and shut it behind her. In that short moment I heard no voices inside. Not a sound reached me while the door remained shut; but in a few seconds it came open again and Rose stood aside to let me pass.

Then I heard something: Doña Rita’s voice raised a little on an impatient note (a very, very rare thing) finishing some phrase of protest with the words “. . . Of no consequence.”

I heard them as I would have heard any other words, for she had that kind of voice which carries a long distance. But the maid’s statement occupied all my mind. “Madame n’est pas heureuse.” It had a dreadful precision . . . “Not happy . . .” This unhappiness had almost a concrete form — something resembling a horrid bat. I was tired, excited, and generally overwrought. My head felt empty. What were the appearances of unhappiness? I was still naïve enough to associate them with tears, lamentations, extraordinary attitudes of the body and some sort of facial distortion, all very dreadful to behold. I didn’t know what I should see; but in what I did see there was nothing startling, at any rate from that nursery point of view which apparently I had not yet outgrown.

With immense relief the apprehensive child within me beheld Captain Blunt warming his back at the more distant of the two fireplaces; and as to Doña Rita there was nothing extraordinary in her attitude either, except perhaps that her hair was all loose about her shoulders. I hadn’t the slightest doubt they had been riding together that morning, but she, with her impatience of all costume (and yet she could dress herself admirably and wore her dresses triumphantly), had divested herself of her riding habit and sat cross-legged enfolded in that ample blue robe like a young savage chieftain in a blanket. It covered her very feet. And before the normal fixity of her enigmatical eyes the smoke of the cigarette ascended ceremonially, straight up, in a slender spiral.

“How are you,” was the greeting of Captain Blunt with the usual smile which would have been more amiable if his teeth hadn’t been, just then, clenched quite so tight. How he managed to force his voice through that shining barrier I could never understand. Doña Rita tapped the couch engagingly by her side but I sat down instead in the armchair nearly opposite her, which, I imagine, must have been just vacated by Blunt.

She inquired with that particular gleam of the eyes in which there was something immemorial and gay:

“Well?”

“Perfect success.”

“I could hug you.”

At any time her lips moved very little but in this instance the intense whisper of these words seemed to form itself right in my very heart; not as a conveyed sound but as an imparted emotion vibrating there with an awful intimacy of delight. And yet it left my heart heavy.

“Oh, yes, for joy,” I said bitterly but very low; “for your Royalist, Legitimist, joy.” Then with that trick of very precise politeness which I must have caught from Mr. Blunt I added:

“I don’t want to be embraced — for the King.”

And I might have stopped there. But I didn’t. With a perversity which should be forgiven to those who suffer night and day and are as if drunk with an exalted unhappiness, I went on: “For the sake of an old cast-off glove; for I suppose a disdained love is not much more than a soiled, flabby thing that finds itself on a private rubbish heap because it has missed the fire.”

She listened to me unreadable, unmoved, narrowed eyes, closed lips, slightly flushed face, as if carved six thousand years ago in order to fix for ever that something secret and obscure which is in all women. Not the gross immobility of a Sphinx proposing roadside riddles but the finer immobility, almost sacred, of a fateful figure seated at the very source of the passions that have moved men from the dawn of ages.

Captain Blunt, with his elbow on the high mantelpiece, had turned away a little from us and his attitude expressed excellently the detachment of a man who does not want to hear. As a matter of fact, I don’t suppose he could have heard. He was too far away, our voices were too contained. Moreover, he didn’t want to hear. There could be no doubt about it; but she addressed him unexpectedly.

“As I was saying to you, Don Juan, I have the greatest difficulty in getting myself, I won’t say understood, but simply believed.”

No pose of detachment could avail against the warm waves of that voice. He had to hear. After a moment he altered his position as it were reluctantly, to answer her.

“That’s a difficulty that women generally have.”

“Yet I have always spoken the truth.”

“All women speak the truth,” said Blunt imperturbably. And this annoyed her.

“Where are the men I have deceived?” she cried.

“Yes, where?” said Blunt in a tone of alacrity as though he had been ready to go out and look for them outside.

“No! But show me one. I say — where is he?”

He threw his affectation of detachment to the winds, moved his shoulders slightly, very slightly, made a step nearer to the couch, and looked down on her with an expression of amused courtesy.

“Oh, I don’t know. Probably nowhere. But if such a man could be found I am certain he would turn out a very stupid person. You can’t be expected to furnish every one who approaches you with a mind. To expect that would be too much, even from you who know how to work wonders at such little cost to yourself.”

“To myself,” she repeated in a loud tone.

“Why this indignation? I am simply taking your word for it.”

“Such little cost!” she exclaimed under her breath.

“I mean to your person.”

“Oh, yes,” she murmured, glanced down, as it were upon herself, then added very low: “This body.”

“Well, it is you,” said Blunt with visibly contained irritation. “You don’t pretend it’s somebody else’s. It can’t be. You haven’t borrowed it. . . . It fits you too well,” he ended between his teeth.

“You take pleasure in tormenting yourself,” she remonstrated, suddenly placated; “and I would be sorry for you if I didn’t think it’s the mere revolt of your pride. And you know you are indulging your pride at my expense. As to the rest of it, as to my living, acting, working wonders at a little cost. . . . it has all but killed me morally. Do you hear? Killed.”

“Oh, you are not dead yet,” he muttered,

“No,” she said with gentle patience. “There is still some feeling left in me; and if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, you may be certain that I shall be conscious of the last stab.”

He remained silent for a while and then with a polite smile and a movement of the head in my direction he warned her.

“Our audience will get bored.”

“I am perfectly aware that Monsieur George is here, and that he has been breathing a very different atmosphere from what he gets in this room. Don’t you find this room extremely confined?” she asked me.

The room was very large but it is a fact that I felt oppressed at that moment. This mysterious quarrel between those two people, revealing something more close in their intercourse than I had ever before suspected, made me so profoundly unhappy that I didn’t even attempt to answer. And she continued:

“More space. More air. Give me air, air.” She seized the embroidered edges of her blue robe under her white throat and made as if to tear them apart, to fling it open on her breast, recklessly, before our eyes. We both remained perfectly still. Her hands dropped nervelessly by her side. “I envy you, Monsieur George. If I am to go under I should prefer to be drowned in the sea with the wind on my face. What luck, to feel nothing less than all the world closing over one’s head!”

A short silence ensued before Mr. Blunt’s drawing-room voice was heard with playful familiarity.

“I have often asked myself whether you weren’t really a very ambitious person, Doña Rita.”

“And I ask myself whether you have any heart.” She was looking straight at him and he gratified her with the usual cold white flash of his even teeth before he answered.

“Asking yourself? That means that you are really asking me. But why do it so publicly? I mean it. One single, detached presence is enough to make a public. One alone. Why not wait till he returns to those regions of space and air — from which he came.”

His particular trick of speaking of any third person as of a lay figure was exasperating. Yet at the moment I did not know how to resent it, but, in any case, Doña Rita would not have given me time. Without a moment’s hesitation she cried out:

“I only wish he could take me out there with him.”

For a moment Mr. Blunt’s face became as still as a mask and then instead of an angry it assumed an indulgent expression. As to me I had a rapid vision of Dominic’s astonishment, awe, and sarcasm which was always as tolerant as it is possible for sarcasm to be. But what a charming, gentle, gay, and fearless companion she would have made! I believed in her fearlessness in any adventure that would interest her. It would be a new occasion for me, a new viewpoint for that faculty of admiration she had awakened in me at sight — at first sight — before she opened her lips — before she ever turned her eyes on me. She would have to wear some sort of sailor costume, a blue woollen shirt open at the throat. . . . Dominic’s hooded cloak would envelop her amply, and her face under the black hood would have a luminous quality, adolescent charm, and an enigmatic expression. The confined space of the little vessel’s quarterdeck would lend itself to her cross-legged attitudes, and the blue sea would balance gently her characteristic immobility that seemed to hide thoughts as old and profound as itself. As restless, too — perhaps.

But the picture I had in my eye, coloured and simple like an illustration to a nursery-book tale of two venturesome children’s escapade, was what fascinated me most. Indeed I felt that we two were like children under the gaze of a man of the world — who lived by his sword. And I said recklessly:

“Yes, you ought to come along with us for a trip. You would see a lot of things for yourself.”

Mr. Blunt’s expression had grown even more indulgent if that were possible. Yet there was something ineradicably ambiguous about that man. I did not like the indefinable tone in which he observed:

“You are perfectly reckless in what you say, Doña Rita. It has become a habit with you of late.”

“While with you reserve is a second nature, Don Juan.”

This was uttered with the gentlest, almost tender, irony. Mr. Blunt waited a while before he said:

“Certainly. . . . Would you have liked me to be otherwise?”

She extended her hand to him on a sudden impulse.

“Forgive me! I may have been unjust, and you may only have been loyal. The falseness is not in us. The fault is in life itself, I suppose. I have been always frank with you.”

“And I obedient,” he said, bowing low over her hand. He turned away, paused to look at me for some time and finally gave me the correct sort of nod. But he said nothing and went out, or rather lounged out with his worldly manner of perfect ease under all conceivable circumstances. With her head lowered Doña Rita watched him till he actually shut the door behind him. I was facing her and only heard the door close.

“Don’t stare at me,” were the first words she said.

It was difficult to obey that request. I didn’t know exactly where to look, while I sat facing her. So I got up, vaguely full of goodwill, prepared even to move off as far as the window, when she commanded:

“Don’t turn your back on me.”

I chose to understand it symbolically.

“You know very well I could never do that. I couldn’t. Not even if I wanted to.” And I added: “It’s too late now.”

“Well, then, sit down. Sit down on this couch.”

I sat down on the couch. Unwillingly? Yes. I was at that stage when all her words, all her gestures, all her silences were a heavy trial to me, put a stress on my resolution, on that fidelity to myself and to her which lay like a leaden weight on my untried heart. But I didn’t sit down very far away from her, though that soft and billowy couch was big enough, God knows! No, not very far from her. Self-control, dignity, hopelessness itself, have their limits. The halo of her tawny hair stirred as I let myself drop by her side. Whereupon she flung one arm round my neck, leaned her temple against my shoulder and began to sob; but that I could only guess from her slight, convulsive movements because in our relative positions I could only see the mass of her tawny hair brushed back, yet with a halo of escaped hair which as I bent my head over her tickled my lips, my cheek, in a maddening manner.

We sat like two venturesome children in an illustration to a tale, scared by their adventure. But not for long. As I instinctively, yet timidly, sought for her other hand I felt a tear strike the back of mine, big and heavy as if fallen from a great height. It was too much for me. I must have given a nervous start. At once I heard a murmur: “You had better go away now.”

I withdrew myself gently from under the light weight of her head, from this unspeakable bliss and inconceivable misery, and had the absurd impression of leaving her suspended in the air. And I moved away on tiptoe.

Like an inspired blind man led by Providence I found my way out of the room but really I saw nothing, till in the hall the maid appeared by enchantment before me holding up my overcoat. I let her help me into it. And then (again as if by enchantment) she had my hat in her hand.

“No. Madame isn’t happy,” I whispered to her distractedly.

She let me take my hat out of her hand and while I was putting it on my head I heard an austere whisper:

“Madame should listen to her heart.”

Austere is not the word; it was almost freezing, this unexpected, dispassionate rustle of words. I had to repress a shudder, and as coldly as herself I murmured:

“She has done that once too often.”

Rose was standing very close to me and I caught distinctly the note of scorn in her indulgent compassion.

“Oh, that! . . . Madame is like a child.” It was impossible to get the bearing of that utterance from that girl who, as Doña Rita herself had told me, was the most taciturn of human beings; and yet of all human beings the one nearest to herself. I seized her head in my hands and turning up her face I looked straight down into her black eyes which should have been lustrous. Like a piece of glass breathed upon they reflected no light, revealed no depths, and under my ardent gaze remained tarnished, misty, unconscious.

“Will Monsieur kindly let me go. Monsieur shouldn’t play the child, either.” (I let her go.) “Madame could have the world at her feet. Indeed she has it there only she doesn’t care for it.”

How talkative she was, this maid with unsealed lips! For some reason or other this last statement of hers brought me immense comfort.

“Yes?” I whispered breathlessly.

“Yes! But in that case what’s the use of living in fear and torment?” she went on, revealing a little more of herself to my astonishment. She opened the door for me and added:

“Those that don’t care to stoop ought at least make themselves happy.”

I turned in the very doorway: “There is something which prevents that?” I suggested.

“To be sure there is. Bonjour, Monsieur.”

Part 4

Chapter 1

“Such a charming lady in a grey silk dress and a hand as white as snow. She looked at me through such funny glasses on the end of a long handle. A very great lady but her voice was as kind as the voice of a saint. I have never seen anything like that. She made me feel so timid.”

The voice uttering these words was the voice of Therese and I looked at her from a bed draped heavily in brown silk curtains fantastically looped up from ceiling to floor. The glow of a sunshiny day was toned down by closed jalousies to a mere transparency of darkness. In this thin medium Therese’s form appeared flat, without detail, as if cut out of black paper. It glided towards the window and with a click and a scrape let in the full flood of light which smote my aching eyeballs painfully.

In truth all that night had been the abomination of desolation to me. After wrestling with my thoughts, if the acute consciousness of a woman’s existence may be called a thought, I had apparently dropped off to sleep only to go on wrestling with a nightmare, a senseless and terrifying dream of being in bonds which, even after waking, made me feel powerless in all my limbs. I lay still, suffering acutely from a renewed sense of existence, unable to lift an arm, and wondering why I was not at sea, how long I had slept, how long Therese had been talking before her voice had reached me in that purgatory of hopeless longing and unanswerable questions to which I was condemned.

It was Therese’s habit to begin talking directly she entered the room with the tray of morning coffee. This was her method for waking me up. I generally regained the consciousness of the external world on some pious phrase asserting the spiritual comfort of early mass, or on angry lamentations about the unconscionable rapacity of the dealers in fish and vegetables; for after mass it was Therese’s practice to do the marketing for the house. As a matter of fact the necessity of having to pay, to actually give money to people, infuriated the pious Therese. But the matter of this morning’s speech was so extraordinary that it might have been the prolongation of a nightmare: a man in bonds having to listen to weird and unaccountable speeches against which, he doesn’t know why, his very soul revolts.

In sober truth my soul remained in revolt though I was convinced that I was no longer dreaming. I watched Therese coming away from the window with that helpless dread a man bound hand and foot may be excused to feel. For in such a situation even

the absurd may appear ominous. She came up close to the bed and folding her hands meekly in front of her turned her eyes up to the ceiling.

“If I had been her daughter she couldn’t have spoken more softly to me,” she said sentimentally.

I made a great effort to speak.

“Mademoiselle Therese, you are raving.”

“She addressed me as Mademoiselle, too, so nicely. I was struck with veneration for her white hair but her face, believe me, my dear young Monsieur, has not so many wrinkles as mine.”

She compressed her lips with an angry glance at me as if I could help her wrinkles, then she sighed.

“God sends wrinkles, but what is our face?” she digressed in a tone of great humility. “We shall have glorious faces in Paradise. But meantime God has permitted me to preserve a smooth heart.”

“Are you going to keep on like this much longer?” I fairly shouted at her. “What are you talking about?”

“I am talking about the sweet old lady who came in a carriage. Not a fiacre. I can tell a fiacre. In a little carriage shut in with glass all in front. I suppose she is very rich. The carriage was very shiny outside and all beautiful grey stuff inside. I opened the door to her myself. She got out slowly like a queen. I was struck all of a heap. Such a shiny beautiful little carriage. There were blue silk tassels inside, beautiful silk tassels.”

Obviously Therese had been very much impressed by a brougham, though she didn’t know the name for it. Of all the town she knew nothing but the streets which led to a neighbouring church frequented only by the poorer classes and the humble quarter around, where she did her marketing. Besides, she was accustomed to glide along the walls with her eyes cast down; for her natural boldness would never show itself through that nun-like mien except when bargaining, if only on a matter of threepence. Such a turn-out had never been presented to her notice before. The traffic in the street of the Consuls was mostly pedestrian and far from fashionable. And anyhow Therese never looked out of the window. She lurked in the depths of the house like some kind of spider that shuns attention. She used to dart at one from some dark recesses which I never explored.

Yet it seemed to me that she exaggerated her raptures for some reason or other. With her it was very difficult to distinguish between craft and innocence.

“Do you mean to say,” I asked suspiciously, “that an old lady wants to hire an apartment here? I hope you told her there was no room, because, you know, this house is not exactly the thing for venerable old ladies.”

“Don’t make me angry, my dear young Monsieur. I have been to confession this morning. Aren’t you comfortable? Isn’t the house appointed richly enough for anybody?”

That girl with a peasant-nun’s face had never seen the inside of a house other than some half-ruined caserio in her native hills.

I pointed out to her that this was not a matter of splendour or comfort but of “convenances.” She pricked up her ears at that word which probably she had never heard before; but with woman’s uncanny intuition I believe she understood perfectly what I meant. Her air of saintly patience became so pronounced that with my own poor intuition I perceived that she was raging at me inwardly. Her weather-tanned complexion, already affected by her confined life, took on an extraordinary clayey aspect which reminded me of a strange head painted by El Greco which my friend Prax had hung on one of his walls and used to rail at; yet not without a certain respect.

Therese, with her hands still meekly folded about her waist, had mastered the feelings of anger so unbecoming to a person whose sins had been absolved only about three hours before, and asked me with an insinuating softness whether she wasn’t an honest girl enough to look after any old lady belonging to a world which after all was sinful. She reminded me that she had kept house ever since she was “so high” for her uncle the priest: a man well-known for his saintliness in a large district extending even beyond Pampeluna. The character of a house depended upon the person who ruled it. She didn’t know what impenitent wretches had been breathing within these walls in the time of that godless and wicked man who had planted every seed of perdition in “our Rita’s” ill-disposed heart. But he was dead and she, Therese, knew for certain that wickedness perished utterly, because of God’s anger (*la colère du bon Dieu*). She would have no hesitation in receiving a bishop, if need be, since “our, Rita,” with her poor, wretched, unbelieving heart, had nothing more to do with the house.

All this came out of her like an unctuous trickle of some acrid oil. The low, voluble delivery was enough by itself to compel my attention.

“You think you know your sister’s heart,” I asked.

She made small eyes at me to discover if I was angry. She seemed to have an invincible faith in the virtuous dispositions of young men. And as I had spoken in measured tones and hadn’t got red in the face she let herself go.

“Black, my dear young Monsieur. Black. I always knew it. Uncle, poor saintly man, was too holy to take notice of anything. He was too busy with his thoughts to listen to anything I had to say to him. For instance as to her shamelessness. She was always ready to run half naked about the hills. . . .”

“Yes. After your goats. All day long. Why didn’t you mend her frocks?”

“Oh, you know about the goats. My dear young Monsieur, I could never tell when she would fling over her pretended sweetness and put her tongue out at me. Did she tell you about a boy, the son of pious and rich parents, whom she tried to lead astray into the wildness of thoughts like her own, till the poor dear child drove her off because she outraged his modesty? I saw him often with his parents at Sunday mass. The grace of God preserved him and made him quite a gentleman in Paris. Perhaps it will touch Rita’s heart, too, some day. But she was awful then. When I wouldn’t listen to her complaints she would say: ‘All right, sister, I would just as soon go clothed in rain and wind.’ And such a bag of bones, too, like the picture of a devil’s imp. Ah, my dear

young Monsieur, you don't know how wicked her heart is. You aren't bad enough for that yourself. I don't believe you are evil at all in your innocent little heart. I never heard you jeer at holy things. You are only thoughtless. For instance, I have never seen you make the sign of the cross in the morning. Why don't you make a practice of crossing yourself directly you open your eyes. It's a very good thing. It keeps Satan off for the day."

She proffered that advice in a most matter-of-fact tone as if it were a precaution against a cold, compressed her lips, then returning to her fixed idea, "But the house is mine," she insisted very quietly with an accent which made me feel that Satan himself would never manage to tear it out of her hands.

"And so I told the great lady in grey. I told her that my sister had given it to me and that surely God would not let her take it away again."

"You told that grey-headed lady, an utter stranger! You are getting more crazy every day. You have neither good sense nor good feeling, Mademoiselle Therese, let me tell you. Do you talk about your sister to the butcher and the greengrocer, too? A downright savage would have more restraint. What's your object? What do you expect from it? What pleasure do you get from it? Do you think you please God by abusing your sister? What do you think you are?"

"A poor lone girl amongst a lot of wicked people. Do you think I wanted to go forth amongst those abominations? it's that poor sinful Rita that wouldn't let me be where I was, serving a holy man, next door to a church, and sure of my share of Paradise. I simply obeyed my uncle. It's he who told me to go forth and attempt to save her soul, bring her back to us, to a virtuous life. But what would be the good of that? She is given over to worldly, carnal thoughts. Of course we are a good family and my uncle is a great man in the country, but where is the reputable farmer or God-fearing man of that kind that would dare to bring such a girl into his house to his mother and sisters. No, let her give her ill-gotten wealth up to the deserving and devote the rest of her life to repentance."

She uttered these righteous reflections and presented this programme for the salvation of her sister's soul in a reasonable convinced tone which was enough to give goose flesh to one all over.

"Mademoiselle Therese," I said, "you are nothing less than a monster."

She received that true expression of my opinion as though I had given her a sweet of a particularly delicious kind. She liked to be abused. It pleased her to be called names. I did let her have that satisfaction to her heart's content. At last I stopped because I could do no more, unless I got out of bed to beat her. I have a vague notion that she would have liked that, too, but I didn't try. After I had stopped she waited a little before she raised her downcast eyes.

"You are a dear, ignorant, flighty young gentleman," she said. "Nobody can tell what a cross my sister is to me except the good priest in the church where I go every day."

"And the mysterious lady in grey," I suggested sarcastically.

“Such a person might have guessed it,” answered Therese, seriously, “but I told her nothing except that this house had been given me in full property by our Rita. And I wouldn’t have done that if she hadn’t spoken to me of my sister first. I can’t tell too many people about that. One can’t trust Rita. I know she doesn’t fear God but perhaps human respect may keep her from taking this house back from me. If she doesn’t want me to talk about her to people why doesn’t she give me a properly stamped piece of paper for it?”

She said all this rapidly in one breath and at the end had a sort of anxious gasp which gave me the opportunity to voice my surprise. It was immense.

“That lady, the strange lady, spoke to you of your sister first!” I cried.

“The lady asked me, after she had been in a little time, whether really this house belonged to Madame de Lastaola. She had been so sweet and kind and condescending that I did not mind humiliating my spirit before such a good Christian. I told her that I didn’t know how the poor sinner in her mad blindness called herself, but that this house had been given to me truly enough by my sister. She raised her eyebrows at that but she looked at me at the same time so kindly, as much as to say, ‘Don’t trust much to that, my dear girl,’ that I couldn’t help taking up her hand, soft as down, and kissing it. She took it away pretty quick but she was not offended. But she only said, ‘That’s very generous on your sister’s part,’ in a way that made me run cold all over. I suppose all the world knows our Rita for a shameless girl. It was then that the lady took up those glasses on a long gold handle and looked at me through them till I felt very much abashed. She said to me, ‘There is nothing to be unhappy about. Madame de Lastaola is a very remarkable person who has done many surprising things. She is not to be judged like other people and as far as I know she has never wronged a single human being. . . .’ That put heart into me, I can tell you; and the lady told me then not to disturb her son. She would wait till he woke up. She knew he was a bad sleeper. I said to her: ‘Why, I can hear the dear sweet gentleman this moment having his bath in the fencing-room,’ and I took her into the studio. They are there now and they are going to have their lunch together at twelve o’clock.”

“Why on earth didn’t you tell me at first that the lady was Mrs. Blunt?”

“Didn’t I? I thought I did,” she said innocently. I felt a sudden desire to get out of that house, to fly from the reinforced Blunt element which was to me so oppressive.

“I want to get up and dress, Mademoiselle Therese,” I said.

She gave a slight start and without looking at me again glided out of the room, the many folds of her brown skirt remaining undisturbed as she moved.

I looked at my watch; it was ten o’clock. Therese had been late with my coffee. The delay was clearly caused by the unexpected arrival of Mr. Blunt’s mother, which might or might not have been expected by her son. The existence of those Blunts made me feel uncomfortable in a peculiar way as though they had been the denizens of another planet with a subtly different point of view and something in the intelligence which was bound to remain unknown to me. It caused in me a feeling of inferiority which I intensely disliked. This did not arise from the actual fact that those people originated

in another continent. I had met Americans before. And the Blunts were Americans. But so little! That was the trouble. Captain Blunt might have been a Frenchman as far as languages, tones, and manners went. But you could not have mistaken him for one. . . . Why? You couldn't tell. It was something indefinite. It occurred to me while I was towelling hard my hair, face, and the back of my neck, that I could not meet J. K. Blunt on equal terms in any relation of life except perhaps arms in hand, and in preference with pistols, which are less intimate, acting at a distance — but arms of some sort. For physically his life, which could be taken away from him, was exactly like mine, held on the same terms and of the same vanishing quality.

I would have smiled at my absurdity if all, even the most intimate, vestige of gaiety had not been crushed out of my heart by the intolerable weight of my love for Rita. It crushed, it overshadowed, too, it was immense. If there were any smiles in the world (which I didn't believe) I could not have seen them. Love for Rita . . . if it was love, I asked myself despairingly, while I brushed my hair before a glass. It did not seem to have any sort of beginning as far as I could remember. A thing the origin of which you cannot trace cannot be seriously considered. It is an illusion. Or perhaps mine was a physical state, some sort of disease akin to melancholia which is a form of insanity? The only moments of relief I could remember were when she and I would start squabbling like two passionate infants in a nursery, over anything under heaven, over a phrase, a word sometimes, in the great light of the glass rotunda, disregarding the quiet entrances and exits of the ever-active Rose, in great bursts of voices and peals of laughter. . . .

I felt tears come into my eyes at the memory of her laughter, the true memory of the senses almost more penetrating than the reality itself. It haunted me. All that appertained to her haunted me with the same awful intimacy, her whole form in the familiar pose, her very substance in its colour and texture, her eyes, her lips, the gleam of her teeth, the tawny mist of her hair, the smoothness of her forehead, the faint scent that she used, the very shape, feel, and warmth of her high-heeled slipper that would sometimes in the heat of the discussion drop on the floor with a crash, and which I would (always in the heat of the discussion) pick up and toss back on the couch without ceasing to argue. And besides being haunted by what was Rita on earth I was haunted also by her waywardness, her gentleness and her flame, by that which the high gods called Rita when speaking of her amongst themselves. Oh, yes, certainly I was haunted by her but so was her sister Therese — who was crazy. It proved nothing. As to her tears, since I had not caused them, they only aroused my indignation. To put her head on my shoulder, to weep these strange tears, was nothing short of an outrageous liberty. It was a mere emotional trick. She would have just as soon leaned her head against the over-mantel of one of those tall, red granite chimney-pieces in order to weep comfortably. And then when she had no longer any need of support she dispensed with it by simply telling me to go away. How convenient! The request had sounded pathetic, almost sacredly so, but then it might have been the exhibition of the coolest possible impudence. With her one could not tell. Sorrow, indifference, tears, smiles, all with her seemed to have a hidden meaning. Nothing could be trusted. . .

Heavens! Am I as crazy as Therese I asked myself with a passing chill of fear, while occupied in equalizing the ends of my neck-tie.

I felt suddenly that "this sort of thing" would kill me. The definition of the cause was vague, but the thought itself was no mere morbid artificiality of sentiment but a genuine conviction. "That sort of thing" was what I would have to die from. It wouldn't be from the innumerable doubts. Any sort of certitude would be also deadly. It wouldn't be from a stab — a kiss would kill me as surely. It would not be from a frown or from any particular word or any particular act — but from having to bear them all, together and in succession — from having to live with "that sort of thing." About the time I finished with my neck-tie I had done with life too. I absolutely did not care because I couldn't tell whether, mentally and physically, from the roots of my hair to the soles of my feet — whether I was more weary or unhappy.

And now my toilet was finished, my occupation was gone. An immense distress descended upon me. It has been observed that the routine of daily life, that arbitrary system of trifles, is a great moral support. But my toilet was finished, I had nothing more to do of those things consecrated by usage and which leave you no option. The exercise of any kind of volition by a man whose consciousness is reduced to the sensation that he is being killed by "that sort of thing" cannot be anything but mere trifling with death, an insincere pose before himself. I wasn't capable of it. It was then that I discovered that being killed by "that sort of thing," I mean the absolute conviction of it, was, so to speak, nothing in itself. The horrible part was the waiting. That was the cruelty, the tragedy, the bitterness of it. "Why the devil don't I drop dead now?" I asked myself peevishly, taking a clean handkerchief out of the drawer and stuffing it in my pocket.

This was absolutely the last thing, the last ceremony of an imperative rite. I was abandoned to myself now and it was terrible. Generally I used to go out, walk down to the port, take a look at the craft I loved with a sentiment that was extremely complex, being mixed up with the image of a woman; perhaps go on board, not because there was anything for me to do there but just for nothing, for happiness, simply as a man will sit contented in the companionship of the beloved object. For lunch I had the choice of two places, one Bohemian, the other select, even aristocratic, where I had still my reserved table in the petit salon, up the white staircase. In both places I had friends who treated my erratic appearances with discretion, in one case tinged with respect, in the other with a certain amused tolerance. I owed this tolerance to the most careless, the most confirmed of those Bohemians (his beard had streaks of grey amongst its many other tints) who, once bringing his heavy hand down on my shoulder, took my defence against the charge of being disloyal and even foreign to that milieu of earnest visions taking beautiful and revolutionary shapes in the smoke of pipes, in the jingle of glasses.

"That fellow (ce garçon) is a primitive nature, but he may be an artist in a sense. He has broken away from his conventions. He is trying to put a special vibration and his own notion of colour into his life; and perhaps even to give it a modelling according

to his own ideas. And for all you know he may be on the track of a masterpiece; but observe: if it happens to be one nobody will see it. It can be only for himself. And even he won't be able to see it in its completeness except on his death-bed. There is something fine in that."

I had blushed with pleasure; such fine ideas had never entered my head. But there was something fine. . . . How far all this seemed! How mute and how still! What a phantom he was, that man with a beard of at least seven tones of brown. And those shades of the other kind such as Baptiste with the shaven diplomatic face, the maître d'hôtel in charge of the petit salon, taking my hat and stick from me with a deferential remark: "Monsieur is not very often seen nowadays." And those other well-groomed heads raised and nodding at my passage — "Bonjour." "Bonjour" — following me with interested eyes; these young X.s and Z.s, low-toned, markedly discreet, lounging up to my table on their way out with murmurs: "Are you well?" — "Will one see you anywhere this evening?" — not from curiosity, God forbid, but just from friendliness; and passing on almost without waiting for an answer. What had I to do with them, this elegant dust, these moulds of provincial fashion?

I also often lunched with Doña Rita without invitation. But that was now unthinkable. What had I to do with a woman who allowed somebody else to make her cry and then with an amazing lack of good feeling did her offensive weeping on my shoulder? Obviously I could have nothing to do with her. My five minutes' meditation in the middle of the bedroom came to an end without even a sigh. The dead don't sigh, and for all practical purposes I was that, except for the final consummation, the growing cold, the rigor mortis — that blessed state! With measured steps I crossed the landing to my sitting-room.

Chapter 2

The windows of that room gave out on the street of the Consuls which as usual was silent. And the house itself below me and above me was soundless, perfectly still. In general the house was quiet, dumbly quiet, without resonances of any sort, something like what one would imagine the interior of a convent would be. I suppose it was very solidly built. Yet that morning I missed in the stillness that feeling of security and peace which ought to have been associated with it. It is, I believe, generally admitted that the dead are glad to be at rest. But I wasn't at rest. What was wrong with that silence? There was something incongruous in that peace. What was it that had got into that stillness? Suddenly I remembered: the mother of Captain Blunt.

Why had she come all the way from Paris? And why should I bother my head about it? H'm — the Blunt atmosphere, the reinforced Blunt vibration stealing through the walls, through the thick walls and the almost more solid stillness. Nothing to me, of course — the movements of Mme. Blunt, mère. It was maternal affection which had brought her south by either the evening or morning Rapide, to take anxious stock of the

ravages of that insomnia. Very good thing, insomnia, for a cavalry officer perpetually on outpost duty, a real godsend, so to speak; but on leave a truly devilish condition to be in.

The above sequence of thoughts was entirely unsympathetic and it was followed by a feeling of satisfaction that I, at any rate, was not suffering from insomnia. I could always sleep in the end. In the end. Escape into a nightmare. Wouldn't he revel in that if he could! But that wasn't for him. He had to toss about open-eyed all night and get up weary, weary. But oh, wasn't I weary, too, waiting for a sleep without dreams.

I heard the door behind me open. I had been standing with my face to the window and, I declare, not knowing what I was looking at across the road — the Desert of Sahara or a wall of bricks, a landscape of rivers and forests or only the Consulate of Paraguay. But I had been thinking, apparently, of Mr. Blunt with such intensity that when I saw him enter the room it didn't really make much difference. When I turned about the door behind him was already shut. He advanced towards me, correct, supple, hollow-eyed, and smiling; and as to his costume ready to go out except for the old shooting jacket which he must have affectioned particularly, for he never lost any time in getting into it at every opportunity. Its material was some tweed mixture; it had gone inconceivably shabby, it was shrunk from old age, it was ragged at the elbows; but any one could see at a glance that it had been made in London by a celebrated tailor, by a distinguished specialist. Blunt came towards me in all the elegance of his slimness and affirming in every line of his face and body, in the correct set of his shoulders and the careless freedom of his movements, the superiority, the inexpressible superiority, the unconscious, the unmarked, the not-to-be-described, and even not-to-be-caught, superiority of the naturally born and the perfectly finished man of the world, over the simple young man. He was smiling, easy, correct, perfectly delightful, fit to kill.

He had come to ask me, if I had no other engagement, to lunch with him and his mother in about an hour's time. He did it in a most *déjà* tone. His mother had given him a surprise. The completest . . . The foundation of his mother's psychology was her delightful unexpectedness. She could never let things be (this in a peculiar tone which he checked at once) and he really would take it very kindly of me if I came to break the *tête-à-tête* for a while (that is if I had no other engagement. Flash of teeth). His mother was exquisitely and tenderly absurd. She had taken it into her head that his health was endangered in some way. And when she took anything into her head . . . Perhaps I might find something to say which would reassure her. His mother had two long conversations with Mills on his passage through Paris and had heard of me (I knew how that thick man could speak of people, he interjected ambiguously) and his mother, with an insatiable curiosity for anything that was rare (filially humorous accent here and a softer flash of teeth), was very anxious to have me presented to her (courteous intonation, but no teeth). He hoped I wouldn't mind if she treated me a little as an "interesting young man." His mother had never got over her seventeenth year, and the manner of the spoilt beauty of at least three counties at the back of the

Carolinas. That again got overlaid by the sans-façon of a grande dame of the Second Empire.

I accepted the invitation with a worldly grin and a perfectly just intonation, because I really didn't care what I did. I only wondered vaguely why that fellow required all the air in the room for himself. There did not seem enough left to go down my throat. I didn't say that I would come with pleasure or that I would be delighted, but I said that I would come. He seemed to forget his tongue in his head, put his hands in his pockets and moved about vaguely. "I am a little nervous this morning," he said in French, stopping short and looking me straight in the eyes. His own were deep sunk, dark, fatal. I asked with some malice, that no one could have detected in my intonation, "How's that sleeplessness?"

He muttered through his teeth, "Mal. Je ne dors plus." He moved off to stand at the window with his back to the room. I sat down on a sofa that was there and put my feet up, and silence took possession of the room.

"Isn't this street ridiculous?" said Blunt suddenly, and crossing the room rapidly waved his hand to me, "A bientôt donc," and was gone. He had seared himself into my mind. I did not understand him nor his mother then; which made them more impressive; but I have discovered since that those two figures required no mystery to make them memorable. Of course it isn't every day that one meets a mother that lives by her wits and a son that lives by his sword, but there was a perfect finish about their ambiguous personalities which is not to be met twice in a life-time. I shall never forget that grey dress with ample skirts and long corsage yet with infinite style, the ancient as if ghostly beauty of outlines, the black lace, the silver hair, the harmonious, restrained movements of those white, soft hands like the hands of a queen — or an abbess; and in the general fresh effect of her person the brilliant eyes like two stars with the calm reposeful way they had of moving on and off one, as if nothing in the world had the right to veil itself before their once sovereign beauty. Captain Blunt with smiling formality introduced me by name, adding with a certain relaxation of the formal tone the comment: "The Monsieur George! whose fame you tell me has reached even Paris." Mrs. Blunt's reception of me, glance, tones, even to the attitude of the admirably corseted figure, was most friendly, approaching the limit of half-familiarity. I had the feeling that I was beholding in her a captured ideal. No common experience! But I didn't care. It was very lucky perhaps for me that in a way I was like a very sick man who has yet preserved all his lucidity. I was not even wondering to myself at what on earth I was doing there. She breathed out: "Comme c'est romantique," at large to the dusty studio as it were; then pointing to a chair at her right hand, and bending slightly towards me she said:

"I have heard this name murmured by pretty lips in more than one royalist salon."

I didn't say anything to that ingratiating speech. I had only an odd thought that she could not have had such a figure, nothing like it, when she was seventeen and wore snowy muslin dresses on the family plantation in South Carolina, in pre-abolition days.

“You won’t mind, I am sure, if an old woman whose heart is still young elects to call you by it,” she declared.

“Certainly, Madame. It will be more romantic,” I assented with a respectful bow.

She dropped a calm: “Yes — there is nothing like romance while one is young. So I will call you Monsieur George,” she paused and then added, “I could never get old,” in a matter-of-fact final tone as one would remark, “I could never learn to swim,” and I had the presence of mind to say in a tone to match, “C’est évident, Madame.” It was evident. She couldn’t get old; and across the table her thirty-year-old son who couldn’t get sleep sat listening with courteous detachment and the narrowest possible line of white underlining his silky black moustache.

“Your services are immensely appreciated,” she said with an amusing touch of importance as of a great official lady. “Immensely appreciated by people in a position to understand the great significance of the Carlist movement in the South. There it has to combat anarchism, too. I who have lived through the Commune . . .”

Therese came in with a dish, and for the rest of the lunch the conversation so well begun drifted amongst the most appalling inanities of the religious-royalist-legitimist order. The ears of all the Bourbons in the world must have been burning. Mrs. Blunt seemed to have come into personal contact with a good many of them and the marvellous insipidity of her recollections was astonishing to my inexperience. I looked at her from time to time thinking: She has seen slavery, she has seen the Commune, she knows two continents, she has seen a civil war, the glory of the Second Empire, the horrors of two sieges; she has been in contact with marked personalities, with great events, she has lived on her wealth, on her personality, and there she is with her plumage unruffled, as glossy as ever, unable to get old: — a sort of Phoenix free from the slightest signs of ashes and dust, all complacent amongst those inanities as if there had been nothing else in the world. In my youthful haste I asked myself what sort of airy soul she had.

At last Therese put a dish of fruit on the table, a small collection of oranges, raisins, and nuts. No doubt she had bought that lot very cheap and it did not look at all inviting. Captain Blunt jumped up. “My mother can’t stand tobacco smoke. Will you keep her company, mon cher, while I take a turn with a cigar in that ridiculous garden. The brougham from the hotel will be here very soon.”

He left us in the white flash of an apologetic grin. Almost directly he reappeared, visible from head to foot through the glass side of the studio, pacing up and down the central path of that “ridiculous” garden: for its elegance and its air of good breeding the most remarkable figure that I have ever seen before or since. He had changed his coat. Madame Blunt mère lowered the long-handled glasses through which she had been contemplating him with an appraising, absorbed expression which had nothing maternal in it. But what she said to me was:

“You understand my anxieties while he is campaigning with the King.”

She had spoken in French and she had used the expression “mes transes” but for all the rest, intonation, bearing, solemnity, she might have been referring to one of the

Bourbons. I am sure that not a single one of them looked half as aristocratic as her son.

"I understand perfectly, Madame. But then that life is so romantic."

"Hundreds of young men belonging to a certain sphere are doing that," she said very distinctly, "only their case is different. They have their positions, their families to go back to; but we are different. We are exiles, except of course for the ideals, the kindred spirit, the friendships of old standing we have in France. Should my son come out unscathed he has no one but me and I have no one but him. I have to think of his life. Mr. Mills (what a distinguished mind that is!) has reassured me as to my son's health. But he sleeps very badly, doesn't he?"

I murmured something affirmative in a doubtful tone and she remarked quaintly, with a certain curtness, "It's so unnecessary, this worry! The unfortunate position of an exile has its advantages. At a certain height of social position (wealth has got nothing to do with it, we have been ruined in a most righteous cause), at a certain established height one can disregard narrow prejudices. You see examples in the aristocracies of all the countries. A chivalrous young American may offer his life for a remote ideal which yet may belong to his familial tradition. We, in our great country, have every sort of tradition. But a young man of good connections and distinguished relations must settle down some day, dispose of his life."

"No doubt, Madame," I said, raising my eyes to the figure outside — "Américain, Catholique et gentilhomme" — walking up and down the path with a cigar which he was not smoking. "For myself, I don't know anything about those necessities. I have broken away for ever from those things."

"Yes, Mr. Mills talked to me about you. What a golden heart that is. His sympathies are infinite."

I thought suddenly of Mills pronouncing on Mme. Blunt, whatever his text on me might have been: "She lives by her wits." Was she exercising her wits on me for some purpose of her own? And I observed coldly:

"I really know your son so very little."

"Oh, voyons," she protested. "I am aware that you are very much younger, but the similitudes of opinions, origins and perhaps at bottom, faintly, of character, of chivalrous devotion — no, you must be able to understand him in a measure. He is infinitely scrupulous and recklessly brave."

I listened deferentially to the end yet with every nerve in my body tingling in hostile response to the Blunt vibration, which seemed to have got into my very hair.

"I am convinced of it, Madame. I have even heard of your son's bravery. It's extremely natural in a man who, in his own words, 'lives by his sword.'"

She suddenly departed from her almost inhuman perfection, betrayed "nerves" like a common mortal, of course very slightly, but in her it meant more than a blaze of fury from a vessel of inferior clay. Her admirable little foot, marvellously shod in a black shoe, tapped the floor irritably. But even in that display there was something

exquisitely delicate. The very anger in her voice was silvery, as it were, and more like the petulance of a seventeen-year-old beauty.

“What nonsense! A Blunt doesn’t hire himself.”

“Some princely families,” I said, “were founded by men who have done that very thing. The great Condottieri, you know.”

It was in an almost tempestuous tone that she made me observe that we were not living in the fifteenth century. She gave me also to understand with some spirit that there was no question here of founding a family. Her son was very far from being the first of the name. His importance lay rather in being the last of a race which had totally perished, she added in a completely drawing-room tone, “in our Civil War.”

She had mastered her irritation and through the glass side of the room sent a wistful smile to his address, but I noticed the yet unextinguished anger in her eyes full of fire under her beautiful white eyebrows. For she was growing old! Oh, yes, she was growing old, and secretly weary, and perhaps desperate.

Chapter 3

Without caring much about it I was conscious of sudden illumination. I said to myself confidently that these two people had been quarrelling all the morning. I had discovered the secret of my invitation to that lunch. They did not care to face the strain of some obstinate, inconclusive discussion for fear, maybe, of it ending in a serious quarrel. And so they had agreed that I should be fetched downstairs to create a diversion. I cannot say I felt annoyed. I didn’t care. My perspicacity did not please me either. I wished they had left me alone — but nothing mattered. They must have been in their superiority accustomed to make use of people, without compunction. From necessity, too. She especially. She lived by her wits. The silence had grown so marked that I had at last to raise my eyes; and the first thing I observed was that Captain Blunt was no longer to be seen in the garden. Must have gone indoors. Would rejoin us in a moment. Then I would leave mother and son to themselves.

The next thing I noticed was that a great mellowness had descended upon the mother of the last of his race. But these terms, irritation, mellowness, appeared gross when applied to her. It is impossible to give an idea of the refinement and subtlety of all her transformations. She smiled faintly at me.

“But all this is beside the point. The real point is that my son, like all fine natures, is a being of strange contradictions which the trials of life have not yet reconciled in him. With me it is a little different. The trials fell mainly to my share — and of course I have lived longer. And then men are much more complex than women, much more difficult, too. And you, Monsieur George? Are you complex, with unexpected resistances and difficulties in your être intime — your inner self? I wonder now . . .”

The Blunt atmosphere seemed to vibrate all over my skin. I disregarded the symptom. “Madame,” I said, “I have never tried to find out what sort of being I am.”

“Ah, that’s very wrong. We ought to reflect on what manner of beings we are. Of course we are all sinners. My John is a sinner like the others,” she declared further, with a sort of proud tenderness as though our common lot must have felt honoured and to a certain extent purified by this condescending recognition.

“You are too young perhaps as yet . . . But as to my John,” she broke off, leaning her elbow on the table and supporting her head on her old, impeccably shaped, white fore-arm emerging from a lot of precious, still older, lace trimming the short sleeve. “The trouble is that he suffers from a profound discord between the necessary reactions to life and even the impulses of nature and the lofty idealism of his feelings; I may say, of his principles. I assure you that he won’t even let his heart speak uncontradicted.”

I am sure I don’t know what particular devil looks after the associations of memory, and I can’t even imagine the shock which it would have been for Mrs. Blunt to learn that the words issuing from her lips had awakened in me the visual perception of a dark-skinned, hard-driven lady’s maid with tarnished eyes; even of the tireless Rose handing me my hat while breathing out the enigmatic words: “Madame should listen to her heart.” A wave from the atmosphere of another house rolled in, overwhelming and fiery, seductive and cruel, through the Blunt vibration, bursting through it as through tissue paper and filling my heart with sweet murmurs and distracting images, till it seemed to break, leaving an empty stillness in my breast.

After that for a long time I heard Mme. Blunt mère talking with extreme fluency and I even caught the individual words, but I could not in the revulsion of my feelings get hold of the sense. She talked apparently of life in general, of its difficulties, moral and physical, of its surprising turns, of its unexpected contacts, of the choice and rare personalities that drift on it as if on the sea; of the distinction that letters and art gave to it, the nobility and consolations there are in aesthetics, of the privileges they confer on individuals and (this was the first connected statement I caught) that Mills agreed with her in the general point of view as to the inner worth of individualities and in the particular instance of it on which she had opened to him her innermost heart. Mills had a universal mind. His sympathy was universal, too. He had that large comprehension — oh, not cynical, not at all cynical, in fact rather tender — which was found in its perfection only in some rare, very rare Englishmen. The dear creature was romantic, too. Of course he was reserved in his speech but she understood Mills perfectly. Mills apparently liked me very much.

It was time for me to say something. There was a challenge in the reposeful black eyes resting upon my face. I murmured that I was very glad to hear it. She waited a little, then uttered meaningly, “Mr. Mills is a little bit uneasy about you.”

“It’s very good of him,” I said. And indeed I thought that it was very good of him, though I did ask myself vaguely in my dulled brain why he should be uneasy.

Somehow it didn’t occur to me to ask Mrs. Blunt. Whether she had expected me to do so or not I don’t know but after a while she changed the pose she had kept so long and folded her wonderfully preserved white arms. She looked a perfect picture in silver and grey, with touches of black here and there. Still I said nothing more in my

dull misery. She waited a little longer, then she woke me up with a crash. It was as if the house had fallen, and yet she had only asked me:

“I believe you are received on very friendly terms by Madame de Lastaola on account of your common exertions for the cause. Very good friends, are you not?”

“You mean Rita,” I said stupidly, but I felt stupid, like a man who wakes up only to be hit on the head.

“Oh, Rita,” she repeated with unexpected acidity, which somehow made me feel guilty of an incredible breach of good manners. “H’m, Rita. . . . Oh, well, let it be Rita — for the present. Though why she should be deprived of her name in conversation about her, really I don’t understand. Unless a very special intimacy . . .”

She was distinctly annoyed. I said sulkily, “It isn’t her name.”

“It is her choice, I understand, which seems almost a better title to recognition on the part of the world. It didn’t strike you so before? Well, it seems to me that choice has got more right to be respected than heredity or law. Moreover, Mme. de Lastaola,” she continued in an insinuating voice, “that most rare and fascinating young woman is, as a friend like you cannot deny, outside legality altogether. Even in that she is an exceptional creature. For she is exceptional — you agree?”

I had gone dumb, I could only stare at her.

“Oh, I see, you agree. No friend of hers could deny.”

“Madame,” I burst out, “I don’t know where a question of friendship comes in here with a person whom you yourself call so exceptional. I really don’t know how she looks upon me. Our intercourse is of course very close and confidential. Is that also talked about in Paris?”

“Not at all, not in the least,” said Mrs. Blunt, easy, equable, but with her calm, sparkling eyes holding me in angry subjection. “Nothing of the sort is being talked about. The references to Mme. de Lastaola are in a very different tone, I can assure you, thanks to her discretion in remaining here. And, I must say, thanks to the discreet efforts of her friends. I am also a friend of Mme. de Lastaola, you must know. Oh, no, I have never spoken to her in my life and have seen her only twice, I believe. I wrote to her though, that I admit. She or rather the image of her has come into my life, into that part of it where art and letters reign undisputed like a sort of religion of beauty to which I have been faithful through all the vicissitudes of my existence. Yes, I did write to her and I have been preoccupied with her for a long time. It arose from a picture, from two pictures and also from a phrase pronounced by a man, who in the science of life and in the perception of aesthetic truth had no equal in the world of culture. He said that there was something in her of the women of all time. I suppose he meant the inheritance of all the gifts that make up an irresistible fascination — a great personality. Such women are not born often. Most of them lack opportunities. They never develop. They end obscurely. Here and there one survives to make her mark even in history. . . . And even that is not a very enviable fate. They are at another pole from the so-called dangerous women who are merely coquettes. A coquette has got to

work for her success. The others have nothing to do but simply exist. You perceive the view I take of the difference?"

I perceived the view. I said to myself that nothing in the world could be more aristocratic. This was the slave-owning woman who had never worked, even if she had been reduced to live by her wits. She was a wonderful old woman. She made me dumb. She held me fascinated by the well-bred attitude, something sublimely aloof in her air of wisdom.

I just simply let myself go admiring her as though I had been a mere slave of aesthetics: the perfect grace, the amazing poise of that venerable head, the assured as if royal — yes, royal even flow of the voice. . . . But what was it she was talking about now? These were no longer considerations about fatal women. She was talking about her son again. My interest turned into mere bitterness of contemptuous attention. For I couldn't withhold it though I tried to let the stuff go by. Educated in the most aristocratic college in Paris . . . at eighteen . . . call of duty . . . with General Lee to the very last cruel minute . . . after that catastrophe end of the world — return to France — to old friendships, infinite kindness — but a life hollow, without occupation. . . . Then 1870 — and chivalrous response to adopted country's call and again emptiness, the chafing of a proud spirit without aim and handicapped not exactly by poverty but by lack of fortune. And she, the mother, having to look on at this wasting of a most accomplished man, of a most chivalrous nature that practically had no future before it.

"You understand me well, Monsieur George. A nature like this! It is the most refined cruelty of fate to look at. I don't know whether I suffered more in times of war or in times of peace. You understand?"

I bowed my head in silence. What I couldn't understand was why he delayed so long in joining us again. Unless he had had enough of his mother? I thought without any great resentment that I was being victimized; but then it occurred to me that the cause of his absence was quite simple. I was familiar enough with his habits by this time to know that he often managed to snatch an hour's sleep or so during the day. He had gone and thrown himself on his bed.

"I admire him exceedingly," Mrs. Blunt was saying in a tone which was not at all maternal. "His distinction, his fastidiousness, the earnest warmth of his heart. I know him well. I assure you that I would never have dared to suggest," she continued with an extraordinary haughtiness of attitude and tone that aroused my attention, "I would never have dared to put before him my views of the extraordinary merits and the uncertain fate of the exquisite woman of whom we speak, if I had not been certain that, partly by my fault, I admit, his attention has been attracted to her and his — his — his heart engaged."

It was as if some one had poured a bucket of cold water over my head. I woke up with a great shudder to the acute perception of my own feelings and of that aristocrat's incredible purpose. How it could have germinated, grown and matured in that exclusive soil was inconceivable. She had been inciting her son all the time to undertake

wonderful salvage work by annexing the heiress of Henry Allègre — the woman and the fortune.

There must have been an amazed incredulity in my eyes, to which her own responded by an unflinching black brilliance which suddenly seemed to develop a scorching quality even to the point of making me feel extremely thirsty all of a sudden. For a time my tongue literally clove to the roof of my mouth. I don't know whether it was an illusion but it seemed to me that Mrs. Blunt had nodded at me twice as if to say: "You are right, that's so." I made an effort to speak but it was very poor. If she did hear me it was because she must have been on the watch for the faintest sound.

"His heart engaged. Like two hundred others, or two thousand, all around," I mumbled.

"Altogether different. And it's no disparagement to a woman surely. Of course her great fortune protects her in a certain measure."

"Does it?" I faltered out and that time I really doubt whether she heard me. Her aspect in my eyes had changed. Her purpose being disclosed, her well-bred ease appeared sinister, her aristocratic repose a treacherous device, her venerable graciousness a mask of unbounded contempt for all human beings whatever. She was a terrible old woman with those straight, white wolfish eye-brows. How blind I had been! Those eyebrows alone ought to have been enough to give her away. Yet they were as beautifully smooth as her voice when she admitted: "That protection naturally is only partial. There is the danger of her own self, poor girl. She requires guidance."

I marvelled at the villainy of my tone as I spoke, but it was only assumed.

"I don't think she has done badly for herself, so far," I forced myself to say. "I suppose you know that she began life by herding the village goats."

In the course of that phrase I noticed her wince just the least bit. Oh, yes, she winced; but at the end of it she smiled easily.

"No, I didn't know. So she told you her story! Oh, well, I suppose you are very good friends. A goatherd — really? In the fairy tale I believe the girl that marries the prince is — what is it? — a *gardeuse d'oies*. And what a thing to drag out against a woman. One might just as soon reproach any of them for coming unclothed into the world. They all do, you know. And then they become — what you will discover when you have lived longer, Monsieur George — for the most part futile creatures, without any sense of truth and beauty, drudges of all sorts, or else dolls to dress. In a word — ordinary."

The implication of scorn in her tranquil manner was immense. It seemed to condemn all those that were not born in the Blunt connection. It was the perfect pride of Republican aristocracy, which has no gradations and knows no limit, and, as if created by the grace of God, thinks it ennobles everything it touches: people, ideas, even passing tastes!

"How many of them," pursued Mrs. Blunt, "have had the good fortune, the leisure to develop their intelligence and their beauty in aesthetic conditions as this charming woman had? Not one in a million. Perhaps not one in an age."

"The heiress of Henry Allègre," I murmured.

"Precisely. But John wouldn't be marrying the heiress of Henry Allègre."

It was the first time that the frank word, the clear idea, came into the conversation and it made me feel ill with a sort of enraged faintness.

"No," I said. "It would be Mme. de Lastaola then."

"Mme. la Comtesse de Lastaola as soon as she likes after the success of this war."

"And you believe in its success?"

"Do you?"

"Not for a moment," I declared, and was surprised to see her look pleased.

She was an aristocrat to the tips of her fingers; she really didn't care for anybody. She had passed through the Empire, she had lived through a siege, had rubbed shoulders with the Commune, had seen everything, no doubt, of what men are capable in the pursuit of their desires or in the extremity of their distress, for love, for money, and even for honour; and in her precarious connection with the very highest spheres she had kept her own honourability unscathed while she had lost all her prejudices. She was above all that. Perhaps "the world" was the only thing that could have the slightest checking influence; but when I ventured to say something about the view it might take of such an alliance she looked at me for a moment with visible surprise.

"My dear Monsieur George, I have lived in the great world all my life. It's the best that there is, but that's only because there is nothing merely decent anywhere. It will accept anything, forgive anything, forget anything in a few days. And after all who will he be marrying? A charming, clever, rich and altogether uncommon woman. What did the world hear of her? Nothing. The little it saw of her was in the Bois for a few hours every year, riding by the side of a man of unique distinction and of exclusive tastes, devoted to the cult of aesthetic impressions; a man of whom, as far as aspect, manner, and behaviour goes, she might have been the daughter. I have seen her myself. I went on purpose. I was immensely struck. I was even moved. Yes. She might have been — except for that something radiant in her that marked her apart from all the other daughters of men. The few remarkable personalities that count in society and who were admitted into Henry Allègre's Pavilion treated her with punctilious reserve. I know that, I have made enquiries. I know she sat there amongst them like a marvellous child, and for the rest what can they say about her? That when abandoned to herself by the death of Allègre she has made a mistake? I think that any woman ought to be allowed one mistake in her life. The worst they can say of her is that she discovered it, that she had sent away a man in love directly she found out that his love was not worth having; that she had told him to go and look for his crown, and that, after dismissing him she had remained generously faithful to his cause, in her person and fortune. And this, you will allow, is rather uncommon upon the whole."

"You make her out very magnificent," I murmured, looking down upon the floor.

"Isn't she?" exclaimed the aristocratic Mrs. Blunt, with an almost youthful ingenuousness, and in those black eyes which looked at me so calmly there was a flash of the Southern beauty, still naïve and romantic, as if altogether untouched by experience. "I

don't think there is a single grain of vulgarity in all her enchanting person. Neither is there in my son. I suppose you won't deny that he is uncommon." She paused.

"Absolutely," I said in a perfectly conventional tone, I was now on my mettle that she should not discover what there was humanly common in my nature. She took my answer at her own valuation and was satisfied.

"They can't fail to understand each other on the very highest level of idealistic perceptions. Can you imagine my John thrown away on some enamoured white goose out of a stuffy old salon? Why, she couldn't even begin to understand what he feels or what he needs."

"Yes," I said impenetrably, "he is not easy to understand."

"I have reason to think," she said with a suppressed smile, "that he has a certain power over women. Of course I don't know anything about his intimate life but a whisper or two have reached me, like that, floating in the air, and I could hardly suppose that he would find an exceptional resistance in that quarter of all others. But I should like to know the exact degree."

I disregarded an annoying tendency to feel dizzy that came over me and was very careful in managing my voice.

"May I ask, Madame, why you are telling me all this?"

"For two reasons," she condescended graciously. "First of all because Mr. Mills told me that you were much more mature than one would expect. In fact you look much younger than I was prepared for."

"Madame," I interrupted her, "I may have a certain capacity for action and for responsibility, but as to the regions into which this very unexpected conversation has taken me I am a great novice. They are outside my interest. I have had no experience."

"Don't make yourself out so hopeless," she said in a spoilt-beauty tone. "You have your intuitions. At any rate you have a pair of eyes. You are everlastingly over there, so I understand. Surely you have seen how far they are . . ."

I interrupted again and this time bitterly, but always in a tone of polite enquiry:

"You think her facile, Madame?"

She looked offended. "I think her most fastidious. It is my son who is in question here."

And I understood then that she looked on her son as irresistible. For my part I was just beginning to think that it would be impossible for me to wait for his return. I figured him to myself lying dressed on his bed sleeping like a stone. But there was no denying that the mother was holding me with an awful, tortured interest. Twice Therese had opened the door, had put her small head in and drawn it back like a tortoise. But for some time I had lost the sense of us two being quite alone in the studio. I had perceived the familiar dummy in its corner but it lay now on the floor as if Therese had knocked it down angrily with a broom for a heathen idol. It lay there prostrate, headless, without its head, pathetic, like the mangled victim of a crime.

“John is fastidious, too,” began Mrs. Blunt again. “Of course you wouldn’t suppose anything vulgar in his resistances to a very real sentiment. One has got to understand his psychology. He can’t leave himself in peace. He is exquisitely absurd.”

I recognized the phrase. Mother and son talked of each other in identical terms. But perhaps “exquisitely absurd” was the Blunt family saying? There are such sayings in families and generally there is some truth in them. Perhaps this old woman was simply absurd. She continued:

“We had a most painful discussion all this morning. He is angry with me for suggesting the very thing his whole being desires. I don’t feel guilty. It’s he who is tormenting himself with his infinite scrupulosity.”

“Ah,” I said, looking at the mangled dummy like the model of some atrocious murder. “Ah, the fortune. But that can be left alone.”

“What nonsense! How is it possible? It isn’t contained in a bag, you can’t throw it into the sea. And moreover, it isn’t her fault. I am astonished that you should have thought of that vulgar hypocrisy. No, it isn’t her fortune that cheeks my son; it’s something much more subtle. Not so much her history as her position. He is absurd. It isn’t what has happened in her life. It’s her very freedom that makes him torment himself and her, too — as far as I can understand.”

I suppressed a groan and said to myself that I must really get away from there.

Mrs. Blunt was fairly launched now.

“For all his superiority he is a man of the world and shares to a certain extent its current opinions. He has no power over her. She intimidates him. He wishes he had never set eyes on her. Once or twice this morning he looked at me as if he could find it in his heart to hate his old mother. There is no doubt about it — he loves her, Monsieur George. He loves her, this poor, luckless, perfect *homme du monde*.”

The silence lasted for some time and then I heard a murmur: “It’s a matter of the utmost delicacy between two beings so sensitive, so proud. It has to be managed.”

I found myself suddenly on my feet and saying with the utmost politeness that I had to beg her permission to leave her alone as I had an engagement; but she motioned me simply to sit down — and I sat down again.

“I told you I had a request to make,” she said. “I have understood from Mr. Mills that you have been to the West Indies, that you have some interests there.”

I was astounded. “Interests! I certainly have been there,” I said, “but . . .”

She caught me up. “Then why not go there again? I am speaking to you frankly because . . .”

“But, Madame, I am engaged in this affair with Doña Rita, even if I had any interests elsewhere. I won’t tell you about the importance of my work. I didn’t suspect it but you brought the news of it to me, and so I needn’t point it out to you.”

And now we were frankly arguing with each other.

“But where will it lead you in the end? You have all your life before you, all your plans, prospects, perhaps dreams, at any rate your own tastes and all your life-time

before you. And would you sacrifice all this to — the Pretender? A mere figure for the front page of illustrated papers.”

“I never think of him,” I said curtly, “but I suppose Doña Rita’s feelings, instincts, call it what you like — or only her chivalrous fidelity to her mistakes — ”

“Doña Rita’s presence here in this town, her withdrawal from the possible complications of her life in Paris has produced an excellent effect on my son. It simplifies infinite difficulties, I mean moral as well as material. It’s extremely to the advantage of her dignity, of her future, and of her peace of mind. But I am thinking, of course, mainly of my son. He is most exacting.”

I felt extremely sick at heart. “And so I am to drop everything and vanish,” I said, rising from my chair again. And this time Mrs. Blunt got up, too, with a lofty and inflexible manner but she didn’t dismiss me yet.

“Yes,” she said distinctly. “All this, my dear Monsieur George, is such an accident. What have you got to do here? You look to me like somebody who would find adventures wherever he went as interesting and perhaps less dangerous than this one.”

She slurred over the word dangerous but I picked it up.

“What do you know of its dangers, Madame, may I ask?” But she did not condescend to hear.

“And then you, too, have your chivalrous feelings,” she went on, unswerving, distinct, and tranquil. “You are not absurd. But my son is. He would shut her up in a convent for a time if he could.”

“He isn’t the only one,” I muttered.

“Indeed!” she was startled, then lower, “Yes. That woman must be the centre of all sorts of passions,” she mused audibly. “But what have you got to do with all this? It’s nothing to you.”

She waited for me to speak.

“Exactly, Madame,” I said, “and therefore I don’t see why I should concern myself in all this one way or another.”

“No,” she assented with a weary air, “except that you might ask yourself what is the good of tormenting a man of noble feelings, however absurd. His Southern blood makes him very violent sometimes. I fear — ” And then for the first time during this conversation, for the first time since I left Doña Rita the day before, for the first time I laughed.

“Do you mean to hint, Madame, that Southern gentlemen are dead shots? I am aware of that — from novels.”

I spoke looking her straight in the face and I made that exquisite, aristocratic old woman positively blink by my directness. There was a faint flush on her delicate old cheeks but she didn’t move a muscle of her face. I made her a most respectful bow and went out of the studio.

Chapter 4

Through the great arched window of the hall I saw the hotel brougham waiting at the door. On passing the door of the front room (it was originally meant for a drawing-room but a bed for Blunt was put in there) I banged with my fist on the panel and shouted: "I am obliged to go out. Your mother's carriage is at the door." I didn't think he was asleep. My view now was that he was aware beforehand of the subject of the conversation, and if so I did not wish to appear as if I had slunk away from him after the interview. But I didn't stop — I didn't want to see him — and before he could answer I was already half way up the stairs running noiselessly up the thick carpet which also covered the floor of the landing. Therefore opening the door of my sitting-room quickly I caught by surprise the person who was in there watching the street half concealed by the window curtain. It was a woman. A totally unexpected woman. A perfect stranger. She came away quickly to meet me. Her face was veiled and she was dressed in a dark walking costume and a very simple form of hat. She murmured: "I had an idea that Monsieur was in the house," raising a gloved hand to lift her veil. It was Rose and she gave me a shock. I had never seen her before but with her little black silk apron and a white cap with ribbons on her head. This outdoor dress was like a disguise. I asked anxiously:

"What has happened to Madame?"

"Nothing. I have a letter," she murmured, and I saw it appear between the fingers of her extended hand, in a very white envelope which I tore open impatiently. It consisted of a few lines only. It began abruptly:

"If you are gone to sea then I can't forgive you for not sending the usual word at the last moment. If you are not gone why don't you come? Why did you leave me yesterday? You leave me crying — I who haven't cried for years and years, and you haven't the sense to come back within the hour, within twenty hours! This conduct is idiotic" — and a sprawling signature of the four magic letters at the bottom.

While I was putting the letter in my pocket the girl said in an earnest undertone: "I don't like to leave Madame by herself for any length of time."

"How long have you been in my room?" I asked.

"The time seemed long. I hope Monsieur won't mind the liberty. I sat for a little in the hall but then it struck me I might be seen. In fact, Madame told me not to be seen if I could help it."

"Why did she tell you that?"

"I permitted myself to suggest that to Madame. It might have given a false impression. Madame is frank and open like the day but it won't do with everybody. There are people who would put a wrong construction on anything. Madame's sister told me Monsieur was out."

"And you didn't believe her?"

"Non, Monsieur. I have lived with Madame's sister for nearly a week when she first came into this house. She wanted me to leave the message, but I said I would wait a

little. Then I sat down in the big porter's chair in the hall and after a while, everything being very quiet, I stole up here. I know the disposition of the apartments. I reckoned Madame's sister would think that I got tired of waiting and let myself out."

"And you have been amusing yourself watching the street ever since?"

"The time seemed long," she answered evasively. "An empty coupé came to the door about an hour ago and it's still waiting," she added, looking at me inquisitively.

"It seems strange."

"There are some dancing girls staying in the house," I said negligently. "Did you leave Madame alone?"

"There's the gardener and his wife in the house."

"Those people keep at the back. Is Madame alone? That's what I want to know."

"Monsieur forgets that I have been three hours away; but I assure Monsieur that here in this town it's perfectly safe for Madame to be alone."

"And wouldn't it be anywhere else? It's the first I hear of it."

"In Paris, in our apartments in the hotel, it's all right, too; but in the Pavilion, for instance, I wouldn't leave Madame by herself, not for half an hour."

"What is there in the Pavilion?" I asked.

"It's a sort of feeling I have," she murmured reluctantly . . . "Oh! There's that coupé going away."

She made a movement towards the window but checked herself. I hadn't moved. The rattle of wheels on the cobble-stones died out almost at once.

"Will Monsieur write an answer?" Rose suggested after a short silence.

"Hardly worth while," I said. "I will be there very soon after you. Meantime, please tell Madame from me that I am not anxious to see any more tears. Tell her this just like that, you understand. I will take the risk of not being received."

She dropped her eyes, said: "Oui, Monsieur," and at my suggestion waited, holding the door of the room half open, till I went downstairs to see the road clear.

It was a kind of deaf-and-dumb house. The black-and-white hall was empty and everything was perfectly still. Blunt himself had no doubt gone away with his mother in the brougham, but as to the others, the dancing girls, Therese, or anybody else that its walls may have contained, they might have been all murdering each other in perfect assurance that the house would not betray them by indulging in any unseemly murmurs. I emitted a low whistle which didn't seem to travel in that peculiar atmosphere more than two feet away from my lips, but all the same Rose came tripping down the stairs at once. With just a nod to my whisper: "Take a fiacre," she glided out and I shut the door noiselessly behind her.

The next time I saw her she was opening the door of the house on the Prado to me, with her cap and the little black silk apron on, and with that marked personality of her own, which had been concealed so perfectly in the dowdy walking dress, very much to the fore.

"I have given Madame the message," she said in her contained voice, swinging the door wide open. Then after relieving me of my hat and coat she announced me with

the simple words: "Voilà Monsieur," and hurried away. Directly I appeared Doña Rita, away there on the couch, passed the tips of her fingers over her eyes and holding her hands up palms outwards on each side of her head, shouted to me down the whole length of the room: "The dry season has set in." I glanced at the pink tips of her fingers perfunctorily and then drew back. She let her hands fall negligently as if she had no use for them any more and put on a serious expression.

"So it seems," I said, sitting down opposite her. "For how long, I wonder."

"For years and years. One gets so little encouragement. First you bolt away from my tears, then you send an impertinent message, and then when you come at last you pretend to behave respectfully, though you don't know how to do it. You should sit much nearer the edge of the chair and hold yourself very stiff, and make it quite clear that you don't know what to do with your hands."

All this in a fascinating voice with a ripple of badinage that seemed to play upon the sober surface of her thoughts. Then seeing that I did not answer she altered the note a bit.

"Amigo George," she said, "I take the trouble to send for you and here I am before you, talking to you and you say nothing."

"What am I to say?"

"How can I tell? You might say a thousand things. You might, for instance, tell me that you were sorry for my tears."

"I might also tell you a thousand lies. What do I know about your tears? I am not a susceptible idiot. It all depends upon the cause. There are tears of quiet happiness. Peeling onions also will bring tears."

"Oh, you are not susceptible," she flew out at me. "But you are an idiot all the same."

"Is it to tell me this that you have written to me to come?" I asked with a certain animation.

"Yes. And if you had as much sense as the talking parrot I owned once you would have read between the lines that all I wanted you here for was to tell you what I think of you."

"Well, tell me what you think of me."

"I would in a moment if I could be half as impertinent as you are."

"What unexpected modesty," I said.

"These, I suppose, are your sea manners."

"I wouldn't put up with half that nonsense from anybody at sea. Don't you remember you told me yourself to go away? What was I to do?"

"How stupid you are. I don't mean that you pretend. You really are. Do you understand what I say? I will spell it for you. S-t-u-p-i-d. Ah, now I feel better. Oh, amigo George, my dear fellow-conspirator for the king — the king. Such a king! Vive le Roi! Come, why don't you shout Vive le Roi, too?"

"I am not your parrot," I said.

“No, he never sulked. He was a charming, good-mannered bird, accustomed to the best society, whereas you, I suppose, are nothing but a heartless vagabond like myself.”

“I daresay you are, but I suppose nobody had the insolence to tell you that to your face.”

“Well, very nearly. It was what it amounted to. I am not stupid. There is no need to spell out simple words for me. It just came out. Don Juan struggled desperately to keep the truth in. It was most pathetic. And yet he couldn’t help himself. He talked very much like a parrot.”

“Of the best society,” I suggested.

“Yes, the most honourable of parrots. I don’t like parrot-talk. It sounds so uncanny. Had I lived in the Middle Ages I am certain I would have believed that a talking bird must be possessed by the devil. I am sure Therese would believe that now. My own sister! She would cross herself many times and simply quake with terror.”

“But you were not terrified,” I said. “May I ask when that interesting communication took place?”

“Yesterday, just before you blundered in here of all days in the year. I was sorry for him.”

“Why tell me this? I couldn’t help noticing it. I regretted I hadn’t my umbrella with me.”

“Those unforgiven tears! Oh, you simple soul! Don’t you know that people never cry for anybody but themselves? . . . Amigo George, tell me — what are we doing in this world?”

“Do you mean all the people, everybody?”

“No, only people like you and me. Simple people, in this world which is eaten up with charlatanism of all sorts so that even we, the simple, don’t know any longer how to trust each other.”

“Don’t we? Then why don’t you trust him? You are dying to do so, don’t you know?”

She dropped her chin on her breast and from under her straight eyebrows the deep blue eyes remained fixed on me, impersonally, as if without thought.

“What have you been doing since you left me yesterday?” she asked.

“The first thing I remember I abused your sister horribly this morning.”

“And how did she take it?”

“Like a warm shower in spring. She drank it all in and unfolded her petals.”

“What poetical expressions he uses! That girl is more perverted than one would think possible, considering what she is and whence she came. It’s true that I, too, come from the same spot.”

“She is slightly crazy. I am a great favourite with her. I don’t say this to boast.”

“It must be very comforting.”

“Yes, it has cheered me immensely. Then after a morning of delightful musings on one thing and another I went to lunch with a charming lady and spent most of the afternoon talking with her.”

Doña Rita raised her head.

“A lady! Women seem such mysterious creatures to me. I don’t know them. Did you abuse her? Did she — how did you say that? — unfold her petals, too? Was she really and truly . . .?”

“She is simply perfection in her way and the conversation was by no means banal. I fancy that if your late parrot had heard it, he would have fallen off his perch. For after all, in that Allègre Pavilion, my dear Rita, you were but a crowd of glorified bourgeois.”

She was beautifully animated now. In her motionless blue eyes like melted sapphires, around those red lips that almost without moving could breathe enchanting sounds into the world, there was a play of light, that mysterious ripple of gaiety that seemed always to run and faintly quiver under her skin even in her gravest moods; just as in her rare moments of gaiety its warmth and radiance seemed to come to one through infinite sadness, like the sunlight of our life hiding the invincible darkness in which the universe must work out its impenetrable destiny.

“Now I think of it! . . . Perhaps that’s the reason I never could feel perfectly serious while they were demolishing the world about my ears. I fancy now that I could tell beforehand what each of them was going to say. They were repeating the same words over and over again, those great clever men, very much like parrots who also seem to know what they say. That doesn’t apply to the master of the house, who never talked much. He sat there mostly silent and looming up three sizes bigger than any of them.”

“The ruler of the aviary,” I muttered viciously.

“It annoys you that I should talk of that time?” she asked in a tender voice. “Well, I won’t, except for once to say that you must not make a mistake: in that aviary he was the man. I know because he used to talk to me afterwards sometimes. Strange! For six years he seemed to carry all the world and me with it in his hand. . . .”

“He dominates you yet,” I shouted.

She shook her head innocently as a child would do.

“No, no. You brought him into the conversation yourself. You think of him much more than I do.” Her voice drooped sadly to a hopeless note. “I hardly ever do. He is not the sort of person to merely flit through one’s mind and so I have no time. Look. I had eleven letters this morning and there were also five telegrams before midday, which have tangled up everything. I am quite frightened.”

And she explained to me that one of them — the long one on the top of the pile, on the table over there — seemed to contain ugly inferences directed at herself in a menacing way. She begged me to read it and see what I could make of it.

I knew enough of the general situation to see at a glance that she had misunderstood it thoroughly and even amazingly. I proved it to her very quickly. But her mistake was so ingenious in its wrongheadedness and arose so obviously from the distraction of an acute mind, that I couldn’t help looking at her admiringly.

“Rita,” I said, “you are a marvellous idiot.”

“Am I? Imbecile,” she retorted with an enchanting smile of relief. “But perhaps it only seems so to you in contrast with the lady so perfect in her way. What is her way?”

"Her way, I should say, lies somewhere between her sixtieth and seventieth year, and I have walked tête-à-tête with her for some little distance this afternoon."

"Heavens," she whispered, thunderstruck. "And meantime I had the son here. He arrived about five minutes after Rose left with that note for you," she went on in a tone of awe. "As a matter of fact, Rose saw him across the street but she thought she had better go on to you."

"I am furious with myself for not having guessed that much," I said bitterly. "I suppose you got him out of the house about five minutes after you heard I was coming here. Rose ought to have turned back when she saw him on his way to cheer your solitude. That girl is stupid after all, though she has got a certain amount of low cunning which no doubt is very useful at times."

"I forbid you to talk like this about Rose. I won't have it. Rose is not to be abused before me."

"I only mean to say that she failed in this instance to read your mind, that's all."

"This is, without exception, the most unintelligent thing you have said ever since I have known you. You may understand a lot about running contraband and about the minds of a certain class of people, but as to Rose's mind let me tell you that in comparison with hers yours is absolutely infantile, my adventurous friend. It would be contemptible if it weren't so — what shall I call it? — babyish. You ought to be slapped and put to bed." There was an extraordinary earnestness in her tone and when she ceased I listened yet to the seductive inflexions of her voice, that no matter in what mood she spoke seemed only fit for tenderness and love. And I thought suddenly of Azzolati being ordered to take himself off from her presence for ever, in that voice the very anger of which seemed to twine itself gently round one's heart. No wonder the poor wretch could not forget the scene and couldn't restrain his tears on the plain of Rambouillet. My moods of resentment against Rita, hot as they were, had no more duration than a blaze of straw. So I only said:

"Much you know about the management of children." The corners of her lips stirred quaintly; her animosity, especially when provoked by a personal attack upon herself, was always tinged by a sort of wistful humour of the most disarming kind.

"Come, amigo George, let us leave poor Rose alone. You had better tell me what you heard from the lips of the charming old lady. Perfection, isn't she? I have never seen her in my life, though she says she has seen me several times. But she has written to me on three separate occasions and every time I answered her as if I were writing to a queen. Amigo George, how does one write to a queen? How should a goatherd that could have been mistress of a king, how should she write to an old queen from very far away; from over the sea?"

"I will ask you as I have asked the old queen: why do you tell me all this, Doña Rita?"

"To discover what's in your mind," she said, a little impatiently.

"If you don't know that yet!" I exclaimed under my breath.

"No, not in your mind. Can any one ever tell what is in a man's mind? But I see you won't tell."

"What's the good? You have written to her before, I understand. Do you think of continuing the correspondence?"

"Who knows?" she said in a profound tone. "She is the only woman that ever wrote to me. I returned her three letters to her with my last answer, explaining humbly that I preferred her to burn them herself. And I thought that would be the end of it. But an occasion may still arise."

"Oh, if an occasion arises," I said, trying to control my rage, "you may be able to begin your letter by the words 'Chère Maman.'"

The cigarette box, which she had taken up without removing her eyes from me, flew out of her hand and opening in mid-air scattered cigarettes for quite a surprising distance all over the room. I got up at once and wandered off picking them up industriously. Doña Rita's voice behind me said indifferently:

"Don't trouble, I will ring for Rose."

"No need," I growled, without turning my head, "I can find my hat in the hall by myself, after I've finished picking up . . ."

"Bear!"

I returned with the box and placed it on the divan near her. She sat cross-legged, leaning back on her arms, in the blue shimmer of her embroidered robe and with the tawny halo of her unruly hair about her face which she raised to mine with an air of resignation.

"George, my friend," she said, "we have no manners."

"You would never have made a career at court, Doña Rita," I observed. "You are too impulsive."

"This is not bad manners, that's sheer insolence. This has happened to you before. If it happens again, as I can't be expected to wrestle with a savage and desperate smuggler single-handed, I will go upstairs and lock myself in my room till you leave the house. Why did you say this to me?"

"Oh, just for nothing, out of a full heart."

"If your heart is full of things like that, then my dear friend, you had better take it out and give it to the crows. No! you said that for the pleasure of appearing terrible. And you see you are not terrible at all, you are rather amusing. Go on, continue to be amusing. Tell me something of what you heard from the lips of that aristocratic old lady who thinks that all men are equal and entitled to the pursuit of happiness."

"I hardly remember now. I heard something about the unworthiness of certain white geese out of stuffy drawing-rooms. It sounds mad, but the lady knows exactly what she wants. I also heard your praises sung. I sat there like a fool not knowing what to say."

"Why? You might have joined in the singing."

“I didn’t feel in the humour, because, don’t you see, I had been incidentally given to understand that I was an insignificant and superfluous person who had better get out of the way of serious people.”

“Ah, par exemple!”

“In a sense, you know, it was flattering; but for the moment it made me feel as if I had been offered a pot of mustard to sniff.”

She nodded with an amused air of understanding and I could see that she was interested. “Anything more?” she asked, with a flash of radiant eagerness in all her person and bending slightly forward towards me.

“Oh, it’s hardly worth mentioning. It was a sort of threat wrapped up, I believe, in genuine anxiety as to what might happen to my youthful insignificance. If I hadn’t been rather on the alert just then I wouldn’t even have perceived the meaning. But really an allusion to ‘hot Southern blood’ I could have only one meaning. Of course I laughed at it, but only ‘pour l’honneur’ and to show I understood perfectly. In reality it left me completely indifferent.”

Doña Rita looked very serious for a minute.

“Indifferent to the whole conversation?”

I looked at her angrily.

“To the whole . . . You see I got up rather out of sorts this morning. Unrefreshed, you know. As if tired of life.”

The liquid blue in her eyes remained directed at me without any expression except that of its usual mysterious immobility, but all her face took on a sad and thoughtful cast. Then as if she had made up her mind under the pressure of necessity:

“Listen, amigo,” she said, “I have suffered domination and it didn’t crush me because I have been strong enough to live with it; I have known caprice, you may call it folly if you like, and it left me unharmed because I was great enough not to be captured by anything that wasn’t really worthy of me. My dear, it went down like a house of cards before my breath. There is something in me that will not be dazzled by any sort of prestige in this world, worthy or unworthy. I am telling you this because you are younger than myself.”

“If you want me to say that there is nothing petty or mean about you, Doña Rita, then I do say it.”

She nodded at me with an air of accepting the rendered justice and went on with the utmost simplicity.

“And what is it that is coming to me now with all the airs of virtue? All the lawful conventions are coming to me, all the glammers of respectability! And nobody can say that I have made as much as the slightest little sign to them. Not so much as lifting my little finger. I suppose you know that?”

“I don’t know. I do not doubt your sincerity in anything you say. I am ready to believe. You are not one of those who have to work.”

“Have to work — what do you mean?”

"It's a phrase I have heard. What I meant was that it isn't necessary for you to make any signs."

She seemed to meditate over this for a while.

"Don't be so sure of that," she said, with a flash of mischief, which made her voice sound more melancholy than before. "I am not so sure myself," she continued with a curious, vanishing, intonation of despair. "I don't know the truth about myself because I never had an opportunity to compare myself to anything in the world. I have been offered mock adulation, treated with mock reserve or with mock devotion, I have been fawned upon with an appalling earnestness of purpose, I can tell you; but these later honours, my dear, came to me in the shape of a very loyal and very scrupulous gentleman. For he is all that. And as a matter of fact I was touched."

"I know. Even to tears," I said provokingly. But she wasn't provoked, she only shook her head in negation (which was absurd) and pursued the trend of her spoken thoughts.

"That was yesterday," she said. "And yesterday he was extremely correct and very full of extreme self-esteem which expressed itself in the exaggerated delicacy with which he talked. But I know him in all his moods. I have known him even playful. I didn't listen to him. I was thinking of something else. Of things that were neither correct nor playful and that had to be looked at steadily with all the best that was in me. And that was why, in the end — I cried — yesterday."

"I saw it yesterday and I had the weakness of being moved by those tears for a time."

"If you want to make me cry again I warn you you won't succeed."

"No, I know. He has been here to-day and the dry season has set in."

"Yes, he has been here. I assure you it was perfectly unexpected. Yesterday he was railing at the world at large, at me who certainly have not made it, at himself and even at his mother. All this rather in parrot language, in the words of tradition and morality as understood by the members of that exclusive club to which he belongs. And yet when I thought that all this, those poor hackneyed words, expressed a sincere passion I could have found in my heart to be sorry for him. But he ended by telling me that one couldn't believe a single word I said, or something like that. You were here then, you heard it yourself."

"And it cut you to the quick," I said. "It made you depart from your dignity to the point of weeping on any shoulder that happened to be there. And considering that it was some more parrot talk after all (men have been saying that sort of thing to women from the beginning of the world) this sensibility seems to me childish."

"What perspicacity," she observed, with an indulgent, mocking smile, then changed her tone. "Therefore he wasn't expected to-day when he turned up, whereas you, who were expected, remained subject to the charms of conversation in that studio. It never occurred to you . . . did it? No! What had become of your perspicacity?"

"I tell you I was weary of life," I said in a passion.

She had another faint smile of a fugitive and unrelated kind as if she had been thinking of far-off things, then roused herself to grave animation.

“He came in full of smiling playfulness. How well I know that mood! Such self-command has its beauty; but it’s no great help for a man with such fateful eyes. I could see he was moved in his correct, restrained way, and in his own way, too, he tried to move me with something that would be very simple. He told me that ever since we became friends, we two, he had not an hour of continuous sleep, unless perhaps when coming back dead-tired from outpost duty, and that he longed to get back to it and yet hadn’t the courage to tear himself away from here. He was as simple as that. He’s a très galant homme of absolute probity, even with himself. I said to him: The trouble is, Don Juan, that it isn’t love but mistrust that keeps you in torment. I might have said jealousy, but I didn’t like to use that word. A parrot would have added that I had given him no right to be jealous. But I am no parrot. I recognized the rights of his passion which I could very well see. He is jealous. He is not jealous of my past or of the future; but he is jealously mistrustful of me, of what I am, of my very soul. He believes in a soul in the same way Therese does, as something that can be touched with grace or go to perdition; and he doesn’t want to be damned with me before his own judgment seat. He is a most noble and loyal gentleman, but I have my own Basque peasant soul and don’t want to think that every time he goes away from my feet — yes, mon cher, on this carpet, look for the marks of scorching — that he goes away feeling tempted to brush the dust off his moral sleeve. That! Never!”

With brusque movements she took a cigarette out of the box, held it in her fingers for a moment, then dropped it unconsciously.

“And then, I don’t love him,” she uttered slowly as if speaking to herself and at the same time watching the very quality of that thought. “I never did. At first he fascinated me with his fatal aspect and his cold society smiles. But I have looked into those eyes too often. There are too many disdains in this aristocratic republican without a home. His fate may be cruel, but it will always be commonplace. While he sat there trying in a worldly tone to explain to me the problems, the scruples, of his suffering honour, I could see right into his heart and I was sorry for him. I was sorry enough for him to feel that if he had suddenly taken me by the throat and strangled me slowly, avec délices, I could forgive him while I choked. How correct he was! But bitterness against me peeped out of every second phrase. At last I raised my hand and said to him, ‘Enough.’ I believe he was shocked by my plebeian abruptness but he was too polite to show it. His conventions will always stand in the way of his nature. I told him that everything that had been said and done during the last seven or eight months was inexplicable unless on the assumption that he was in love with me, — and yet in everything there was an implication that he couldn’t forgive me my very existence. I did ask him whether he didn’t think that it was absurd on his part . . . “

“Didn’t you say that it was exquisitely absurd?” I asked.

“Exquisitely! . . . “ Doña Rita was surprised at my question. “No. Why should I say that?”

“It would have reconciled him to your abruptness. It’s their family expression. It would have come with a familiar sound and would have been less offensive.”

“Offensive,” Doña Rita repeated earnestly. “I don’t think he was offended; he suffered in another way, but I didn’t care for that. It was I that had become offended in the end, without spite, you understand, but past bearing. I didn’t spare him. I told him plainly that to want a woman formed in mind and body, mistress of herself, free in her choice, independent in her thoughts; to love her apparently for what she is and at the same time to demand from her the candour and the innocence that could be only a shocking pretence; to know her such as life had made her and at the same time to despise her secretly for every touch with which her life had fashioned her — that was neither generous nor high minded; it was positively frantic. He got up and went away to lean against the mantelpiece, there, on his elbow and with his head in his hand. You have no idea of the charm and the distinction of his pose. I couldn’t help admiring him: the expression, the grace, the fatal suggestion of his immobility. Oh, yes, I am sensible to aesthetic impressions, I have been educated to believe that there is a soul in them.”

With that enigmatic, under the eyebrows glance fixed on me she laughed her deep contralto laugh without mirth but also without irony, and profoundly moving by the mere purity of the sound.

“I suspect he was never so disgusted and appalled in his life. His self-command is the most admirable worldly thing I have ever seen. What made it beautiful was that one could feel in it a tragic suggestion as in a great work of art.”

She paused with an inscrutable smile that a great painter might have put on the face of some symbolic figure for the speculation and wonder of many generations. I said:

“I always thought that love for you could work great wonders. And now I am certain.”

“Are you trying to be ironic?” she said sadly and very much as a child might have spoken.

“I don’t know,” I answered in a tone of the same simplicity. “I find it very difficult to be generous.”

“I, too,” she said with a sort of funny eagerness. “I didn’t treat him very generously. Only I didn’t say much more. I found I didn’t care what I said — and it would have been like throwing insults at a beautiful composition. He was well inspired not to move. It has spared him some disagreeable truths and perhaps I would even have said more than the truth. I am not fair. I am no more fair than other people. I would have been harsh. My very admiration was making me more angry. It’s ridiculous to say of a man got up in correct tailor clothes, but there was a funereal grace in his attitude so that he might have been reproduced in marble on a monument to some woman in one of those atrocious Campo Santos: the bourgeois conception of an aristocratic mourning lover. When I came to that conclusion I became glad that I was angry or else I would have laughed right out before him.”

“I have heard a woman say once, a woman of the people — do you hear me, Doña Rita? — therefore deserving your attention, that one should never laugh at love.”

“My dear,” she said gently, “I have been taught to laugh at most things by a man who never laughed himself; but it’s true that he never spoke of love to me, love as a subject that is. So perhaps . . . But why?”

“Because (but maybe that old woman was crazy), because, she said, there was death in the mockery of love.”

Doña Rita moved slightly her beautiful shoulders and went on:

“I am glad, then, I didn’t laugh. And I am also glad I said nothing more. I was feeling so little generous that if I had known something then of his mother’s allusion to ‘white geese’ I would have advised him to get one of them and lead it away on a beautiful blue ribbon. Mrs. Blunt was wrong, you know, to be so scornful. A white goose is exactly what her son wants. But look how badly the world is arranged. Such white birds cannot be got for nothing and he has not enough money even to buy a ribbon. Who knows! Maybe it was this which gave that tragic quality to his pose by the mantelpiece over there. Yes, that was it. Though no doubt I didn’t see it then. As he didn’t offer to move after I had done speaking I became quite unaffectedly sorry and advised him very gently to dismiss me from his mind definitely. He moved forward then and said to me in his usual voice and with his usual smile that it would have been excellent advice but unfortunately I was one of those women who can’t be dismissed at will. And as I shook my head he insisted rather darkly: ‘Oh, yes, Doña Rita, it is so. Cherish no illusions about that fact.’ It sounded so threatening that in my surprise I didn’t even acknowledge his parting bow. He went out of that false situation like a wounded man retreating after a fight. No, I have nothing to reproach myself with. I did nothing. I led him into nothing. Whatever illusions have passed through my head I kept my distance, and he was so loyal to what he seemed to think the redeeming proprieties of the situation that he has gone from me for good without so much as kissing the tips of my fingers. He must have felt like a man who had betrayed himself for nothing. It’s horrible. It’s the fault of that enormous fortune of mine, and I wish with all my heart that I could give it to him; for he couldn’t help his hatred of the thing that is: and as to his love, which is just as real, well — could I have rushed away from him to shut myself up in a convent? Could I? After all I have a right to my share of daylight.”

Chapter 5

I took my eyes from her face and became aware that dusk was beginning to steal into the room. How strange it seemed. Except for the glazed rotunda part its long walls, divided into narrow panels separated by an order of flat pilasters, presented, depicted on a black background and in vivid colours, slender women with butterfly wings and lean youths with narrow birds’ wings. The effect was supposed to be Pompeian and Rita and I had often laughed at the delirious fancy of some enriched shopkeeper. But still it was a display of fancy, a sign of grace; but at that moment these figures appeared

to me weird and intrusive and strangely alive in their attenuated grace of unearthly beings concealing a power to see and hear.

Without words, without gestures, Doña Rita was heard again. "It may have been as near coming to pass as this." She showed me the breadth of her little finger nail. "Yes, as near as that. Why? How? Just like that, for nothing. Because it had come up. Because a wild notion had entered a practical old woman's head. Yes. And the best of it is that I have nothing to complain of. Had I surrendered I would have been perfectly safe with these two. It is they or rather he who couldn't trust me, or rather that something which I express, which I stand for. Mills would never tell me what it was. Perhaps he didn't know exactly himself. He said it was something like genius. My genius! Oh, I am not conscious of it, believe me, I am not conscious of it. But if I were I wouldn't pluck it out and cast it away. I am ashamed of nothing, of nothing! Don't be stupid enough to think that I have the slightest regret. There is no regret. First of all because I am I — and then because . . . My dear, believe me, I have had a horrible time of it myself lately."

This seemed to be the last word. Outwardly quiet, all the time, it was only then that she became composed enough to light an enormous cigarette of the same pattern as those made specially for the king — *por el Rey!* After a time, tipping the ash into the bowl on her left hand, she asked me in a friendly, almost tender, tone:

"What are you thinking of, amigo?"

"I was thinking of your immense generosity. You want to give a crown to one man, a fortune to another. That is very fine. But I suppose there is a limit to your generosity somewhere."

"I don't see why there should be any limit — to fine intentions! Yes, one would like to pay ransom and be done with it all."

"That's the feeling of a captive; and yet somehow I can't think of you as ever having been anybody's captive."

"You do display some wonderful insight sometimes. My dear, I begin to suspect that men are rather conceited about their powers. They think they dominate us. Even exceptional men will think that; men too great for mere vanity, men like Henry Allègre for instance, who by his consistent and serene detachment was certainly fit to dominate all sorts of people. Yet for the most part they can only do it because women choose more or less consciously to let them do so. Henry Allègre, if any man, might have been certain of his own power; and yet, look: I was a chit of a girl, I was sitting with a book where I had no business to be, in his own garden, when he suddenly came upon me, an ignorant girl of seventeen, a most uninviting creature with a tousled head, in an old black frock and shabby boots. I could have run away. I was perfectly capable of it. But I stayed looking up at him and — in the end it was he who went away and it was I who stayed."

"Consciously?" I murmured.

"Consciously? You may just as well ask my shadow that lay so still by me on the young grass in that morning sunshine. I never knew before how still I could keep. It

wasn't the stillness of terror. I remained, knowing perfectly well that if I ran he was not the man to run after me. I remember perfectly his deep-toned, politely indifferent 'Restez donc.' He was mistaken. Already then I hadn't the slightest intention to move. And if you ask me again how far conscious all this was the nearest answer I can make you is this: that I remained on purpose, but I didn't know for what purpose I remained. Really, that couldn't be expected. . . . Why do you sigh like this? Would you have preferred me to be idiotically innocent or abominably wise?"

"These are not the questions that trouble me," I said. "If I sighed it is because I am weary."

"And getting stiff, too, I should say, in this Pompeiian armchair. You had better get out of it and sit on this couch as you always used to do. That, at any rate, is not Pompeiian. You have been growing of late extremely formal, I don't know why. If it is a pose then for goodness' sake drop it. Are you going to model yourself on Captain Blunt? You couldn't, you know. You are too young."

"I don't want to model myself on anybody," I said. "And anyway Blunt is too romantic; and, moreover, he has been and is yet in love with you — a thing that requires some style, an attitude, something of which I am altogether incapable."

"You know it isn't so stupid, this what you have just said. Yes, there is something in this."

"I am not stupid," I protested, without much heat.

"Oh, yes, you are. You don't know the world enough to judge. You don't know how wise men can be. Owls are nothing to them. Why do you try to look like an owl? There are thousands and thousands of them waiting for me outside the door: the staring, hissing beasts. You don't know what a relief of mental ease and intimacy you have been to me in the frankness of gestures and speeches and thoughts, sane or insane, that we have been throwing at each other. I have known nothing of this in my life but with you. There had always been some fear, some constraint, lurking in the background behind everybody, everybody — except you, my friend."

"An unmannerly, Arcadian state of affairs. I am glad you like it. Perhaps it's because you were intelligent enough to perceive that I was not in love with you in any sort of style."

"No, you were always your own self, unwise and reckless and with something in it kindred to mine, if I may say so without offence."

"You may say anything without offence. But has it never occurred to your sagacity that I just, simply, loved you?"

"Just — simply," she repeated in a wistful tone.

"You didn't want to trouble your head about it, is that it?"

"My poor head. From your tone one might think you yearned to cut it off. No, my dear, I have made up my mind not to lose my head."

"You would be astonished to know how little I care for your mind."

“Would I? Come and sit on the couch all the same,” she said after a moment of hesitation. Then, as I did not move at once, she added with indifference: “You may sit as far away as you like, it’s big enough, goodness knows.”

The light was ebbing slowly out of the rotunda and to my bodily eyes she was beginning to grow shadowy. I sat down on the couch and for a long time no word passed between us. We made no movement. We did not even turn towards each other. All I was conscious of was the softness of the seat which seemed somehow to cause a relaxation of my stern mood, I won’t say against my will but without any will on my part. Another thing I was conscious of, strangely enough, was the enormous brass bowl for cigarette ends. Quietly, with the least possible action, Doña Rita moved it to the other side of her motionless person. Slowly, the fantastic women with butterflies’ wings and the slender-limbed youths with the gorgeous pinions on their shoulders were vanishing into their black backgrounds with an effect of silent discretion, leaving us to ourselves.

I felt suddenly extremely exhausted, absolutely overcome with fatigue since I had moved; as if to sit on that Pompeian chair had been a task almost beyond human strength, a sort of labour that must end in collapse. I fought against it for a moment and then my resistance gave way. Not all at once but as if yielding to an irresistible pressure (for I was not conscious of any irresistible attraction) I found myself with my head resting, with a weight I felt must be crushing, on Doña Rita’s shoulder which yet did not give way, did not flinch at all. A faint scent of violets filled the tragic emptiness of my head and it seemed impossible to me that I should not cry from sheer weakness. But I remained dry-eyed. I only felt myself slipping lower and lower and I caught her round the waist clinging to her not from any intention but purely by instinct. All that time she hadn’t stirred. There was only the slight movement of her breathing that showed her to be alive; and with closed eyes I imagined her to be lost in thought, removed by an incredible meditation while I clung to her, to an immense distance from the earth. The distance must have been immense because the silence was so perfect, the feeling as if of eternal stillness. I had a distinct impression of being in contact with an infinity that had the slightest possible rise and fall, was pervaded by a warm, delicate scent of violets and through which came a hand from somewhere to rest lightly on my head. Presently my ear caught the faint and regular pulsation of her heart, firm and quick, infinitely touching in its persistent mystery, disclosing itself into my very ear — and my felicity became complete.

It was a dreamlike state combined with a dreamlike sense of insecurity. Then in that warm and scented infinity, or eternity, in which I rested lost in bliss but ready for any catastrophe, I heard the distant, hardly audible, and fit to strike terror into the heart, ringing of a bell. At this sound the greatness of spaces departed. I felt the world close about me; the world of darkened walls, of very deep grey dusk against the panes, and I asked in a pained voice:

“Why did you ring, Rita?”

There was a bell rope within reach of her hand. I had not felt her move, but she said very low:

“I rang for the lights.”

“You didn’t want the lights.”

“It was time,” she whispered secretly.

Somewhere within the house a door slammed. I got away from her feeling small and weak as if the best part of me had been torn away and irretrievably lost. Rose must have been somewhere near the door.

“It’s abominable,” I murmured to the still, idol-like shadow on the couch.

The answer was a hurried, nervous whisper: “I tell you it was time. I rang because I had no strength to push you away.”

I suffered a moment of giddiness before the door opened, light streamed in, and Rose entered, preceding a man in a green baize apron whom I had never seen, carrying on an enormous tray three Argand lamps fitted into vases of Pompeiian form. Rose distributed them over the room. In the flood of soft light the winged youths and the butterfly women reappeared on the panels, affected, gorgeous, callously unconscious of anything having happened during their absence. Rose attended to the lamp on the nearest mantelpiece, then turned about and asked in a confident undertone.

“Monsieur dîne?”

I had lost myself with my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, but I heard the words distinctly. I heard also the silence which ensued. I sat up and took the responsibility of the answer on myself.

“Impossible. I am going to sea this evening.”

This was perfectly true only I had totally forgotten it till then. For the last two days my being was no longer composed of memories but exclusively of sensations of the most absorbing, disturbing, exhausting nature. I was like a man who has been buffeted by the sea or by a mob till he loses all hold on the world in the misery of his helplessness. But now I was recovering. And naturally the first thing I remembered was the fact that I was going to sea.

“You have heard, Rose,” Doña Rita said at last with some impatience.

The girl waited a moment longer before she said:

“Oh, yes! There is a man waiting for Monsieur in the hall. A seaman.”

It could be no one but Dominic. It dawned upon me that since the evening of our return I had not been near him or the ship, which was completely unusual, unheard of, and well calculated to startle Dominic.

“I have seen him before,” continued Rose, “and as he told me he has been pursuing Monsieur all the afternoon and didn’t like to go away without seeing Monsieur for a moment, I proposed to him to wait in the hall till Monsieur was at liberty.”

I said: “Very well,” and with a sudden resumption of her extremely busy, not-a-moment-to-lose manner Rose departed from the room. I lingered in an imaginary world full of tender light, of unheard-of colours, with a mad riot of flowers and an inconceivable happiness under the sky arched above its yawning precipices, while a

feeling of awe enveloped me like its own proper atmosphere. But everything vanished at the sound of Doña Rita's loud whisper full of boundless dismay, such as to make one's hair stir on one's head.

"Mon Dieu! And what is going to happen now?"

She got down from the couch and walked to a window. When the lights had been brought into the room all the panes had turned inky black; for the night had come and the garden was full of tall bushes and trees screening off the gas lamps of the main alley of the Prado. Whatever the question meant she was not likely to see an answer to it outside. But her whisper had offended me, had hurt something infinitely deep, infinitely subtle and infinitely clear-eyed in my nature. I said after her from the couch on which I had remained, "Don't lose your composure. You will always have some sort of bell at hand."

I saw her shrug her uncovered shoulders impatiently. Her forehead was against the very blackness of the panes; pulled upward from the beautiful, strong nape of her neck, the twisted mass of her tawny hair was held high upon her head by the arrow of gold.

"You set up for being unforgiving," she said without anger.

I sprang to my feet while she turned about and came towards me bravely, with a wistful smile on her bold, adolescent face.

"It seems to me," she went on in a voice like a wave of love itself, "that one should try to understand before one sets up for being unforgiving. Forgiveness is a very fine word. It is a fine invocation."

"There are other fine words in the language such as fascination, fidelity, also frivolity; and as for invocations there are plenty of them, too; for instance: alas, heaven help me."

We stood very close together, her narrow eyes were as enigmatic as ever, but that face, which, like some ideal conception of art, was incapable of anything like untruth and grimace, expressed by some mysterious means such a depth of infinite patience that I felt profoundly ashamed of myself.

"This thing is beyond words altogether," I said. "Beyond forgiveness, beyond forgetting, beyond anger or jealousy. . . . There is nothing between us two that could make us act together."

"Then we must fall back perhaps on something within us, that — you admit it? — we have in common."

"Don't be childish," I said. "You give one with a perpetual and intense freshness feelings and sensations that are as old as the world itself, and you imagine that your enchantment can be broken off anywhere, at any time! But it can't be broken. And forgetfulness, like everything else, can only come from you. It's an impossible situation to stand up against."

She listened with slightly parted lips as if to catch some further resonances.

"There is a sort of generous ardour about you," she said, "which I don't really understand. No, I don't know it. Believe me, it is not of myself I am thinking. And you — you are going out to-night to make another landing."

“Yes, it is a fact that before many hours I will be sailing away from you to try my luck once more.”

“Your wonderful luck,” she breathed out.

“Oh, yes, I am wonderfully lucky. Unless the luck really is yours — in having found somebody like me, who cares at the same time so much and so little for what you have at heart.”

“What time will you be leaving the harbour?” she asked.

“Some time between midnight and daybreak. Our men may be a little late in joining, but certainly we will be gone before the first streak of light.”

“What freedom!” she murmured enviously. “It’s something I shall never know. . . .”

“Freedom!” I protested. “I am a slave to my word. There will be a siring of carts and mules on a certain part of the coast, and a most ruffianly lot of men, men you understand, men with wives and children and sweethearts, who from the very moment they start on a trip risk a bullet in the head at any moment, but who have a perfect conviction that I will never fail them. That’s my freedom. I wonder what they would think if they knew of your existence.”

“I don’t exist,” she said.

“That’s easy to say. But I will go as if you didn’t exist — yet only because you do exist. You exist in me. I don’t know where I end and you begin. You have got into my heart and into my veins and into my brain.”

“Take this fancy out and trample it down in the dust,” she said in a tone of timid entreaty.

“Heroically,” I suggested with the sarcasm of despair.

“Well, yes, heroically,” she said; and there passed between us dim smiles, I have no doubt of the most touching imbecility on earth. We were standing by then in the middle of the room with its vivid colours on a black background, with its multitude of winged figures with pale limbs, with hair like halos or flames, all strangely tense in their strained, decorative attitudes. Doña Rita made a step towards me, and as I attempted to seize her hand she flung her arms round my neck. I felt their strength drawing me towards her and by a sort of blind and desperate effort I resisted. And all the time she was repeating with nervous insistence:

“But it is true that you will go. You will surely. Not because of those people but because of me. You will go away because you feel you must.”

With every word urging me to get away, her clasp tightened, she hugged my head closer to her breast. I submitted, knowing well that I could free myself by one more effort which it was in my power to make. But before I made it, in a sort of desperation, I pressed a long kiss into the hollow of her throat. And lo — there was no need for any effort. With a stifled cry of surprise her arms fell off me as if she had been shot. I must have been giddy, and perhaps we both were giddy, but the next thing I knew there was a good foot of space between us in the peaceful glow of the ground-glass globes, in the everlasting stillness of the winged figures. Something in the quality of her exclamation, something utterly unexpected, something I had never heard before, and

also the way she was looking at me with a sort of incredulous, concentrated attention, disconcerted me exceedingly. I knew perfectly well what I had done and yet I felt that I didn't understand what had happened. I became suddenly abashed and I muttered that I had better go and dismiss that poor Dominic. She made no answer, gave no sign. She stood there lost in a vision — or was it a sensation? — of the most absorbing kind. I hurried out into the hall, shamefaced, as if I were making my escape while she wasn't looking. And yet I felt her looking fixedly at me, with a sort of stupefaction on her features — in her whole attitude — as though she had never even heard of such a thing as a kiss in her life.

A dim lamp (of Pompeian form) hanging on a long chain left the hall practically dark. Dominic, advancing towards me from a distant corner, was but a little more opaque shadow than the others. He had expected me on board every moment till about three o'clock, but as I didn't turn up and gave no sign of life in any other way he started on his hunt. He sought news of me from the garçons at the various cafés, from the cochers de fiacre in front of the Exchange, from the tobacconist lady at the counter of the fashionable Débit de Tabac, from the old man who sold papers outside the cercle, and from the flower-girl at the door of the fashionable restaurant where I had my table. That young woman, whose business name was Irma, had come on duty about mid-day. She said to Dominic: "I think I've seen all his friends this morning but I haven't seen him for a week. What has become of him?"

"That's exactly what I want to know," Dominic replied in a fury and then went back to the harbour on the chance that I might have called either on board or at Madame Léonore's café.

I expressed to him my surprise that he should fuss about me like an old hen over a chick. It wasn't like him at all. And he said that "en effet" it was Madame Léonore who wouldn't give him any peace. He hoped I wouldn't mind, it was best to humour women in little things; and so he started off again, made straight for the street of the Consuls, was told there that I wasn't at home but the woman of the house looked so funny that he didn't know what to make of it. Therefore, after some hesitation, he took the liberty to inquire at this house, too, and being told that I couldn't be disturbed, had made up his mind not to go on board without actually setting his eyes on me and hearing from my own lips that nothing was changed as to sailing orders.

"There is nothing changed, Dominic," I said.

"No change of any sort?" he insisted, looking very sombre and speaking gloomily from under his black moustaches in the dim glow of the alabaster lamp hanging above his head. He peered at me in an extraordinary manner as if he wanted to make sure that I had all my limbs about me. I asked him to call for my bag at the other house, on his way to the harbour, and he departed reassured, not, however, without remarking ironically that ever since she saw that American cavalier Madame Léonore was not easy in her mind about me.

As I stood alone in the hall, without a sound of any sort, Rose appeared before me. "Monsieur will dine after all," she whispered calmly.

“My good girl, I am going to sea to-night.”

“What am I going to do with Madame?” she murmured to herself. “She will insist on returning to Paris.”

“Oh, have you heard of it?”

“I never get more than two hours’ notice,” she said. “But I know how it will be,” her voice lost its calmness. “I can look after Madame up to a certain point but I cannot be altogether responsible. There is a dangerous person who is everlastingly trying to see Madame alone. I have managed to keep him off several times but there is a beastly old journalist who is encouraging him in his attempts, and I daren’t even speak to Madame about it.”

“What sort of person do you mean?”

“Why, a man,” she said scornfully.

I snatched up my coat and hat.

“Aren’t there dozens of them?”

“Oh! But this one is dangerous. Madame must have given him a hold on her in some way. I ought not to talk like this about Madame and I wouldn’t to anybody but Monsieur. I am always on the watch, but what is a poor girl to do? . . . Isn’t Monsieur going back to Madame?”

“No, I am not going back. Not this time.” A mist seemed to fall before my eyes. I could hardly see the girl standing by the closed door of the Pempeiian room with extended hand, as if turned to stone. But my voice was firm enough. “Not this time,” I repeated, and became aware of the great noise of the wind amongst the trees, with the lashing of a rain squall against the door.

“Perhaps some other time,” I added.

I heard her say twice to herself: “Mon Dieu! Mon, Dieu!” and then a dismayed: “What can Monsieur expect me to do?” But I had to appear insensible to her distress and that not altogether because, in fact, I had no option but to go away. I remember also a distinct wilfulness in my attitude and something half-contemptuous in my words as I laid my hand on the knob of the front door.

“You will tell Madame that I am gone. It will please her. Tell her that I am gone — heroically.”

Rose had come up close to me. She met my words by a despairing outward movement of her hands as though she were giving everything up.

“I see it clearly now that Madame has no friends,” she declared with such a force of restrained bitterness that it nearly made me pause. But the very obscurity of actuating motives drove me on and I stepped out through the doorway muttering: “Everything is as Madame wishes it.”

She shot at me a swift: “You should resist,” of an extraordinary intensity, but I strode on down the path. Then Rose’s schooled temper gave way at last and I heard her angry voice screaming after me furiously through the wind and rain: “No! Madame has no friends. Not one!”

Part 5

Chapter 1

That night I didn't get on board till just before midnight and Dominic could not conceal his relief at having me safely there. Why he should have been so uneasy it was impossible to say but at the time I had a sort of impression that my inner destruction (it was nothing less) had affected my appearance, that my doom was as it were written on my face. I was a mere receptacle for dust and ashes, a living testimony to the vanity of all things. My very thoughts were like a ghostly rustle of dead leaves. But we had an extremely successful trip, and for most of the time Dominic displayed an unwonted jocularity of a dry and biting kind with which, he maintained, he had been infected by no other person than myself. As, with all his force of character, he was very responsive to the moods of those he liked I have no doubt he spoke the truth. But I know nothing about it. The observer, more or less alert, whom each of us carries in his own consciousness, failed me altogether, had turned away his face in sheer horror, or else had fainted from the strain. And thus I had to live alone, unobserved even by myself.

But the trip had been successful. We re-entered the harbour very quietly as usual and when our craft had been moored unostentatiously amongst the plebeian stone-carriers, Dominic, whose grim joviality had subsided in the last twenty-four hours of our homeward run, abandoned me to myself as though indeed I had been a doomed man. He only stuck his head for a moment into our little cuddy where I was changing my clothes and being told in answer to his question that I had no special orders to give went ashore without waiting for me.

Generally we used to step on the quay together and I never failed to enter for a moment Madame Léonore's café. But this time when I got on the quay Dominic was nowhere to be seen. What was it? Abandonment — discretion — or had he quarrelled with his Léonore before leaving on the trip?

My way led me past the café and through the glass panes I saw that he was already there. On the other side of the little marble table Madame Léonore, leaning with mature grace on her elbow, was listening to him absorbed. Then I passed on and — what would you have! — I ended by making my way into the street of the Consuls. I had nowhere else to go. There were my things in the apartment on the first floor. I couldn't bear the thought of meeting anybody I knew.

The feeble gas flame in the hall was still there, on duty, as though it had never been turned off since I last crossed the hall at half-past eleven in the evening to go to the harbour. The small flame had watched me letting myself out; and now, exactly of the same size, the poor little tongue of light (there was something wrong with that burner) watched me letting myself in, as indeed it had done many times before. Generally the impression was that of entering an untenanted house, but this time before I could reach the foot of the stairs Therese glided out of the passage leading into the studio. After the usual exclamations she assured me that everything was ready for me upstairs, had been for days, and offered to get me something to eat at once. I accepted and said I would be down in the studio in half an hour. I found her there by the side of the laid table ready for conversation. She began by telling me — the dear, poor young Monsieur — in a sort of plaintive chant, that there were no letters for me, no letters of any kind, no letters from anybody. Glances of absolutely terrifying tenderness mingled with flashes of cunning swept over me from head to foot while I tried to eat.

“Are you giving me Captain Blunt’s wine to drink?” I asked, noting the straw-coloured liquid in my glass.

She screwed up her mouth as if she had a twinge of toothache and assured me that the wine belonged to the house. I would have to pay her for it. As far as personal feelings go, Blunt, who addressed her always with polite seriousness, was not a favourite with her. The “charming, brave Monsieur” was now fighting for the King and religion against the impious Liberals. He went away the very morning after I had left and, oh! she remembered, he had asked her before going away whether I was still in the house. Wanted probably to say good-bye to me, shake my hand, the dear, polite Monsieur.

I let her run on in dread expectation of what she would say next but she stuck to the subject of Blunt for some time longer. He had written to her once about some of his things which he wanted her to send to Paris to his mother’s address; but she was going to do nothing of the kind. She announced this with a pious smile; and in answer to my questions I discovered that it was a stratagem to make Captain Blunt return to the house.

“You will get yourself into trouble with the police, Mademoiselle Therese, if you go on like that,” I said. But she was as obstinate as a mule and assured me with the utmost confidence that many people would be ready to defend a poor honest girl. There was something behind this attitude which I could not fathom. Suddenly she fetched a deep sigh.

“Our Rita, too, will end by coming to her sister.”

The name for which I had been waiting deprived me of speech for the moment. The poor mad sinner had rushed off to some of her wickednesses in Paris. Did I know? No? How could she tell whether I did know or not? Well! I had hardly left the house, so to speak, when Rita was down with her maid behaving as if the house did really still belong to her. . .

“What time was it?” I managed to ask. And with the words my life itself was being forced out through my lips. But Therese, not noticing anything strange about me, said

it was something like half-past seven in the morning. The “poor sinner” was all in black as if she were going to church (except for her expression, which was enough to shock any honest person), and after ordering her with frightful menaces not to let anybody know she was in the house she rushed upstairs and locked herself up in my bedroom, while “that French creature” (whom she seemed to love more than her own sister) went into my salon and hid herself behind the window curtain.

I had recovered sufficiently to ask in a quiet natural voice whether Doña Rita and Captain Blunt had seen each other. Apparently they had not seen each other. The polite captain had looked so stern while packing up his kit that Therese dared not speak to him at all. And he was in a hurry, too. He had to see his dear mother off to Paris before his own departure. Very stern. But he shook her hand with a very nice bow.

Therese elevated her right hand for me to see. It was broad and short with blunt fingers, as usual. The pressure of Captain Blunt’s handshake had not altered its unlovely shape.

“What was the good of telling him that our Rita was here?” went on Therese. “I would have been ashamed of her coming here and behaving as if the house belonged to her! I had already said some prayers at his intention at the half-past six mass, the brave gentleman. That maid of my sister Rita was upstairs watching him drive away with her evil eyes, but I made a sign of the cross after the fiacre, and then I went upstairs and banged at your door, my dear kind young Monsieur, and shouted to Rita that she had no right to lock herself in any of my locataires’ rooms. At last she opened it — and what do you think? All her hair was loose over her shoulders. I suppose it all came down when she flung her hat on your bed. I noticed when she arrived that her hair wasn’t done properly. She used your brushes to do it up again in front of your glass.”

“Wait a moment,” I said, and jumped up, upsetting my wine to run upstairs as fast as I could. I lighted the gas, all the three jets in the middle of the room, the jet by the bedside and two others flanking the dressing-table. I had been struck by the wild hope of finding a trace of Rita’s passage, a sign or something. I pulled out all the drawers violently, thinking that perhaps she had hidden there a scrap of paper, a note. It was perfectly mad. Of course there was no chance of that. Therese would have seen to it. I picked up one after another all the various objects on the dressing-table. On laying my hands on the brushes I had a profound emotion, and with misty eyes I examined them meticulously with the new hope of finding one of Rita’s tawny hairs entangled amongst the bristles by a miraculous chance. But Therese would have done away with that chance, too. There was nothing to be seen, though I held them up to the light with a beating heart. It was written that not even that trace of her passage on the earth should remain with me; not to help but, as it were, to soothe the memory. Then I lighted a cigarette and came downstairs slowly. My unhappiness became dulled, as the grief of those who mourn for the dead gets dulled in the overwhelming sensation

that everything is over, that a part of themselves is lost beyond recall taking with it all the savour of life.

I discovered Therese still on the very same spot of the floor, her hands folded over each other and facing my empty chair before which the spilled wine had soaked a large portion of the table-cloth. She hadn't moved at all. She hadn't even picked up the overturned glass. But directly I appeared she began to speak in an ingratiating voice.

"If you have missed anything of yours upstairs, my dear young Monsieur, you mustn't say it's me. You don't know what our Rita is."

"I wish to goodness," I said, "that she had taken something."

And again I became inordinately agitated as though it were my absolute fate to be everlastingly dying and reviving to the tormenting fact of her existence. Perhaps she had taken something? Anything. Some small object. I thought suddenly of a Rhenish-stone match-box. Perhaps it was that. I didn't remember having seen it when upstairs. I wanted to make sure at once. At once. But I commanded myself to sit still.

"And she so wealthy," Therese went on. "Even you with your dear generous little heart can do nothing for our Rita. No man can do anything for her — except perhaps one, but she is so evilly disposed towards him that she wouldn't even see him, if in the goodness of his forgiving heart he were to offer his hand to her. It's her bad conscience that frightens her. He loves her more than his life, the dear, charitable man."

"You mean some rascal in Paris that I believe persecutes Doña Rita. Listen, Mademoiselle Therese, if you know where he hangs out you had better let him have word to be careful. I believe he, too, is mixed up in the Carlist intrigue. Don't you know that your sister can get him shut up any day or get him expelled by the police?"

Therese sighed deeply and put on a look of pained virtue.

"Oh, the hardness of her heart. She tried to be tender with me. She is awful. I said to her, 'Rita, have you sold your soul to the Devil?' and she shouted like a fiend: 'For happiness! Ha, ha, ha!' She threw herself backwards on that couch in your room and laughed and laughed and laughed as if I had been tickling her, and she drummed on the floor with the heels of her shoes. She is possessed. Oh, my dear innocent young Monsieur, you have never seen anything like that. That wicked girl who serves her rushed in with a tiny glass bottle and put it to her nose; but I had a mind to run out and fetch the priest from the church where I go to early mass. Such a nice, stout, severe man. But that false, cheating creature (I am sure she is robbing our Rita from morning to night), she talked to our Rita very low and quieted her down. I am sure I don't know what she said. She must be leagued with the devil. And then she asked me if I would go down and make a cup of chocolate for her Madame. Madame — that's our Rita. Madame! It seems they were going off directly to Paris and her Madame had had nothing to eat since the morning of the day before. Fancy me being ordered to make chocolate for our Rita! However, the poor thing looked so exhausted and white-faced that I went. Ah! the devil can give you an awful shake up if he likes."

Therese fetched another deep sigh and raising her eyes looked at me with great attention. I preserved an inscrutable expression, for I wanted to hear all she had to tell

me of Rita. I watched her with the greatest anxiety composing her face into a cheerful expression.

“So Doña Rita is gone to Paris?” I asked negligently.

“Yes, my dear Monsieur. I believe she went straight to the railway station from here. When she first got up from the couch she could hardly stand. But before, while she was drinking the chocolate which I made for her, I tried to get her to sign a paper giving over the house to me, but she only closed her eyes and begged me to try and be a good sister and leave her alone for half an hour. And she lying there looking as if she wouldn’t live a day. But she always hated me.”

I said bitterly, “You needn’t have worried her like this. If she had not lived for another day you would have had this house and everything else besides; a bigger bit than even your wolfish throat can swallow, Mademoiselle Therese.”

I then said a few more things indicative of my disgust with her rapacity, but they were quite inadequate, as I wasn’t able to find words strong enough to express my real mind. But it didn’t matter really because I don’t think Therese heard me at all. She seemed lost in rapt amazement.

“What do you say, my dear Monsieur? What! All for me without any sort of paper?”

She appeared distracted by my curt: “Yes.” Therese believed in my truthfulness. She believed me implicitly, except when I was telling her the truth about herself, mincing no words, when she used to stand smilingly bashful as if I were overwhelming her with compliments. I expected her to continue the horrible tale but apparently she had found something to think about which checked the flow. She fetched another sigh and muttered:

“Then the law can be just, if it does not require any paper. After all, I am her sister.”

“It’s very difficult to believe that — at sight,” I said roughly.

“Ah, but that I could prove. There are papers for that.”

After this declaration she began to clear the table, preserving a thoughtful silence.

I was not very surprised at the news of Doña Rita’s departure for Paris. It was not necessary to ask myself why she had gone. I didn’t even ask myself whether she had left the leased Villa on the Prado for ever. Later talking again with Therese, I learned that her sister had given it up for the use of the Carlist cause and that some sort of unofficial Consul, a Carlist agent of some sort, either was going to live there or had already taken possession. This, Rita herself had told her before her departure on that agitated morning spent in the house — in my rooms. A close investigation demonstrated to me that there was nothing missing from them. Even the wretched match-box which I really hoped was gone turned up in a drawer after I had, delightedly, given it up. It was a great blow. She might have taken that at least! She knew I used to carry it about with me constantly while ashore. She might have taken it! Apparently she meant that there should be no bond left even of that kind; and yet it was a long time before I gave up visiting and revisiting all the corners of all possible receptacles for something that she might have left behind on purpose. It was like the mania of those disordered minds who spend their days hunting for a treasure. I hoped for a forgotten

hairpin, for some tiny piece of ribbon. Sometimes at night I reflected that such hopes were altogether insensate; but I remember once getting up at two in the morning to search for a little cardboard box in the bathroom, into which, I remembered, I had not looked before. Of course it was empty; and, anyway, Rita could not possibly have known of its existence. I got back to bed shivering violently, though the night was warm, and with a distinct impression that this thing would end by making me mad. It was no longer a question of "this sort of thing" killing me. The moral atmosphere of this torture was different. It would make me mad. And at that thought great shudders ran down my prone body, because, once, I had visited a famous lunatic asylum where they had shown me a poor wretch who was mad, apparently, because he thought he had been abominably fooled by a woman. They told me that his grievance was quite imaginary. He was a young man with a thin fair beard, huddled up on the edge of his bed, hugging himself forlornly; and his incessant and lamentable wailing filled the long bare corridor, striking a chill into one's heart long before one came to the door of his cell.

And there was no one from whom I could hear, to whom I could speak, with whom I could evoke the image of Rita. Of course I could utter that word of four letters to Therese; but Therese for some reason took it into her head to avoid all topics connected with her sister. I felt as if I could pull out great handfuls of her hair hidden modestly under the black handkerchief of which the ends were sometimes tied under her chin. But, really, I could not have given her any intelligible excuse for that outrage. Moreover, she was very busy from the very top to the very bottom of the house, which she persisted in running alone because she couldn't make up her mind to part with a few francs every month to a servant. It seemed to me that I was no longer such a favourite with her as I used to be. That, strange to say, was exasperating, too. It was as if some idea, some fruitful notion had killed in her all the softer and more humane emotions. She went about with brooms and dusters wearing an air of sanctimonious thoughtfulness.

The man who to a certain extent took my place in Therese's favour was the old father of the dancing girls inhabiting the ground floor. In a tall hat and a well-to-do dark blue overcoat he allowed himself to be button-holed in the hall by Therese who would talk to him interminably with downcast eyes. He smiled gravely down at her, and meanwhile tried to edge towards the front door. I imagine he didn't put a great value on Therese's favour. Our stay in harbour was prolonged this time and I kept indoors like an invalid. One evening I asked that old man to come in and drink and smoke with me in the studio. He made no difficulties to accept, brought his wooden pipe with him, and was very entertaining in a pleasant voice. One couldn't tell whether he was an uncommon person or simply a ruffian, but in any case with his white beard he looked quite venerable. Naturally he couldn't give me much of his company as he had to look closely after his girls and their admirers; not that the girls were unduly frivolous, but of course being very young they had no experience. They were friendly creatures with pleasant, merry voices and he was very much devoted to them. He was

a muscular man with a high colour and silvery locks curling round his bald pate and over his ears, like a barocco apostle. I had an idea that he had had a lurid past and had seen some fighting in his youth. The admirers of the two girls stood in great awe of him, from instinct no doubt, because his behaviour to them was friendly and even somewhat obsequious, yet always with a certain truculent glint in his eye that made them pause in everything but their generosity — which was encouraged. I sometimes wondered whether those two careless, merry hard-working creatures understood the secret moral beauty of the situation.

My real company was the dummy in the studio and I can't say it was exactly satisfying. After taking possession of the studio I had raised it tenderly, dusted its mangled limbs and insensible, hard-wood bosom, and then had propped it up in a corner where it seemed to take on, of itself, a shy attitude. I knew its history. It was not an ordinary dummy. One day, talking with Doña Rita about her sister, I had told her that I thought Therese used to knock it down on purpose with a broom, and Doña Rita had laughed very much. This, she had said, was an instance of dislike from mere instinct. That dummy had been made to measure years before. It had to wear for days and days the Imperial Byzantine robes in which Doña Rita sat only once or twice herself; but of course the folds and bends of the stuff had to be preserved as in the first sketch. Doña Rita described amusingly how she had to stand in the middle of her room while Rose walked around her with a tape measure noting the figures down on a small piece of paper which was then sent to the maker, who presently returned it with an angry letter stating that those proportions were altogether impossible in any woman. Apparently Rose had muddled them all up; and it was a long time before the figure was finished and sent to the Pavilion in a long basket to take on itself the robes and the hieratic pose of the Empress. Later, it wore with the same patience the marvellous hat of the "Girl in the Hat." But Doña Rita couldn't understand how the poor thing ever found its way to Marseilles minus its turnip head. Probably it came down with the robes and a quantity of precious brocades which she herself had sent down from Paris. The knowledge of its origin, the contempt of Captain Blunt's references to it, with Therese's shocked dislike of the dummy, invested that summary reproduction with a sort of charm, gave me a faint and miserable illusion of the original, less artificial than a photograph, less precise, too. . . . But it can't be explained. I felt positively friendly to it as if it had been Rita's trusted personal attendant. I even went so far as to discover that it had a sort of grace of its own. But I never went so far as to address set speeches to it where it lurked shyly in its corner, or drag it out from there for contemplation. I left it in peace. I wasn't mad. I was only convinced that I soon would be.

Chapter 2

Notwithstanding my misanthropy I had to see a few people on account of all these Royalist affairs which I couldn't very well drop, and in truth did not wish to drop. They

were my excuse for remaining in Europe, which somehow I had not the strength of mind to leave for the West Indies, or elsewhere. On the other hand, my adventurous pursuit kept me in contact with the sea where I found occupation, protection, consolation, the mental relief of grappling with concrete problems, the sanity one acquires from close contact with simple mankind, a little self-confidence born from the dealings with the elemental powers of nature. I couldn't give all that up. And besides all this was related to Doña Rita. I had, as it were, received it all from her own hand, from that hand the clasp of which was as frank as a man's and yet conveyed a unique sensation. The very memory of it would go through me like a wave of heat. It was over that hand that we first got into the habit of quarrelling, with the irritability of sufferers from some obscure pain and yet half unconscious of their disease. Rita's own spirit hovered over the troubled waters of Legitimacy. But as to the sound of the four magic letters of her name I was not very likely to hear it fall sweetly on my ear. For instance, the distinguished personality in the world of finance with whom I had to confer several times, alluded to the irresistible seduction of the power which reigned over my heart and my mind; which had a mysterious and unforgettable face, the brilliance of sunshine together with the unfathomable splendour of the night as — Madame de Lastaola. That's how that steel-grey man called the greatest mystery of the universe. When uttering that assumed name he would make for himself a guardedly solemn and reserved face as though he were afraid lest I should presume to smile, lest he himself should venture to smile, and the sacred formality of our relations should be outraged beyond mending.

He would refer in a studiously grave tone to Madame de Lastaola's wishes, plans, activities, instructions, movements; or picking up a letter from the usual litter of paper found on such men's desks, glance at it to refresh his memory; and, while the very sight of the handwriting would make my lips go dry, would ask me in a bloodless voice whether perchance I had "a direct communication from — er — Paris lately." And there would be other maddening circumstances connected with those visits. He would treat me as a serious person having a clear view of certain eventualities, while at the very moment my vision could see nothing but streaming across the wall at his back, abundant and misty, unearthly and adorable, a mass of tawny hair that seemed to have hot sparks tangled in it. Another nuisance was the atmosphere of Royalism, of Legitimacy, that pervaded the room, thin as air, intangible, as though no Legitimist of flesh and blood had ever existed to the man's mind except perhaps myself. He, of course, was just simply a banker, a very distinguished, a very influential, and a very impeccable banker. He persisted also in deferring to my judgment and sense with an over-emphasis called out by his perpetual surprise at my youth. Though he had seen me many times (I even knew his wife) he could never get over my immature age. He himself was born about fifty years old, all complete, with his iron-grey whiskers and his bilious eyes, which he had the habit of frequently closing during a conversation. On one occasion he said to me. "By the by, the Marquis of Villarel is here for a time. He inquired after you the last time he called on me. May I let him know that you are in town?"

I didn't say anything to that. The Marquis of Villarel was the Don Rafael of Rita's own story. What had I to do with Spanish grandees? And for that matter what had she, the woman of all time, to do with all the villainous or splendid disguises human dust takes upon itself? All this was in the past, and I was acutely aware that for me there was no present, no future, nothing but a hollow pain, a vain passion of such magnitude that being locked up within my breast it gave me an illusion of lonely greatness with my miserable head uplifted amongst the stars. But when I made up my mind (which I did quickly, to be done with it) to call on the banker's wife, almost the first thing she said to me was that the Marquis de Villarel was "amongst us." She said it joyously. If in her husband's room at the bank legitimism was a mere unpopulated principle, in her salon Legitimacy was nothing but persons. "Il m'a causé beaucoup de vous," she said as if there had been a joke in it of which I ought to be proud. I slunk away from her. I couldn't believe that the grandee had talked to her about me. I had never felt myself part of the great Royalist enterprise. I confess that I was so indifferent to everything, so profoundly demoralized, that having once got into that drawing-room I hadn't the strength to get away; though I could see perfectly well my volatile hostess going from one to another of her acquaintances in order to tell them with a little gesture, "Look! Over there — in that corner. That's the notorious Monsieur George." At last she herself drove me out by coming to sit by me vivaciously and going into ecstasies over "ce cher Monsieur Mills" and that magnificent Lord X; and ultimately, with a perfectly odious snap in the eyes and drop in the voice, dragging in the name of Madame de Lastaola and asking me whether I was really so much in the confidence of that astonishing person. "Vous devez bien regretter son départ pour Paris," she cooed, looking with affected bashfulness at her fan. . . . How I got out of the room I really don't know. There was also a staircase. I did not fall down it head first — that much I am certain of; and I also remember that I wandered for a long time about the seashore and went home very late, by the way of the Prado, giving in passing a fearful glance at the Villa. It showed not a gleam of light through the thin foliage of its trees.

I spent the next day with Dominic on board the little craft watching the shipwrights at work on her deck. From the way they went about their business those men must have been perfectly sane; and I felt greatly refreshed by my company during the day. Dominic, too, devoted himself to his business, but his taciturnity was sardonic. Then I dropped in at the café and Madame Léonore's loud "Eh, Signorino, here you are at last!" pleased me by its resonant friendliness. But I found the sparkle of her black eyes as she sat down for a moment opposite me while I was having my drink rather difficult to bear. That man and that woman seemed to know something. What did they know? At parting she pressed my hand significantly. What did she mean? But I didn't feel offended by these manifestations. The souls within these people's breasts were not volatile in the manner of slightly scented and inflated bladders. Neither had they the impervious skins which seem the rule in the fine world that wants only to get on. Somehow they had sensed that there was something wrong; and whatever impression

they might have formed for themselves I had the certitude that it would not be for them a matter of grins at my expense.

That day on returning home I found Therese looking out for me, a very unusual occurrence of late. She handed me a card bearing the name of the Marquis de Villarel.

“How did you come by this?” I asked. She turned on at once the tap of her volubility and I was not surprised to learn that the grandee had not done such an extraordinary thing as to call upon me in person. A young gentleman had brought it. Such a nice young gentleman, she interjected with her piously ghoulish expression. He was not very tall. He had a very smooth complexion (that woman was incorrigible) and a nice, tiny black moustache. Therese was sure that he must have been an officer en las filas legitimas. With that notion in her head she had asked him about the welfare of that other model of charm and elegance, Captain Blunt. To her extreme surprise the charming young gentleman with beautiful eyes had apparently never heard of Blunt. But he seemed very much interested in his surroundings, looked all round the hall, noted the costly wood of the door panels, paid some attention to the silver statuette holding up the defective gas burner at the foot of the stairs, and, finally, asked whether this was in very truth the house of the most excellent Señora Doña Rita de Lastaola. The question staggered Therese, but with great presence of mind she answered the young gentleman that she didn’t know what excellence there was about it, but that the house was her property, having been given to her by her own sister. At this the young gentleman looked both puzzled and angry, turned on his heel, and got back into his fiacre. Why should people be angry with a poor girl who had never done a single reprehensible thing in her whole life?

“I suppose our Rita does tell people awful lies about her poor sister.” She sighed deeply (she had several kinds of sighs and this was the hopeless kind) and added reflectively, “Sin on sin, wickedness on wickedness! And the longer she lives the worse it will be. It would be better for our Rita to be dead.”

I told “Mademoiselle Therese” that it was really impossible to tell whether she was more stupid or atrocious; but I wasn’t really very much shocked. These outbursts did not signify anything in Therese. One got used to them. They were merely the expression of her rapacity and her righteousness; so that our conversation ended by my asking her whether she had any dinner ready for me that evening.

“What’s the good of getting you anything to eat, my dear young Monsieur,” she quizzed me tenderly. “You just only peck like a little bird. Much better let me save the money for you.” It will show the super-terrestrial nature of my misery when I say that I was quite surprised at Therese’s view of my appetite. Perhaps she was right. I certainly did not know. I stared hard at her and in the end she admitted that the dinner was in fact ready that very moment.

The new young gentleman within Therese’s horizon didn’t surprise me very much. Villarel would travel with some sort of suite, a couple of secretaries at least. I had heard enough of Carlist headquarters to know that the man had been (very likely was still) Captain General of the Royal Bodyguard and was a person of great political (and

domestic) influence at Court. The card was, under its social form, a mere command to present myself before the grandee. No Royalist devoted by conviction, as I must have appeared to him, could have mistaken the meaning. I put the card in my pocket and after dining or not dining — I really don't remember — spent the evening smoking in the studio, pursuing thoughts of tenderness and grief, visions exalting and cruel. From time to time I looked at the dummy. I even got up once from the couch on which I had been writhing like a worm and walked towards it as if to touch it, but refrained, not from sudden shame but from sheer despair. By and by Therese drifted in. It was then late and, I imagine, she was on her way to bed. She looked the picture of cheerful, rustic innocence and started propounding to me a conundrum which began with the words:

“If our Rita were to die before long . . .”

She didn't get any further because I had jumped up and frightened her by shouting: “Is she ill? What has happened? Have you had a letter?”

She had had a letter. I didn't ask her to show it to me, though I daresay she would have done so. I had an idea that there was no meaning in anything, at least no meaning that mattered. But the interruption had made Therese apparently forget her sinister conundrum. She observed me with her shrewd, unintelligent eyes for a bit, and then with the fatuous remark about the Law being just she left me to the horrors of the studio. I believe I went to sleep there from sheer exhaustion. Some time during the night I woke up chilled to the bone and in the dark. These were horrors and no mistake. I dragged myself upstairs to bed past the indefatigable statuette holding up the ever-miserable light. The black-and-white hall was like an ice-house.

The main consideration which induced me to call on the Marquis of Villarel was the fact that after all I was a discovery of Doña Rita's, her own recruit. My fidelity and steadfastness had been guaranteed by her and no one else. I couldn't bear the idea of her being criticized by every empty-headed chatterer belonging to the Cause. And as, apart from that, nothing mattered much, why, then — I would get this over.

But it appeared that I had not reflected sufficiently on all the consequences of that step. First of all the sight of the Villa looking shabbily cheerful in the sunshine (but not containing her any longer) was so perturbing that I very nearly went away from the gate. Then when I got in after much hesitation — being admitted by the man in the green baize apron who recognized me — the thought of entering that room, out of which she was gone as completely as if she had been dead, gave me such an emotion that I had to steady myself against the table till the faintness was past. Yet I was irritated as at a treason when the man in the baize apron instead of letting me into the Pompeiian dining-room crossed the hall to another door not at all in the Pompeiian style (more Louis XV rather — that Villa was like a *Salade Russe* of styles) and introduced me into a big, light room full of very modern furniture. The portrait en pied of an officer in a sky-blue uniform hung on the end wall. The officer had a small head, a black beard cut square, a robust body, and leaned with gauntleted hands on the simple hilt of a straight sword. That striking picture dominated a massive mahogany

desk, and, in front of this desk, a very roomy, tall-backed armchair of dark green velvet. I thought I had been announced into an empty room till glancing along the extremely loud carpet I detected a pair of feet under the armchair.

I advanced towards it and discovered a little man, who had made no sound or movement till I came into his view, sunk deep in the green velvet. He altered his position slowly and rested his hollow, black, quietly burning eyes on my face in prolonged scrutiny. I detected something comminatory in his yellow, emaciated countenance, but I believe now he was simply startled by my youth. I bowed profoundly. He extended a meagre little hand.

“Take a chair, Don Jorge.”

He was very small, frail, and thin, but his voice was not languid, though he spoke hardly above his breath. Such was the envelope and the voice of the fanatical soul belonging to the Grand-master of Ceremonies and Captain General of the Bodyguard at the Headquarters of the Legitimist Court, now detached on a special mission. He was all fidelity, inflexibility, and sombre conviction, but like some great saints he had very little body to keep all these merits in.

“You are very young,” he remarked, to begin with. “The matters on which I desired to converse with you are very grave.”

“I was under the impression that your Excellency wished to see me at once. But if your Excellency prefers it I will return in, say, seven years’ time when I may perhaps be old enough to talk about grave matters.”

He didn’t stir hand or foot and not even the quiver of an eyelid proved that he had heard my shockingly unbecoming retort.

“You have been recommended to us by a noble and loyal lady, in whom His Majesty — whom God preserve — reposes an entire confidence. God will reward her as she deserves and you, too, Señor, according to the disposition you bring to this great work which has the blessing (here he crossed himself) of our Holy Mother the Church.”

“I suppose your Excellency understands that in all this I am not looking for reward of any kind.”

At this he made a faint, almost ethereal grimace.

“I was speaking of the spiritual blessing which rewards the service of religion and will be of benefit to your soul,” he explained with a slight touch of acidity. “The other is perfectly understood and your fidelity is taken for granted. His Majesty — whom God preserve — has been already pleased to signify his satisfaction with your services to the most noble and loyal Doña Rita by a letter in his own hand.”

Perhaps he expected me to acknowledge this announcement in some way, speech, or bow, or something, because before my immobility he made a slight movement in his chair which smacked of impatience. “I am afraid, Señor, that you are affected by the spirit of scoffing and irreverence which pervades this unhappy country of France in which both you and I are strangers, I believe. Are you a young man of that sort?”

“I am a very good gun-runner, your Excellency,” I answered quietly.

He bowed his head gravely. "We are aware. But I was looking for the motives which ought to have their pure source in religion."

"I must confess frankly that I have not reflected on my motives," I said. "It is enough for me to know that they are not dishonourable and that anybody can see they are not the motives of an adventurer seeking some sordid advantage."

He had listened patiently and when he saw that there was nothing more to come he ended the discussion.

"Señor, we should reflect upon our motives. It is salutary for our conscience and is recommended (he crossed himself) by our Holy Mother the Church. I have here certain letters from Paris on which I would consult your young sagacity which is accredited to us by the most loyal Doña Rita."

The sound of that name on his lips was simply odious. I was convinced that this man of forms and ceremonies and fanatical royalism was perfectly heartless. Perhaps he reflected on his motives; but it seemed to me that his conscience could be nothing else but a monstrous thing which very few actions could disturb appreciably. Yet for the credit of Doña Rita I did not withhold from him my young sagacity. What he thought of it I don't know. The matters we discussed were not of course of high policy, though from the point of view of the war in the south they were important enough. We agreed on certain things to be done, and finally, always out of regard for Doña Rita's credit, I put myself generally at his disposition or of any Carlist agent he would appoint in his place; for I did not suppose that he would remain very long in Marseilles. He got out of the chair laboriously, like a sick child might have done. The audience was over but he noticed my eyes wandering to the portrait and he said in his measured, breathed-out tones:

"I owe the pleasure of having this admirable work here to the gracious attention of Madame de Lastaola, who, knowing my attachment to the royal person of my Master, has sent it down from Paris to greet me in this house which has been given up for my occupation also through her generosity to the Royal Cause. Unfortunately she, too, is touched by the infection of this irreverent and unfaithful age. But she is young yet. She is young."

These last words were pronounced in a strange tone of menace as though he were supernaturally aware of some suspended disasters. With his burning eyes he was the image of an Inquisitor with an unconquerable soul in that frail body. But suddenly he dropped his eyelids and the conversation finished as characteristically as it had begun: with a slow, dismissing inclination of the head and an "Adios, Señor — may God guard you from sin."

Chapter 3

I must say that for the next three months I threw myself into my unlawful trade with a sort of desperation, dogged and hopeless, like a fairly decent fellow who takes

deliberately to drink. The business was getting dangerous. The bands in the South were not very well organized, worked with no very definite plan, and now were beginning to be pretty closely hunted. The arrangements for the transport of supplies were going to pieces; our friends ashore were getting scared; and it was no joke to find after a day of skilful dodging that there was no one at the landing place and have to go out again with our compromising cargo, to slink and lurk about the coast for another week or so, unable to trust anybody and looking at every vessel we met with suspicion. Once we were ambushed by a lot of "rascally Carabineers," as Dominic called them, who hid themselves among the rocks after disposing a train of mules well in view on the seashore. Luckily, on evidence which I could never understand, Dominic detected something suspicious. Perhaps it was by virtue of some sixth sense that men born for unlawful occupations may be gifted with. "There is a smell of treachery about this," he remarked suddenly, turning at his oar. (He and I were pulling alone in a little boat to reconnoitre.) I couldn't detect any smell and I regard to this day our escape on that occasion as, properly speaking, miraculous. Surely some supernatural power must have struck upwards the barrels of the Carabineers' rifles, for they missed us by yards. And as the Carabineers have the reputation of shooting straight, Dominic, after swearing most horribly, ascribed our escape to the particular guardian angel that looks after crazy young gentlemen. Dominic believed in angels in a conventional way, but laid no claim to having one of his own. Soon afterwards, while sailing quietly at night, we found ourselves suddenly near a small coasting vessel, also without lights, which all at once treated us to a volley of rifle fire. Dominic's mighty and inspired yell: "A plat ventre!" and also an unexpected roll to windward saved all our lives. Nobody got a scratch. We were past in a moment and in a breeze then blowing we had the heels of anything likely to give us chase. But an hour afterwards, as we stood side by side peering into the darkness, Dominic was heard to mutter through his teeth: "Le métier se gâte." I, too, had the feeling that the trade, if not altogether spoiled, had seen its best days. But I did not care. In fact, for my purpose it was rather better, a more potent influence; like the stronger intoxication of raw spirit. A volley in the dark after all was not such a bad thing. Only a moment before we had received it, there, in that calm night of the sea full of freshness and soft whispers, I had been looking at an enchanting turn of a head in a faint light of its own, the tawny hair with snared red sparks brushed up from the nape of a white neck and held up on high by an arrow of gold feathered with brilliants and with ruby gleams all along its shaft. That jewelled ornament, which I remember often telling Rita was of a very Philistinish conception (it was in some way connected with a tortoiseshell comb) occupied an undue place in my memory, tried to come into some sort of significance even in my sleep. Often I dreamed of her with white limbs shimmering in the gloom like a nymph haunting a riot of foliage, and raising a perfect round arm to take an arrow of gold out of her hair to throw it at me by hand, like a dart. It came on, a whizzing trail of light, but I always woke up before it struck. Always. Invariably. It never had a chance. A volley of small arms was much more likely to do the business some day — or night.

At last came the day when everything slipped out of my grasp. The little vessel, broken and gone like the only toy of a lonely child, the sea itself, which had swallowed it, throwing me on shore after a shipwreck that instead of a fair fight left in me the memory of a suicide. It took away all that there was in me of independent life, but just failed to take me out of the world, which looked then indeed like Another World fit for no one else but unrepentant sinners. Even Dominic failed me, his moral entity destroyed by what to him was a most tragic ending of our common enterprise. The lurid swiftness of it all was like a stunning thunder-clap — and, one evening, I found myself weary, heartsore, my brain still dazed and with awe in my heart entering Marseilles by way of the railway station, after many adventures, one more disagreeable than another, involving privations, great exertions, a lot of difficulties with all sorts of people who looked upon me evidently more as a discreditable vagabond deserving the attentions of gendarmes than a respectable (if crazy) young gentleman attended by a guardian angel of his own. I must confess that I slunk out of the railway station shunning its many lights as if, invariably, failure made an outcast of a man. I hadn't any money in my pocket. I hadn't even the bundle and the stick of a destitute wayfarer. I was unshaven and unwashed, and my heart was faint within me. My attire was such that I daren't approach the rank of fiacres, where indeed I could perceive only two pairs of lamps, of which one suddenly drove away while I looked. The other I gave up to the fortunate of this earth. I didn't believe in my power of persuasion. I had no powers. I slunk on and on, shivering with cold, through the uproarious streets. Bedlam was loose in them. It was the time of Carnival.

Small objects of no value have the secret of sticking to a man in an astonishing way. I had nearly lost my liberty and even my life, I had lost my ship, a money-belt full of gold, I had lost my companions, had parted from my friend; my occupation, my only link with life, my touch with the sea, my cap and jacket were gone — but a small penknife and a latchkey had never parted company with me. With the latchkey I opened the door of refuge. The hall wore its deaf-and-dumb air, its black-and-white stillness.

The sickly gas-jet still struggled bravely with adversity at the end of the raised silver arm of the statuette which had kept to a hair's breadth its graceful pose on the toes of its left foot; and the staircase lost itself in the shadows above. There was parsimonious with the lights. To see all this was surprising. It seemed to me that all the things I had known ought to have come down with a crash at the moment of the final catastrophe on the Spanish coast. And there was Therese herself descending the stairs, frightened but plucky. Perhaps she thought that she would be murdered this time for certain. She had a strange, unemotional conviction that the house was particularly convenient for a crime. One could never get to the bottom of her wild notions which she held with the stolidity of a peasant allied to the outward serenity of a nun. She quaked all over as she came down to her doom, but when she recognized me she got such a shock that she sat down suddenly on the lowest step. She did not

expect me for another week at least, and, besides, she explained, the state I was in made her blood take "one turn."

Indeed my plight seemed either to have called out or else repressed her true nature. But who had ever fathomed her nature! There was none of her treacly volubility. There were none of her "dear young gentlemen" and "poor little hearts" and references to sin. In breathless silence she ran about the house getting my room ready, lighting fires and gas-jets and even hauling at me to help me up the stairs. Yes, she did lay hands on me for that charitable purpose. They trembled. Her pale eyes hardly left my face. "What brought you here like this?" she whispered once.

"If I were to tell you, Mademoiselle Therese, you would see there the hand of God."

She dropped the extra pillow she was carrying and then nearly fell over it. "Oh, dear heart," she murmured, and ran off to the kitchen.

I sank into bed as into a cloud and Therese reappeared very misty and offering me something in a cup. I believe it was hot milk, and after I drank it she took the cup and stood looking at me fixedly. I managed to say with difficulty: "Go away," whereupon she vanished as if by magic before the words were fairly out of my mouth. Immediately afterwards the sunlight forced through the slats of the jalousies its diffused glow, and Therese was there again as if by magic, saying in a distant voice: "It's midday". . . Youth will have its rights. I had slept like a stone for seventeen hours.

I suppose an honourable bankrupt would know such an awakening: the sense of catastrophe, the shrinking from the necessity of beginning life again, the faint feeling that there are misfortunes which must be paid for by a hanging. In the course of the morning Therese informed me that the apartment usually occupied by Mr. Blunt was vacant and added mysteriously that she intended to keep it vacant for a time, because she had been instructed to do so. I couldn't imagine why Blunt should wish to return to Marseilles. She told me also that the house was empty except for myself and the two dancing girls with their father. Those people had been away for some time as the girls had engagements in some Italian summer theatres, but apparently they had secured a re-engagement for the winter and were now back. I let Therese talk because it kept my imagination from going to work on subjects which, I had made up my mind, were no concern of mine. But I went out early to perform an unpleasant task. It was only proper that I should let the Carlist agent ensconced in the Prado Villa know of the sudden ending of my activities. It would be grave enough news for him, and I did not like to be its bearer for reasons which were mainly personal. I resembled Dominic in so far that I, too, disliked failure.

The Marquis of Villarel had of course gone long before. The man who was there was another type of Carlist altogether, and his temperament was that of a trader. He was the chief purveyor of the Legitimist armies, an honest broker of stores, and enjoyed a great reputation for cleverness. His important task kept him, of course, in France, but his young wife, whose beauty and devotion to her King were well known, represented him worthily at Headquarters, where his own appearances were extremely rare. The dissimilar but united loyalties of those two people had been rewarded by the title

of baron and the ribbon of some order or other. The gossip of the Legitimist circles appreciated those favours with smiling indulgence. He was the man who had been so distressed and frightened by Doña Rita's first visit to Tolosa. He had an extreme regard for his wife. And in that sphere of clashing arms and unceasing intrigue nobody would have smiled then at his agitation if the man himself hadn't been somewhat grotesque.

He must have been startled when I sent in my name, for he didn't of course expect to see me yet — nobody expected me. He advanced soft-footed down the room. With his jutting nose, flat-topped skull and sable garments he recalled an obese raven, and when he heard of the disaster he manifested his astonishment and concern in a most plebeian manner by a low and expressive whistle. I, of course, could not share his consternation. My feelings in that connection were of a different order; but I was annoyed at his unintelligent stare.

"I suppose," I said, "you will take it on yourself to advise Doña Rita, who is greatly interested in this affair."

"Yes, but I was given to understand that Madame de Lastaola was to leave Paris either yesterday or this morning."

It was my turn to stare dumbly before I could manage to ask: "For Tolosa?" in a very knowing tone.

Whether it was the droop of his head, play of light, or some other subtle cause, his nose seemed to have grown perceptibly longer.

"That, Señor, is the place where the news has got to be conveyed without undue delay," he said in an agitated wheeze. "I could, of course, telegraph to our agent in Bayonne who would find a messenger. But I don't like, I don't like! The Alphonists have agents, too, who hang about the telegraph offices. It's no use letting the enemy get that news."

He was obviously very confused, unhappy, and trying to think of two different things at once.

"Sit down, Don George, sit down." He absolutely forced a cigar on me. "I am extremely distressed. That — I mean Doña Rita is undoubtedly on her way to Tolosa. This is very frightful."

I must say, however, that there was in the man some sense of duty. He mastered his private fears. After some cogitation he murmured: "There is another way of getting the news to Headquarters. Suppose you write me a formal letter just stating the facts, the unfortunate facts, which I will be able to forward. There is an agent of ours, a fellow I have been employing for purchasing supplies, a perfectly honest man. He is coming here from the north by the ten o'clock train with some papers for me of a confidential nature. I was rather embarrassed about it. It wouldn't do for him to get into any sort of trouble. He is not very intelligent. I wonder, Don George, whether you would consent to meet him at the station and take care of him generally till to-morrow. I don't like the idea of him going about alone. Then, to-morrow night, we would send him on to Tolosa by the west coast route, with the news; and then he can also call on Doña Rita who will no doubt be already there. . . ." He became again distracted all

in a moment and actually went so far as to wring his fat hands. "Oh, yes, she will be there!" he exclaimed in most pathetic accents.

I was not in the humour to smile at anything, and he must have been satisfied with the gravity with which I beheld his extraordinary antics. My mind was very far away. I thought: Why not? Why shouldn't I also write a letter to Doña Rita, telling her that now nothing stood in the way of my leaving Europe, because, really, the enterprise couldn't be begun again; that things that come to an end can never be begun again. The idea — never again — had complete possession of my mind. I could think of nothing else. Yes, I would write. The worthy Commissary General of the Carlist forces was under the impression that I was looking at him; but what I had in my eye was a jumble of butterfly women and winged youths and the soft sheen of Argand lamps gleaming on an arrow of gold in the hair of a head that seemed to evade my outstretched hand.

"Oh, yes," I said, "I have nothing to do and even nothing to think of just now, I will meet your man as he gets off the train at ten o'clock to-night. What's he like?"

"Oh, he has a black moustache and whiskers, and his chin is shaved," said the newly-fledged baron cordially. "A very honest fellow. I always found him very useful. His name is José Ortega."

He was perfectly self-possessed now, and walking soft-footed accompanied me to the door of the room. He shook hands with a melancholy smile. "This is a very frightful situation. My poor wife will be quite distracted. She is such a patriot. Many thanks, Don George. You relieve me greatly. The fellow is rather stupid and rather bad-tempered. Queer creature, but very honest! Oh, very honest!"

Chapter 4

It was the last evening of Carnival. The same masks, the same yells, the same mad rushes, the same bedlam of disguised humanity blowing about the streets in the great gusts of mistral that seemed to make them dance like dead leaves on an earth where all joy is watched by death.

It was exactly twelve months since that other carnival evening when I had felt a little weary and a little lonely but at peace with all mankind. It must have been — to a day or two. But on this evening it wasn't merely loneliness that I felt. I felt bereaved with a sense of a complete and universal loss in which there was perhaps more resentment than mourning; as if the world had not been taken away from me by an august decree but filched from my innocence by an underhand fate at the very moment when it had disclosed to my passion its warm and generous beauty. This consciousness of universal loss had this advantage that it induced something resembling a state of philosophic indifference. I walked up to the railway station caring as little for the cold blasts of wind as though I had been going to the scaffold. The delay of the train did not irritate me in the least. I had finally made up my mind to write a letter to Doña Rita; and

this “honest fellow” for whom I was waiting would take it to her. He would have no difficulty in Tolosa in finding Madame de Lastaola. The General Headquarters, which was also a Court, would be buzzing with comments on her presence. Most likely that “honest fellow” was already known to Doña Rita. For all I knew he might have been her discovery just as I was. Probably I, too, was regarded as an “honest fellow” enough; but stupid — since it was clear that my luck was not inexhaustible. I hoped that while carrying my letter the man would not let himself be caught by some Alphonsist guerilla who would, of course, shoot him. But why should he? I, for instance, had escaped with my life from a much more dangerous enterprise than merely passing through the frontier line in charge of some trustworthy guide. I pictured the fellow to myself trudging over the stony slopes and scrambling down wild ravines with my letter to Doña Rita in his pocket. It would be such a letter of farewell as no lover had ever written, no woman in the world had ever read, since the beginning of love on earth. It would be worthy of the woman. No experience, no memories, no dead traditions of passion or language would inspire it. She herself would be its sole inspiration. She would see her own image in it as in a mirror; and perhaps then she would understand what it was I was saying farewell to on the very threshold of my life. A breath of vanity passed through my brain. A letter as moving as her mere existence was moving would be something unique. I regretted I was not a poet.

I woke up to a great noise of feet, a sudden influx of people through the doors of the platform. I made out my man’s whiskers at once — not that they were enormous, but because I had been warned beforehand of their existence by the excellent Commissary General. At first I saw nothing of him but his whiskers: they were black and cut somewhat in the shape of a shark’s fin and so very fine that the least breath of air animated them into a sort of playful restlessness. The man’s shoulders were hunched up and when he had made his way clear of the throng of passengers I perceived him as an unhappy and shivery being. Obviously he didn’t expect to be met, because when I murmured an enquiring, “Señor Ortega?” into his ear he swerved away from me and nearly dropped a little handbag he was carrying. His complexion was uniformly pale, his mouth was red, but not engaging. His social status was not very definite. He was wearing a dark blue overcoat of no particular cut, his aspect had no relief; yet those restless side-whiskers flanking his red mouth and the suspicious expression of his black eyes made him noticeable. This I regretted the more because I caught sight of two skulking fellows, looking very much like policemen in plain clothes, watching us from a corner of the great hall. I hurried my man into a fiacre. He had been travelling from early morning on cross-country lines and after we got on terms a little confessed to being very hungry and cold. His red lips trembled and I noted an underhand, cynical curiosity when he had occasion to raise his eyes to my face. I was in some doubt how to dispose of him but as we rolled on at a jog trot I came to the conclusion that the best thing to do would be to organize for him a shake-down in the studio. Obscure lodging houses are precisely the places most looked after by the police, and even the best hotels are bound to keep a register of arrivals. I was very anxious that nothing

should stop his projected mission of courier to headquarters. As we passed various street corners where the mistral blast struck at us fiercely I could feel him shivering by my side. However, Therese would have lighted the iron stove in the studio before retiring for the night, and, anyway, I would have to turn her out to make up a bed on the couch. Service of the King! I must say that she was amiable and didn't seem to mind anything one asked her to do. Thus while the fellow slumbered on the divan I would sit upstairs in my room setting down on paper those great words of passion and sorrow that seethed in my brain and even must have forced themselves in murmurs on to my lips, because the man by my side suddenly asked me: "What did you say?" — "Nothing," I answered, very much surprised. In the shifting light of the street lamps he looked the picture of bodily misery with his chattering teeth and his whiskers blown back flat over his ears. But somehow he didn't arouse my compassion. He was swearing to himself, in French and Spanish, and I tried to soothe him by the assurance that we had not much farther to go. "I am starving," he remarked acidly, and I felt a little compunction. Clearly, the first thing to do was to feed him. We were then entering the Cannebière and as I didn't care to show myself with him in the fashionable restaurant where a new face (and such a face, too) would be remarked, I pulled up the fiacre at the door of the Maison Dorée. That was more of a place of general resort where, in the multitude of casual patrons, he would pass unnoticed.

For this last night of carnival the big house had decorated all its balconies with rows of coloured paper lanterns right up to the roof. I led the way to the grand salon, for as to private rooms they had been all retained days before. There was a great crowd of people in costume, but by a piece of good luck we managed to secure a little table in a corner. The revellers, intent on their pleasure, paid no attention to us. Señor Ortega trod on my heels and after sitting down opposite me threw an ill-natured glance at the festive scene. It might have been about half-past ten, then.

Two glasses of wine he drank one after another did not improve his temper. He only ceased to shiver. After he had eaten something it must have occurred to him that he had no reason to bear me a grudge and he tried to assume a civil and even friendly manner. His mouth, however, betrayed an abiding bitterness. I mean when he smiled. In repose it was a very expressionless mouth, only it was too red to be altogether ordinary. The whole of him was like that: the whiskers too black, the hair too shiny, the forehead too white, the eyes too mobile; and he lent you his attention with an air of eagerness which made you uncomfortable. He seemed to expect you to give yourself away by some unconsidered word that he would snap up with delight. It was that peculiarity that somehow put me on my guard. I had no idea who I was facing across the table and as a matter of fact I did not care. All my impressions were blurred; and even the promptings of my instinct were the haziest thing imaginable. Now and then I had acute hallucinations of a woman with an arrow of gold in her hair. This caused alternate moments of exaltation and depression from which I tried to take refuge in conversation; but Señor Ortega was not stimulating. He was preoccupied with personal matters. When suddenly he asked me whether I knew why he had been called

away from his work (he had been buying supplies from peasants somewhere in Central France), I answered that I didn't know what the reason was originally, but I had an idea that the present intention was to make of him a courier, bearing certain messages from Baron H. to the Quartel Real in Tolosa.

He glared at me like a basilisk. "And why have I been met like this?" he enquired with an air of being prepared to hear a lie.

I explained that it was the Baron's wish, as a matter of prudence and to avoid any possible trouble which might arise from enquiries by the police.

He took it badly. "What nonsense." He was — he said — an employé (for several years) of Hernandez Brothers in Paris, an importing firm, and he was travelling on their business — as he could prove. He dived into his side pocket and produced a handful of folded papers of all sorts which he plunged back again instantly.

And even then I didn't know whom I had there, opposite me, busy now devouring a slice of pâté de foie gras. Not in the least. It never entered my head. How could it? The Rita that haunted me had no history; she was but the principle of life charged with fatality. Her form was only a mirage of desire decoying one step by step into despair.

Señor Ortega gulped down some more wine and suggested I should tell him who I was. "It's only right I should know," he added.

This could not be gainsaid; and to a man connected with the Carlist organization the shortest way was to introduce myself as that "Monsieur George" of whom he had probably heard.

He leaned far over the table, till his very breast-bone was over the edge, as though his eyes had been stilettos and he wanted to drive them home into my brain. It was only much later that I understood how near death I had been at that moment. But the knives on the tablecloth were the usual restaurant knives with rounded ends and about as deadly as pieces of hoop-iron. Perhaps in the very gust of his fury he remembered what a French restaurant knife is like and something sane within him made him give up the sudden project of cutting my heart out where I sat. For it could have been nothing but a sudden impulse. His settled purpose was quite other. It was not my heart that he was after. His fingers indeed were groping amongst the knife handles by the side of his plate but what captivated my attention for a moment were his red lips which were formed into an odd, sly, insinuating smile. Heard! To be sure he had heard! The chief of the great arms smuggling organization!

"Oh!" I said, "that's giving me too much importance." The person responsible and whom I looked upon as chief of all the business was, as he might have heard, too, a certain noble and loyal lady.

"I am as noble as she is," he snapped peevishly, and I put him down at once as a very offensive beast. "And as to being loyal, what is that? It is being truthful! It is being faithful! I know all about her."

I managed to preserve an air of perfect unconcern. He wasn't a fellow to whom one could talk of Doña Rita.

"You are a Basque," I said.

He admitted rather contemptuously that he was a Basque and even then the truth did not dawn upon me. I suppose that with the hidden egoism of a lover I was thinking of myself, of myself alone in relation to Doña Rita, not of Doña Rita herself. He, too, obviously. He said: "I am an educated man, but I know her people, all peasants. There is a sister, an uncle, a priest, a peasant, too, and perfectly unenlightened. One can't expect much from a priest (I am a free-thinker of course), but he is really too bad, more like a brute beast. As to all her people, mostly dead now, they never were of any account. There was a little land, but they were always working on other people's farms, a barefooted gang, a starved lot. I ought to know because we are distant relations. Twentieth cousins or something of the sort. Yes, I am related to that most loyal lady. And what is she, after all, but a Parisian woman with innumerable lovers, as I have been told."

"I don't think your information is very correct," I said, affecting to yawn slightly. "This is mere gossip of the gutter and I am surprised at you, who really know nothing about it — "

But the disgusting animal had fallen into a brown study. The hair of his very whiskers was perfectly still. I had now given up all idea of the letter to Rita. Suddenly he spoke again:

"Women are the origin of all evil. One should never trust them. They have no honour. No honour!" he repeated, striking his breast with his closed fist on which the knuckles stood out very white. "I left my village many years ago and of course I am perfectly satisfied with my position and I don't know why I should trouble my head about this loyal lady. I suppose that's the way women get on in the world."

I felt convinced that he was no proper person to be a messenger to headquarters. He struck me as altogether untrustworthy and perhaps not quite sane. This was confirmed by him saying suddenly with no visible connection and as if it had been forced from him by some agonizing process: "I was a boy once," and then stopping dead short with a smile. He had a smile that frightened one by its association of malice and anguish.

"Will you have anything more to eat?" I asked.

He declined dully. He had had enough. But he drained the last of a bottle into his glass and accepted a cigar which I offered him. While he was lighting it I had a sort of confused impression that he wasn't such a stranger to me as I had assumed he was; and yet, on the other hand, I was perfectly certain I had never seen him before. Next moment I felt that I could have knocked him down if he hadn't looked so amazingly unhappy, while he came out with the astounding question: "Señor, have you ever been a lover in your young days?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. "How old do you think I am?"

"That's true," he said, gazing at me in a way in which the damned gaze out of their cauldrons of boiling pitch at some soul walking scot free in the place of torment. "It's true, you don't seem to have anything on your mind." He assumed an air of ease, throwing an arm over the back of his chair and blowing the smoke through the gash of his twisted red mouth. "Tell me," he said, "between men, you know, has this

— wonderful celebrity — what does she call herself? How long has she been your mistress?”

I reflected rapidly that if I knocked him over, chair and all, by a sudden blow from the shoulder it would bring about infinite complications beginning with a visit to the Commissaire de Police on night-duty, and ending in God knows what scandal and disclosures of political kind; because there was no telling what, or how much, this outrageous brute might choose to say and how many people he might not involve in a most undesirable publicity. He was smoking his cigar with a poignantly mocking air and not even looking at me. One can't hit like that a man who isn't even looking at one; and then, just as I was looking at him swinging his leg with a caustic smile and stony eyes, I felt sorry for the creature. It was only his body that was there in that chair. It was manifest to me that his soul was absent in some hell of its own. At that moment I attained the knowledge of who it was I had before me. This was the man of whom both Doña Rita and Rose were so much afraid. It remained then for me to look after him for the night and then arrange with Baron H. that he should be sent away the very next day — and anywhere but to Tolosa. Yes, evidently, I mustn't lose sight of him. I proposed in the calmest tone that we should go on where he could get his much-needed rest. He rose with alacrity, picked up his little hand-bag, and, walking out before me, no doubt looked a very ordinary person to all eyes but mine. It was then past eleven, not much, because we had not been in that restaurant quite an hour, but the routine of the town's night-life being upset during the Carnival the usual row of fiacres outside the Maison Dorée was not there; in fact, there were very few carriages about. Perhaps the coachmen had assumed Pierrot costumes and were rushing about the streets on foot yelling with the rest of the population. “We will have to walk,” I said after a while. — “Oh, yes, let us walk,” assented Señor Ortega, “or I will be frozen here.” It was like a plaint of unutterable wretchedness. I had a fancy that all his natural heat had abandoned his limbs and gone to his brain. It was otherwise with me; my head was cool but I didn't find the night really so very cold. We stepped out briskly side by side. My lucid thinking was, as it were, enveloped by the wide shouting of the consecrated Carnival gaiety. I have heard many noises since, but nothing that gave me such an intimate impression of the savage instincts hidden in the breast of mankind; these yells of festivity suggested agonizing fear, rage of murder, ferocity of lust, and the irremediable joylessness of human condition: yet they were emitted by people who were convinced that they were amusing themselves supremely, traditionally, with the sanction of ages, with the approval of their conscience — and no mistake about it whatever! Our appearance, the soberness of our gait made us conspicuous. Once or twice, by common inspiration, masks rushed forward and forming a circle danced round us uttering discordant shouts of derision; for we were an outrage to the peculiar proprieties of the hour, and besides we were obviously lonely and defenceless. On those occasions there was nothing for it but to stand still till the flurry was over. My companion, however, would stamp his feet with rage, and I must admit that I myself regretted not having provided for our wearing a couple of false noses, which

would have been enough to placate the just resentment of those people. We might have also joined in the dance, but for some reason or other it didn't occur to us; and I heard once a high, clear woman's voice stigmatizing us for a "species of swelled heads" (*espèce d'enflés*). We proceeded sedately, my companion muttered with rage, and I was able to resume my thinking. It was based on the deep persuasion that the man at my side was insane with quite another than Carnivalesque lunacy which comes on at one stated time of the year. He was fundamentally mad, though not perhaps completely; which of course made him all the greater, I won't say danger but, nuisance.

I remember once a young doctor expounding the theory that most catastrophes in family circles, surprising episodes in public affairs and disasters in private life, had their origin in the fact that the world was full of half-mad people. He asserted that they were the real majority. When asked whether he considered himself as belonging to the majority, he said frankly that he didn't think so; unless the folly of voicing this view in a company, so utterly unable to appreciate all its horror, could be regarded as the first symptom of his own fate. We shouted down him and his theory, but there is no doubt that it had thrown a chill on the gaiety of our gathering.

We had now entered a quieter quarter of the town and Señor Ortega had ceased his muttering. For myself I had not the slightest doubt of my own sanity. It was proved to me by the way I could apply my intelligence to the problem of what was to be done with Señor Ortega. Generally, he was unfit to be trusted with any mission whatever. The instability of his temper was sure to get him into a scrape. Of course carrying a letter to Headquarters was not a very complicated matter; and as to that I would have trusted willingly a properly trained dog. My private letter to Doña Rita, the wonderful, the unique letter of farewell, I had given up for the present. Naturally I thought of the Ortega problem mainly in the terms of Doña Rita's safety. Her image presided at every council, at every conflict of my mind, and dominated every faculty of my senses. It floated before my eyes, it touched my elbow, it guarded my right side and my left side; my ears seemed to catch the sound of her footsteps behind me, she enveloped me with passing whiffs of warmth and perfume, with filmy touches of the hair on my face. She penetrated me, my head was full of her . . . And his head, too, I thought suddenly with a side glance at my companion. He walked quietly with hunched-up shoulders carrying his little hand-bag and he looked the most commonplace figure imaginable.

Yes. There was between us a most horrible fellowship; the association of his crazy torture with the sublime suffering of my passion. We hadn't been a quarter of an hour together when that woman had surged up fatally between us; between this miserable wretch and myself. We were haunted by the same image. But I was sane! I was sane! Not because I was certain that the fellow must not be allowed to go to Tolosa, but because I was perfectly alive to the difficulty of stopping him from going there, since the decision was absolutely in the hands of Baron H.

If I were to go early in the morning and tell that fat, bilious man: "Look here, your Ortega's mad," he would certainly think at once that I was, get very frightened, and . . . one couldn't tell what course he would take. He would eliminate me somehow out of

the affair. And yet I could not let the fellow proceed to where Doña Rita was, because, obviously, he had been molesting her, had filled her with uneasiness and even alarm, was an unhappy element and a disturbing influence in her life — incredible as the thing appeared! I couldn't let him go on to make himself a worry and a nuisance, drive her out from a town in which she wished to be (for whatever reason) and perhaps start some explosive scandal. And that girl Rose seemed to fear something graver even than a scandal. But if I were to explain the matter fully to H. he would simply rejoice in his heart. Nothing would please him more than to have Doña Rita driven out of Tolosa. What a relief from his anxieties (and his wife's, too); and if I were to go further, if I even went so far as to hint at the fears which Rose had not been able to conceal from me, why then — I went on thinking coldly with a stoical rejection of the most elementary faith in mankind's rectitude — why then, that accommodating husband would simply let the ominous messenger have his chance. He would see there only his natural anxieties being laid to rest for ever. Horrible? Yes. But I could not take the risk. In a twelvemonth I had travelled a long way in my mistrust of mankind.

We paced on steadily. I thought: "How on earth am I going to stop you?" Had this arisen only a month before, when I had the means at hand and Dominic to confide in, I would have simply kidnapped the fellow. A little trip to sea would not have done Señor Ortega any harm; though no doubt it would have been abhorrent to his feelings. But now I had not the means. I couldn't even tell where my poor Dominic was hiding his diminished head.

Again I glanced at him sideways. I was the taller of the two and as it happened I met in the light of the street lamp his own stealthy glance directed up at me with an agonized expression, an expression that made me fancy I could see the man's very soul writhing in his body like an impaled worm. In spite of my utter inexperience I had some notion of the images that rushed into his mind at the sight of any man who had approached Doña Rita. It was enough to awaken in any human being a movement of horrified compassion; but my pity went out not to him but to Doña Rita. It was for her that I felt sorry; I pitied her for having that damned soul on her track. I pitied her with tenderness and indignation, as if this had been both a danger and a dishonour.

I don't mean to say that those thoughts passed through my head consciously. I had only the resultant, settled feeling. I had, however, a thought, too. It came on me suddenly, and I asked myself with rage and astonishment: "Must I then kill that brute?" There didn't seem to be any alternative. Between him and Doña Rita I couldn't hesitate. I believe I gave a slight laugh of desperation. The suddenness of this sinister conclusion had in it something comic and unbelievable. It loosened my grip on my mental processes. A Latin tag came into my head about the facile descent into the abyss. I marvelled at its aptness, and also that it should have come to me so pat. But I believe now that it was suggested simply by the actual declivity of the street of the Consuls which lies on a gentle slope. We had just turned the corner. All the houses were dark and in a perspective of complete solitude our two shadows dodged and wheeled about our feet.

"Here we are," I said.

He was an extraordinarily chilly devil. When we stopped I could hear his teeth chattering again. I don't know what came over me, I had a sort of nervous fit, was incapable of finding my pockets, let alone the latchkey. I had the illusion of a narrow streak of light on the wall of the house as if it had been cracked. "I hope we will be able to get in," I murmured.

Señor Ortega stood waiting patiently with his handbag, like a rescued wayfarer. "But you live in this house, don't you?" he observed.

"No," I said, without hesitation. I didn't know how that man would behave if he were aware that I was staying under the same roof. He was half mad. He might want to talk all night, try crazily to invade my privacy. How could I tell? Moreover, I wasn't so sure that I would remain in the house. I had some notion of going out again and walking up and down the street of the Consuls till daylight. "No, an absent friend lets me use . . . I had that latchkey this morning . . . Ah! here it is."

I let him go in first. The sickly gas flame was there on duty, undaunted, waiting for the end of the world to come and put it out. I think that the black-and-white hall surprised Ortega. I had closed the front door without noise and stood for a moment listening, while he glanced about furtively. There were only two other doors in the hall, right and left. Their panels of ebony were decorated with bronze applications in the centre. The one on the left was of course Blunt's door. As the passage leading beyond it was dark at the further end I took Señor Ortega by the hand and led him along, unresisting, like a child. For some reason or other I moved on tip-toe and he followed my example. The light and the warmth of the studio impressed him favourably; he laid down his little bag, rubbed his hands together, and produced a smile of satisfaction; but it was such a smile as a totally ruined man would perhaps force on his lips, or a man condemned to a short shrift by his doctor. I begged him to make himself at home and said that I would go at once and hunt up the woman of the house who would make him up a bed on the big couch there. He hardly listened to what I said. What were all those things to him! He knew that his destiny was to sleep on a bed of thorns, to feed on adders. But he tried to show a sort of polite interest. He asked: "What is this place?"

"It used to belong to a painter," I mumbled.

"Ah, your absent friend," he said, making a wry mouth. "I detest all those artists, and all those writers, and all politicians who are thieves; and I would go even farther and higher, laying a curse on all idle lovers of women. You think perhaps I am a Royalist? No. If there was anybody in heaven or hell to pray to I would pray for a revolution — a red revolution everywhere."

"You astonish me," I said, just to say something.

"No! But there are half a dozen people in the world with whom I would like to settle accounts. One could shoot them like partridges and no questions asked. That's what revolution would mean to me."

"It's a beautifully simple view," I said. "I imagine you are not the only one who holds it; but I really must look after your comforts. You mustn't forget that we have to see Baron H. early to-morrow morning." And I went out quietly into the passage wondering in what part of the house Therese had elected to sleep that night. But, lo and behold, when I got to the foot of the stairs there was Therese coming down from the upper regions in her nightgown, like a sleep-walker. However, it wasn't that, because, before I could exclaim, she vanished off the first floor landing like a streak of white mist and without the slightest sound. Her attire made it perfectly clear that she could not have heard us coming in. In fact, she must have been certain that the house was empty, because she was as well aware as myself that the Italian girls after their work at the opera were going to a masked ball to dance for their own amusement, attended of course by their conscientious father. But what thought, need, or sudden impulse had driven Therese out of bed like this was something I couldn't conceive.

I didn't call out after her. I felt sure that she would return. I went up slowly to the first floor and met her coming down again, this time carrying a lighted candle. She had managed to make herself presentable in an extraordinarily short time.

"Oh, my dear young Monsieur, you have given me a fright."

"Yes. And I nearly fainted, too," I said. "You looked perfectly awful. What's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

She had lighted by then the gas on the landing and I must say that I had never seen exactly that manner of face on her before. She wriggled, confused and shifty-eyed, before me; but I ascribed this behaviour to her shocked modesty and without troubling myself any more about her feelings I informed her that there was a Carlist downstairs who must be put up for the night. Most unexpectedly she betrayed a ridiculous consternation, but only for a moment. Then she assumed at once that I would give him hospitality upstairs where there was a camp-bedstead in my dressing-room. I said:

"No. Give him a shake-down in the studio, where he is now. It's warm in there. And remember! I charge you strictly not to let him know that I sleep in this house. In fact, I don't know myself that I will; I have certain matters to attend to this very night. You will also have to serve him his coffee in the morning. I will take him away before ten o'clock."

All this seemed to impress her more than I had expected. As usual when she felt curious, or in some other way excited, she assumed a saintly, detached expression, and asked:

"The dear gentleman is your friend, I suppose?"

"I only know he is a Spaniard and a Carlist," I said: "and that ought to be enough for you."

Instead of the usual effusive exclamations she murmured: "Dear me, dear me," and departed upstairs with the candle to get together a few blankets and pillows, I suppose. As for me I walked quietly downstairs on my way to the studio. I had a curious sensation that I was acting in a preordained manner, that life was not at all what I had thought

it to be, or else that I had been altogether changed sometime during the day, and that I was a different person from the man whom I remembered getting out of my bed in the morning.

Also feelings had altered all their values. The words, too, had become strange. It was only the inanimate surroundings that remained what they had always been. For instance the studio. . . .

During my absence Señor Ortega had taken off his coat and I found him as it were in the air, sitting in his shirt sleeves on a chair which he had taken pains to place in the very middle of the floor. I repressed an absurd impulse to walk round him as though he had been some sort of exhibit. His hands were spread over his knees and he looked perfectly insensible. I don't mean strange, or ghastly, or wooden, but just insensible — like an exhibit. And that effect persisted even after he raised his black suspicious eyes to my face. He lowered them almost at once. It was very mechanical. I gave him up and became rather concerned about myself. My thought was that I had better get out of that before any more queer notions came into my head. So I only remained long enough to tell him that the woman of the house was bringing down some bedding and that I hoped that he would have a good night's rest. And directly I spoke it struck me that this was the most extraordinary speech that ever was addressed to a figure of that sort. He, however, did not seem startled by it or moved in any way. He simply said:

“Thank you.”

In the darkest part of the long passage outside I met Therese with her arms full of pillows and blankets.

Chapter 5

Coming out of the bright light of the studio I didn't make out Therese very distinctly. She, however, having groped in dark cupboards, must have had her pupils sufficiently dilated to have seen that I had my hat on my head. This has its importance because after what I had said to her upstairs it must have convinced her that I was going out on some midnight business. I passed her without a word and heard behind me the door of the studio close with an unexpected crash. It strikes me now that under the circumstances I might have without shame gone back to listen at the keyhole. But truth to say the association of events was not so clear in my mind as it may be to the reader of this story. Neither were the exact connections of persons present to my mind. And, besides, one doesn't listen at a keyhole but in pursuance of some plan; unless one is afflicted by a vulgar and fatuous curiosity. But that vice is not in my character. As to plan, I had none. I moved along the passage between the dead wall and the black-and-white marble elevation of the staircase with hushed footsteps, as though there had been a mortally sick person somewhere in the house. And the only person that could have answered to that description was Señor Ortega. I moved on,

stealthy, absorbed, undecided; asking myself earnestly: "What on earth am I going to do with him?" That exclusive preoccupation of my mind was as dangerous to Señor Ortega as typhoid fever would have been. It strikes me that this comparison is very exact. People recover from typhoid fever, but generally the chance is considered poor. This was precisely his case. His chance was poor; though I had no more animosity towards him than a virulent disease has against the victim it lays low. He really would have nothing to reproach me with; he had run up against me, unwittingly, as a man enters an infected place, and now he was very ill, very ill indeed. No, I had no plans against him. I had only the feeling that he was in mortal danger.

I believe that men of the most daring character (and I make no claim to it) often do shrink from the logical processes of thought. It is only the devil, they say, that loves logic. But I was not a devil. I was not even a victim of the devil. It was only that I had given up the direction of my intelligence before the problem; or rather that the problem had dispossessed my intelligence and reigned in its stead side by side with a superstitious awe. A dreadful order seemed to lurk in the darkest shadows of life. The madness of that Carlist with the soul of a Jacobin, the vile fears of Baron H., that excellent organizer of supplies, the contact of their two ferocious stupidities, and last, by a remote disaster at sea, my love brought into direct contact with the situation: all that was enough to make one shudder — not at the chance, but at the design.

For it was my love that was called upon to act here, and nothing else. And love which elevates us above all safeguards, above restraining principles, above all littlenesses of self-possession, yet keeps its feet always firmly on earth, remains marvellously practical in its suggestions.

I discovered that however much I had imagined I had given up Rita, that whatever agonies I had gone through, my hope of her had never been lost. Plucked out, stamped down, torn to shreds, it had remained with me secret, intact, invincible. Before the danger of the situation it sprang, full of life, up in arms — the undying child of immortal love. What incited me was independent of honour and compassion; it was the prompting of a love supreme, practical, remorseless in its aim; it was the practical thought that no woman need be counted as lost for ever, unless she be dead!

This excluded for the moment all considerations of ways and means and risks and difficulties. Its tremendous intensity robbed it of all direction and left me adrift in the big black-and-white hall as on a silent sea. It was not, properly speaking, irresolution. It was merely hesitation as to the next immediate step, and that step even of no great importance: hesitation merely as to the best way I could spend the rest of the night. I didn't think further forward for many reasons, more or less optimistic, but mainly because I have no homicidal vein in my composition. The disposition to gloat over homicide was in that miserable creature in the studio, the potential Jacobin; in that confounded buyer of agricultural produce, the punctual employé of Hernandez Brothers, the jealous wretch with an obscene tongue and an imagination of the same kind to drive him mad. I thought of him without pity but also without contempt. I reflected that there were no means of sending a warning to Doña Rita in Tolosa; for of

course no postal communication existed with the Headquarters. And moreover what would a warning be worth in this particular case, supposing it would reach her, that she would believe it, and that she would know what to do? How could I communicate to another that certitude which was in my mind, the more absolute because without proofs that one could produce?

The last expression of Rose's distress rang again in my ears: "Madame has no friends. Not one!" and I saw Doña Rita's complete loneliness beset by all sorts of insincerities, surrounded by pitfalls; her greatest dangers within herself, in her generosity, in her fears, in her courage, too. What I had to do first of all was to stop that wretch at all costs. I became aware of a great mistrust of Therese. I didn't want her to find me in the hall, but I was reluctant to go upstairs to my rooms from an unreasonable feeling that there I would be too much out of the way; not sufficiently on the spot. There was the alternative of a live-long night of watching outside, before the dark front of the house. It was a most distasteful prospect. And then it occurred to me that Blunt's former room would be an extremely good place to keep a watch from. I knew that room. When Henry Allègre gave the house to Rita in the early days (long before he made his will) he had planned a complete renovation and this room had been meant for the drawing-room. Furniture had been made for it specially, upholstered in beautiful ribbed stuff, made to order, of dull gold colour with a pale blue tracery of arabesques and oval medallions enclosing Rita's monogram, repeated on the backs of chairs and sofas, and on the heavy curtains reaching from ceiling to floor. To the same time belonged the ebony and bronze doors, the silver statuette at the foot of the stairs, the forged iron balustrade reproducing right up the marble staircase Rita's decorative monogram in its complicated design. Afterwards the work was stopped and the house had fallen into disrepair. When Rita devoted it to the Carlist cause a bed was put into that drawing-room, just simply the bed. The room next to that yellow salon had been in Allègre's young days fitted as a fencing-room containing also a bath, and a complicated system of all sorts of shower and jet arrangements, then quite up to date. That room was very large, lighted from the top, and one wall of it was covered by trophies of arms of all sorts, a choice collection of cold steel disposed on a background of Indian mats and rugs: Blunt used it as a dressing-room. It communicated by a small door with the studio.

I had only to extend my hand and make one step to reach the magnificent bronze handle of the ebony door, and if I didn't want to be caught by Therese there was no time to lose. I made the step and extended the hand, thinking that it would be just like my luck to find the door locked. But the door came open to my push. In contrast to the dark hall the room was most unexpectedly dazzling to my eyes, as if illuminated a giorno for a reception. No voice came from it, but nothing could have stopped me now. As I turned round to shut the door behind me noiselessly I caught sight of a woman's dress on a chair, of other articles of apparel scattered about. The mahogany bed with a piece of light silk which Therese found somewhere and used for a counterpane was a magnificent combination of white and crimson between the gleaming surfaces of dark

wood; and the whole room had an air of splendour with marble consoles, gilt carvings, long mirrors and a sumptuous Venetian lustre depending from the ceiling: a darkling mass of icy pendants catching a spark here and there from the candles of an eight-branched candelabra standing on a little table near the head of a sofa which had been dragged round to face the fireplace. The faintest possible whiff of a familiar perfume made my head swim with its suggestion.

I grabbed the back of the nearest piece of furniture and the splendour of marbles and mirrors, of cut crystals and carvings, swung before my eyes in the golden mist of walls and draperies round an extremely conspicuous pair of black stockings thrown over a music stool which remained motionless. The silence was profound. It was like being in an enchanted place. Suddenly a voice began to speak, clear, detached, infinitely touching in its calm weariness.

“Haven’t you tormented me enough to-day?” it said. . . . My head was steady now but my heart began to beat violently. I listened to the end without moving, “Can’t you make up your mind to leave me alone for to-night?” It pleaded with an accent of charitable scorn.

The penetrating quality of these tones which I had not heard for so many, many days made my eyes run full of tears. I guessed easily that the appeal was addressed to the atrocious Therese. The speaker was concealed from me by the high back of the sofa, but her apprehension was perfectly justified. For was it not I who had turned back Therese the pious, the insatiable, coming downstairs in her nightgown to torment her sister some more? Mere surprise at Doña Rita’s presence in the house was enough to paralyze me; but I was also overcome by an enormous sense of relief, by the assurance of security for her and for myself. I didn’t even ask myself how she came there. It was enough for me that she was not in Tolosa. I could have smiled at the thought that all I had to do now was to hasten the departure of that abominable lunatic — for Tolosa: an easy task, almost no task at all. Yes, I would have smiled, had not I felt outraged by the presence of Señor Ortega under the same roof with Doña Rita. The mere fact was repugnant to me, morally revolting; so that I should have liked to rush at him and throw him out into the street. But that was not to be done for various reasons. One of them was pity. I was suddenly at peace with all mankind, with all nature. I felt as if I couldn’t hurt a fly. The intensity of my emotion sealed my lips. With a fearful joy tugging at my heart I moved round the head of the couch without a word.

In the wide fireplace on a pile of white ashes the logs had a deep crimson glow; and turned towards them Doña Rita reclined on her side enveloped in the skins of wild beasts like a charming and savage young chieftain before a camp fire. She never even raised her eyes, giving me the opportunity to contemplate mutely that adolescent, delicately masculine head, so mysteriously feminine in the power of instant seduction, so infinitely suave in its firm design, almost childlike in the freshness of detail: altogether ravishing in the inspired strength of the modelling. That precious head reposed in the palm of her hand; the face was slightly flushed (with anger perhaps). She kept her eyes obstinately fixed on the pages of a book which she was holding with her other hand.

I had the time to lay my infinite adoration at her feet whose white insteps gleamed below the dark edge of the fur out of quilted blue silk bedroom slippers, embroidered with small pearls. I had never seen them before; I mean the slippers. The gleam of the insteps, too, for that matter. I lost myself in a feeling of deep content, something like a foretaste of a time of felicity which must be quiet or it couldn't be eternal. I had never tasted such perfect quietness before. It was not of this earth. I had gone far beyond. It was as if I had reached the ultimate wisdom beyond all dreams and all passions. She was That which is to be contemplated to all Infinity.

The perfect stillness and silence made her raise her eyes at last, reluctantly, with a hard, defensive expression which I had never seen in them before. And no wonder! The glance was meant for Therese and assumed in self-defence. For some time its character did not change and when it did it turned into a perfectly stony stare of a kind which I also had never seen before. She had never wished so much to be left in peace. She had never been so astonished in her life. She had arrived by the evening express only two hours before Señor Ortega, had driven to the house, and after having something to eat had become for the rest of the evening the helpless prey of her sister who had fawned and scolded and wheedled and threatened in a way that outraged all Rita's feelings. Seizing this unexpected occasion Therese had displayed a distracting versatility of sentiment: rapacity, virtue, piety, spite, and false tenderness — while, characteristically enough, she unpacked the dressing-bag, helped the sinner to get ready for bed, brushed her hair, and finally, as a climax, kissed her hands, partly by surprise and partly by violence. After that she had retired from the field of battle slowly, undefeated, still defiant, firing as a last shot the impudent question: "Tell me only, have you made your will, Rita?" To this poor Doña Rita with the spirit of opposition strung to the highest pitch answered: "No, and I don't mean to" — being under the impression that this was what her sister wanted her to do. There can be no doubt, however, that all Therese wanted was the information.

Rita, much too agitated to expect anything but a sleepless night, had not the courage to get into bed. She thought she would remain on the sofa before the fire and try to compose herself with a book. As she had no dressing-gown with her she put on her long fur coat over her night-gown, threw some logs on the fire, and lay down. She didn't hear the slightest noise of any sort till she heard me shut the door gently. Quietness of movement was one of Therese's accomplishments, and the harassed heiress of the Allègre millions naturally thought it was her sister coming again to renew the scene. Her heart sank within her. In the end she became a little frightened at the long silence, and raised her eyes. She didn't believe them for a long time. She concluded that I was a vision. In fact, the first word which I heard her utter was a low, awed "No," which, though I understood its meaning, chilled my blood like an evil omen.

It was then that I spoke. "Yes," I said, "it's me that you see," and made a step forward. She didn't start; only her other hand flew to the edges of the fur coat, gripping them together over her breast. Observing this gesture I sat down in the nearest chair. The book she had been reading slipped with a thump on the floor.

“How is it possible that you should be here?” she said, still in a doubting voice.

“I am really here,” I said. “Would you like to touch my hand?”

She didn’t move at all; her fingers still clutched the fur coat.

“What has happened?”

“It’s a long story, but you may take it from me that all is over. The tie between us is broken. I don’t know that it was ever very close. It was an external thing. The true misfortune is that I have ever seen you.”

This last phrase was provoked by an exclamation of sympathy on her part. She raised herself on her elbow and looked at me intently. “All over,” she murmured.

“Yes, we had to wreck the little vessel. It was awful. I feel like a murderer. But she had to be killed.”

“Why?”

“Because I loved her too much. Don’t you know that love and death go very close together?”

“I could feel almost happy that it is all over, if you hadn’t had to lose your love. Oh, amigo George, it was a safe love for you.”

“Yes,” I said. “It was a faithful little vessel. She would have saved us all from any plain danger. But this was a betrayal. It was — never mind. All that’s past. The question is what will the next one be.”

“Why should it be that?”

“I don’t know. Life seems but a series of betrayals. There are so many kinds of them. This was a betrayed plan, but one can betray confidence, and hope and — desire, and the most sacred . . .”

“But what are you doing here?” she interrupted.

“Oh, yes! The eternal why. Till a few hours ago I didn’t know what I was here for. And what are you here for?” I asked point blank and with a bitterness she disregarded. She even answered my question quite readily with many words out of which I could make very little. I only learned that for at least five mixed reasons, none of which impressed me profoundly, Doña Rita had started at a moment’s notice from Paris with nothing but a dressing-bag, and permitting Rose to go and visit her aged parents for two days, and then follow her mistress. That girl of late had looked so perturbed and worried that the sensitive Rita, fearing that she was tired of her place, proposed to settle a sum of money on her which would have enabled her to devote herself entirely to her aged parents. And did I know what that extraordinary girl said? She had said: “Don’t let Madame think that I would be too proud to accept anything whatever from her; but I can’t even dream of leaving Madame. I believe Madame has no friends. Not one.” So instead of a large sum of money Doña Rita gave the girl a kiss and as she had been worried by several people who wanted her to go to Tolosa she bolted down this way just to get clear of all those busybodies. “Hide from them,” she went on with ardour. “Yes, I came here to hide,” she repeated twice as if delighted at last to have hit on that reason among so many others. “How could I tell that you would be here?”

Then with sudden fire which only added to the delight with which I had been watching the play of her physiognomy she added: "Why did you come into this room?"

She enchanted me. The ardent modulations of the sound, the slight play of the beautiful lips, the still, deep sapphire gleam in those long eyes inherited from the dawn of ages and that seemed always to watch unimaginable things, that underlying faint ripple of gaiety that played under all her moods as though it had been a gift from the high gods moved to pity for this lonely mortal, all this within the four walls and displayed for me alone gave me the sense of almost intolerable joy. The words didn't matter. They had to be answered, of course.

"I came in for several reasons. One of them is that I didn't know you were here."

"Therese didn't tell you?"

"No."

"Never talked to you about me?"

I hesitated only for a moment. "Never," I said. Then I asked in my turn, "Did she tell you I was here?"

"No," she said.

"It's very clear she did not mean us to come together again."

"Neither did I, my dear."

"What do you mean by speaking like this, in this tone, in these words? You seem to use them as if they were a sort of formula. Am I a dear to you? Or is anybody? . . . or everybody? . . ."

She had been for some time raised on her elbow, but then as if something had happened to her vitality she sank down till her head rested again on the sofa cushion.

"Why do you try to hurt my feelings?" she asked.

"For the same reason for which you call me dear at the end of a sentence like that: for want of something more amusing to do. You don't pretend to make me believe that you do it for any sort of reason that a decent person would confess to."

The colour had gone from her face; but a fit of wickedness was on me and I pursued, "What are the motives of your speeches? What prompts your actions? On your own showing your life seems to be a continuous running away. You have just run away from Paris. Where will you run to-morrow? What are you everlastingly running from — or is it that you are running after something? What is it? A man, a phantom — or some sensation that you don't like to own to?"

Truth to say, I was abashed by the silence which was her only answer to this sally. I said to myself that I would not let my natural anger, my just fury be disarmed by any assumption of pathos or dignity. I suppose I was really out of my mind and what in the middle ages would have been called "possessed" by an evil spirit. I went on enjoying my own villainy.

"Why aren't you in Tolosa? You ought to be in Tolosa. Isn't Tolosa the proper field for your abilities, for your sympathies, for your profusions, for your generosities — the king without a crown, the man without a fortune! But here there is nothing worthy of your talents. No, there is no longer anything worth any sort of trouble here. There

isn't even that ridiculous Monsieur George. I understand that the talk of the coast from here to Cette is that Monsieur George is drowned. Upon my word I believe he is. And serve him right, too. There's Therese, but I don't suppose that your love for your sister . . ."

"For goodness' sake don't let her come in and find you here."

Those words recalled me to myself, exorcised the evil spirit by the mere enchanting power of the voice. They were also impressive by their suggestion of something practical, utilitarian, and remote from sentiment. The evil spirit left me and I remained taken aback slightly.

"Well," I said, "if you mean that you want me to leave the room I will confess to you that I can't very well do it yet. But I could lock both doors if you don't mind that."

"Do what you like as long as you keep her out. You two together would be too much for me to-night. Why don't you go and lock those doors? I have a feeling she is on the prowl."

I got up at once saying, "I imagine she has gone to bed by this time." I felt absolutely calm and responsible. I turned the keys one after another so gently that I couldn't hear the click of the locks myself. This done I recrossed the room with measured steps, with downcast eyes, and approaching the couch without raising them from the carpet I sank down on my knees and leaned my forehead on its edge. That penitential attitude had but little remorse in it. I detected no movement and heard no sound from her. In one place a bit of the fur coat touched my cheek softly, but no forgiving hand came to rest on my bowed head. I only breathed deeply the faint scent of violets, her own particular fragrance enveloping my body, penetrating my very heart with an inconceivable intimacy, bringing me closer to her than the closest embrace, and yet so subtle that I sensed her existence in me only as a great, glowing, indeterminate tenderness, something like the evening light disclosing after the white passion of the day infinite depths in the colours of the sky and an unsuspected soul of peace in the protean forms of life. I had not known such quietness for months; and I detected in myself an immense fatigue, a longing to remain where I was without changing my position to the end of time. Indeed to remain seemed to me a complete solution for all the problems that life presents — even as to the very death itself.

Only the unwelcome reflection that this was impossible made me get up at last with a sigh of deep grief at the end of the dream. But I got up without despair. She didn't murmur, she didn't stir. There was something august in the stillness of the room. It was a strange peace which she shared with me in this unexpected shelter full of disorder in its neglected splendour. What troubled me was the sudden, as it were material, consciousness of time passing as water flows. It seemed to me that it was only the tenacity of my sentiment that held that woman's body, extended and tranquil above the flood. But when I ventured at last to look at her face I saw her flushed, her teeth clenched — it was visible — her nostrils dilated, and in her narrow, level-glancing eyes a look of inward and frightened ecstasy. The edges of the fur coat had fallen open and I was moved to turn away. I had the same impression as on the

evening we parted that something had happened which I did not understand; only this time I had not touched her at all. I really didn't understand. At the slightest whisper I would now have gone out without a murmur, as though that emotion had given her the right to be obeyed. But there was no whisper; and for a long time I stood leaning on my arm, looking into the fire and feeling distinctly between the four walls of that locked room the unchecked time flow past our two stranded personalities.

And suddenly she spoke. She spoke in that voice that was so profoundly moving without ever being sad, a little wistful perhaps and always the supreme expression of her grace. She asked as if nothing had happened:

“What are you thinking of, amigo?”

I turned about. She was lying on her side, tranquil above the smooth flow of time, again closely wrapped up in her fur, her head resting on the old-gold sofa cushion bearing like everything else in that room the decoratively enlaced letters of her monogram; her face a little pale now, with the crimson lobe of her ear under the tawny mist of her loose hair, the lips a little parted, and her glance of melted sapphire level and motionless, darkened by fatigue.

“Can I think of anything but you?” I murmured, taking a seat near the foot of the couch. “Or rather it isn't thinking, it is more like the consciousness of you always being present in me, complete to the last hair, to the faintest shade of expression, and that not only when we are apart but when we are together, alone, as close as this. I see you now lying on this couch but that is only the insensible phantom of the real you that is in me. And it is the easier for me to feel this because that image which others see and call by your name — how am I to know that it is anything else but an enchanting mist? You have always eluded me except in one or two moments which seem still more dream-like than the rest. Since I came into this room you have done nothing to destroy my conviction of your unreality apart from myself. You haven't offered me your hand to touch. Is it because you suspect that apart from me you are but a mere phantom, and that you fear to put it to the test?”

One of her hands was under the fur and the other under her cheek. She made no sound. She didn't offer to stir. She didn't move her eyes, not even after I had added after waiting for a while,

“Just what I expected. You are a cold illusion.”

She smiled mysteriously, right away from me, straight at the fire, and that was all.

Chapter 6

I had a momentary suspicion that I had said something stupid. Her smile amongst many other things seemed to have meant that, too. And I answered it with a certain resignation:

“Well, I don’t know that you are so much mist. I remember once hanging on to you like a drowning man . . . But perhaps I had better not speak of this. It wasn’t so very long ago, and you may . . .”

“I don’t mind. Well . . .”

“Well, I have kept an impression of great solidity. I’ll admit that. A woman of granite.”

“A doctor once told me that I was made to last for ever,” she said.

“But essentially it’s the same thing,” I went on. “Granite, too, is insensible.”

I watched her profile against the pillow and there came on her face an expression I knew well when with an indignation full of suppressed laughter she used to throw at me the word “Imbecile.” I expected it to come, but it didn’t come. I must say, though, that I was swimmy in my head and now and then had a noise as of the sea in my ears, so I might not have heard it. The woman of granite, built to last for ever, continued to look at the glowing logs which made a sort of fiery ruin on the white pile of ashes. “I will tell you how it is,” I said. “When I have you before my eyes there is such a projection of my whole being towards you that I fail to see you distinctly. It was like that from the beginning. I may say that I never saw you distinctly till after we had parted and I thought you had gone from my sight for ever. It was then that you took body in my imagination and that my mind seized on a definite form of you for all its adorations — for its profanations, too. Don’t imagine me grovelling in spiritual abasement before a mere image. I got a grip on you that nothing can shake now.”

“Don’t speak like this,” she said. “It’s too much for me. And there is a whole long night before us.”

“You don’t think that I dealt with you sentimentally enough perhaps? But the sentiment was there; as clear a flame as ever burned on earth from the most remote ages before that eternal thing which is in you, which is your heirloom. And is it my fault that what I had to give was real flame, and not a mystic’s incense? It is neither your fault nor mine. And now whatever we say to each other at night or in daylight, that sentiment must be taken for granted. It will be there on the day I die — when you won’t be there.”

She continued to look fixedly at the red embers; and from her lips that hardly moved came the quietest possible whisper: “Nothing would be easier than to die for you.”

“Really,” I cried. “And you expect me perhaps after this to kiss your feet in a transport of gratitude while I hug the pride of your words to my breast. But as it happens there is nothing in me but contempt for this sublime declaration. How dare you offer me this charlatanism of passion? What has it got to do between you and me who are the only two beings in the world that may safely say that we have no need of shams between ourselves? Is it possible that you are a charlatan at heart? Not from egoism, I admit, but from some sort of fear. Yet, should you be sincere, then — listen well to me — I would never forgive you. I would visit your grave every day to curse you for an evil thing.”

“Evil thing,” she echoed softly.

“Would you prefer to be a sham — that one could forget?”

“You will never forget me,” she said in the same tone at the glowing embers. “Evil or good. But, my dear, I feel neither an evil nor a sham. I have got to be what I am, and that, amigo, is not so easy; because I may be simple, but like all those on whom there is no peace I am not One. No, I am not One!”

“You are all the women in the world,” I whispered bending over her. She didn’t seem to be aware of anything and only spoke — always to the glow.

“If I were that I would say: God help them then. But that would be more appropriate for Therese. For me, I can only give them my infinite compassion. I have too much reverence in me to invoke the name of a God of whom clever men have robbed me a long time ago. How could I help it? For the talk was clever and — and I had a mind. And I am also, as Therese says, naturally sinful. Yes, my dear, I may be naturally wicked but I am not evil and I could die for you.”

“You!” I said. “You are afraid to die.”

“Yes. But not for you.”

The whole structure of glowing logs fell down, raising a small turmoil of white ashes and sparks. The tiny crash seemed to wake her up thoroughly. She turned her head upon the cushion to look at me.

“It’s a very extraordinary thing, we two coming together like this,” she said with conviction. “You coming in without knowing I was here and then telling me that you can’t very well go out of the room. That sounds funny. I wouldn’t have been angry if you had said that you wouldn’t. It would have hurt me. But nobody ever paid much attention to my feelings. Why do you smile like this?”

“At a thought. Without any charlatanism of passion I am able to tell you of something to match your devotion. I was not afraid for your sake to come within a hair’s breadth of what to all the world would have been a squalid crime. Note that you and I are persons of honour. And there might have been a criminal trial at the end of it for me. Perhaps the scaffold.”

“Do you say these horrors to make me tremble?”

“Oh, you needn’t tremble. There shall be no crime. I need not risk the scaffold, since now you are safe. But I entered this room meditating resolutely on the ways of murder, calculating possibilities and chances without the slightest compunction. It’s all over now. It was all over directly I saw you here, but it had been so near that I shudder yet.”

She must have been very startled because for a time she couldn’t speak. Then in a faint voice:

“For me! For me!” she faltered out twice.

“For you — or for myself? Yet it couldn’t have been selfish. What would it have been to me that you remained in the world? I never expected to see you again. I even composed a most beautiful letter of farewell. Such a letter as no woman had ever received.”

Instantly she shot out a hand towards me. The edges of the fur cloak fell apart. A wave of the faintest possible scent floated into my nostrils.

"Let me have it," she said imperiously.

"You can't have it. It's all in my head. No woman will read it. I suspect it was something that could never have been written. But what a farewell! And now I suppose we shall say good-bye without even a handshake. But you are safe! Only I must ask you not to come out of this room till I tell you you may."

I was extremely anxious that Señor Ortega should never even catch a glimpse of Doña Rita, never guess how near he had been to her. I was extremely anxious the fellow should depart for Tolosa and get shot in a ravine; or go to the Devil in his own way, as long as he lost the track of Doña Rita completely. He then, probably, would get mad and get shut up, or else get cured, forget all about it, and devote himself to his vocation, whatever it was — keep a shop and grow fat. All this flashed through my mind in an instant and while I was still dazzled by those comforting images, the voice of Doña Rita pulled me up with a jerk.

"You mean not out of the house?"

"No, I mean not out of this room," I said with some embarrassment.

"What do you mean? Is there something in the house then? This is most extraordinary! Stay in this room? And you, too, it seems? Are you also afraid for yourself?"

"I can't even give you an idea how afraid I was. I am not so much now. But you know very well, Doña Rita, that I never carry any sort of weapon in my pocket."

"Why don't you, then?" she asked in a flash of scorn which bewitched me so completely for an instant that I couldn't even smile at it.

"Because if I am unconventionalized I am an old European," I murmured gently. "No, Excellentissima, I shall go through life without as much as a switch in my hand. It's no use you being angry. Adapting to this great moment some words you've heard before: I am like that. Such is my character!"

Doña Rita frankly stared at me — a most unusual expression for her to have. Suddenly she sat up.

"Don George," she said with lovely animation, "I insist upon knowing who is in my house."

"You insist! . . . But Therese says it is her house."

Had there been anything handy, such as a cigarette box, for instance, it would have gone sailing through the air spouting cigarettes as it went. Rosy all over, cheeks, neck, shoulders, she seemed lighted up softly from inside like a beautiful transparency. But she didn't raise her voice.

"You and Therese have sworn my ruin. If you don't tell me what you mean I will go outside and shout up the stairs to make her come down. I know there is no one but the three of us in the house."

"Yes, three; but not counting my Jacobin. There is a Jacobin in the house."

"A Jac . . .! Oh, George, is this the time to jest?" she began in persuasive tones when a faint but peculiar noise stilled her lips as though they had been suddenly frozen. She

became quiet all over instantly. I, on the contrary, made an involuntary movement before I, too, became as still as death. We strained our ears; but that peculiar metallic rattle had been so slight and the silence now was so perfect that it was very difficult to believe one's senses. Doña Rita looked inquisitively at me. I gave her a slight nod. We remained looking into each other's eyes while we listened and listened till the silence became unbearable. Doña Rita whispered composedly: "Did you hear?"

"I am asking myself . . . I almost think I didn't."

"Don't shuffle with me. It was a scraping noise."

"Something fell."

"Something! What thing? What are the things that fall by themselves? Who is that man of whom you spoke? Is there a man?"

"No doubt about it whatever. I brought him here myself."

"What for?"

"Why shouldn't I have a Jacobin of my own? Haven't you one, too? But mine is a different problem from that white-haired humbug of yours. He is a genuine article. There must be plenty like him about. He has scores to settle with half a dozen people, he says, and he clamours for revolutions to give him a chance."

"But why did you bring him here?"

"I don't know — from sudden affection . . ."

All this passed in such low tones that we seemed to make out the words more by watching each other's lips than through our sense of hearing. Man is a strange animal. I didn't care what I said. All I wanted was to keep her in her pose, excited and still, sitting up with her hair loose, softly glowing, the dark brown fur making a wonderful contrast with the white lace on her breast. All I was thinking of was that she was adorable and too lovely for words! I cared for nothing but that sublimely aesthetic impression. It summed up all life, all joy, all poetry! It had a divine strain. I am certain that I was not in my right mind. I suppose I was not quite sane. I am convinced that at that moment of the four people in the house it was Doña Rita who upon the whole was the most sane. She observed my face and I am sure she read there something of my inward exaltation. She knew what to do. In the softest possible tone and hardly above her breath she commanded: "George, come to yourself."

Her gentleness had the effect of evening light. I was soothed. Her confidence in her own power touched me profoundly. I suppose my love was too great for madness to get hold of me. I can't say that I passed to a complete calm, but I became slightly ashamed of myself. I whispered:

"No, it was not from affection, it was for the love of you that I brought him here. That imbecile H. was going to send him to Tolosa."

"That Jacobin!" Doña Rita was immensely surprised, as she might well have been. Then resigned to the incomprehensible: "Yes," she breathed out, "what did you do with him?"

"I put him to bed in the studio."

How lovely she was with the effort of close attention depicted in the turn of her head and in her whole face honestly trying to approve. "And then?" she inquired.

"Then I came in here to face calmly the necessity of doing away with a human life. I didn't shirk it for a moment. That's what a short twelvemonth has brought me to. Don't think I am reproaching you, O blind force! You are justified because you are. Whatever had to happen you would not even have heard of it."

Horror darkened her marvellous radiance. Then her face became utterly blank with the tremendous effort to understand. Absolute silence reigned in the house. It seemed to me that everything had been said now that mattered in the world; and that the world itself had reached its ultimate stage, had reached its appointed end of an eternal, phantom-like silence. Suddenly Doña Rita raised a warning finger. I had heard nothing and shook my head; but she nodded hers and murmured excitedly,

"Yes, yes, in the fencing-room, as before."

In the same way I answered her: "Impossible! The door is locked and Therese has the key." She asked then in the most cautious manner,

"Have you seen Therese to-night?"

"Yes," I confessed without misgiving. "I left her making up the fellow's bed when I came in here."

"The bed of the Jacobin?" she said in a peculiar tone as if she were humouring a lunatic.

"I think I had better tell you he is a Spaniard — that he seems to know you from early days. . . ." I glanced at her face, it was extremely tense, apprehensive. For myself I had no longer any doubt as to the man and I hoped she would reach the correct conclusion herself. But I believe she was too distracted and worried to think consecutively. She only seemed to feel some terror in the air. In very pity I bent down and whispered carefully near her ear, "His name is Ortega."

I expected some effect from that name but I never expected what happened. With the sudden, free, spontaneous agility of a young animal she leaped off the sofa, leaving her slippers behind, and in one bound reached almost the middle of the room. The vigour, the instinctive precision of that spring, were something amazing. I just escaped being knocked over. She landed lightly on her bare feet with a perfect balance, without the slightest suspicion of swaying in her instant immobility. It lasted less than a second, then she spun round distractedly and darted at the first door she could see. My own agility was just enough to enable me to grip the back of the fur coat and then catch her round the body before she could wriggle herself out of the sleeves. She was muttering all the time, "No, no, no." She abandoned herself to me just for an instant during which I got her back to the middle of the room. There she attempted to free herself and I let her go at once. With her face very close to mine, but apparently not knowing what she was looking at she repeated again twice, "No — No," with an intonation which might well have brought dampness to my eyes but which only made me regret that I didn't kill the honest Ortega at sight. Suddenly Doña Rita swung round and seizing her loose hair with both hands started twisting it up before one of the sumptuous mirrors. The

wide fur sleeves slipped down her white arms. In a brusque movement like a downward stab she transfixed the whole mass of tawny glints and sparks with the arrow of gold which she perceived lying there, before her, on the marble console. Then she sprang away from the glass muttering feverishly, "Out — out — out of this house," and trying with an awful, senseless stare to dodge past me who had put myself in her way with open arms. At last I managed to seize her by the shoulders and in the extremity of my distress I shook her roughly. If she hadn't quieted down then I believe my heart would have broken. I spluttered right into her face: "I won't let you. Here you stay." She seemed to recognize me at last, and suddenly still, perfectly firm on her white feet, she let her arms fall and, from an abyss of desolation, whispered, "O! George! No! No! Not Ortega."

There was a passion of mature grief in this tone of appeal. And yet she remained as touching and helpless as a distressed child. It had all the simplicity and depth of a child's emotion. It tugged at one's heart-strings in the same direct way. But what could one do? How could one soothe her? It was impossible to pat her on the head, take her on the knee, give her a chocolate or show her a picture-book. I found myself absolutely without resource. Completely at a loss.

"Yes, Ortega. Well, what of it?" I whispered with immense assurance.

Chapter 7

My brain was in a whirl. I am safe to say that at this precise moment there was nobody completely sane in the house. Setting apart Therese and Ortega, both in the grip of unspeakable passions, all the moral economy of Doña Rita had gone to pieces. Everything was gone except her strong sense of life with all its implied menaces. The woman was a mere chaos of sensations and vitality. I, too, suffered most from inability to get hold of some fundamental thought. The one on which I could best build some hopes was the thought that, of course, Ortega did not know anything. I whispered this into the ear of Doña Rita, into her precious, her beautifully shaped ear.

But she shook her head, very much like an inconsolable child and very much with a child's complete pessimism she murmured, "Therese has told him."

The words, "Oh, nonsense," never passed my lips, because I could not cheat myself into denying that there had been a noise; and that the noise was in the fencing-room. I knew that room. There was nothing there that by the wildest stretch of imagination could be conceived as falling with that particular sound. There was a table with a tall strip of looking-glass above it at one end; but since Blunt took away his campaigning kit there was no small object of any sort on the console or anywhere else that could have been jarred off in some mysterious manner. Along one of the walls there was the whole complicated apparatus of solid brass pipes, and quite close to it an enormous bath sunk into the floor. The greatest part of the room along its whole length was covered with matting and had nothing else but a long, narrow leather-upholstered

bench fixed to the wall. And that was all. And the door leading to the studio was locked. And Therese had the key. And it flashed on my mind, independently of Doña Rita's pessimism, by the force of personal conviction, that, of course, Therese would tell him. I beheld the whole succession of events perfectly connected and tending to that particular conclusion. Therese would tell him! I could see the contrasted heads of those two formidable lunatics close together in a dark mist of whispers compounded of greed, piety, and jealousy, plotting in a sense of perfect security as if under the very wing of Providence. So at least Therese would think. She could not be but under the impression that (providentially) I had been called out for the rest of the night.

And now there was one sane person in the house, for I had regained complete command of my thoughts. Working in a logical succession of images they showed me at last as clearly as a picture on a wall, Therese pressing with fervour the key into the fevered palm of the rich, prestigious, virtuous cousin, so that he should go and urge his self-sacrificing offer to Rita, and gain merit before Him whose Eye sees all the actions of men. And this image of those two with the key in the studio seemed to me a most monstrous conception of fanaticism, of a perfectly horrible aberration. For who could mistake the state that made José Ortega the figure he was, inspiring both pity and fear? I could not deny that I understood, not the full extent but the exact nature of his suffering. Young as I was I had solved for myself that grotesque and sombre personality. His contact with me, the personal contact with (as he thought) one of the actual lovers of that woman who brought to him as a boy the curse of the gods, had tipped over the trembling scales. No doubt I was very near death in the "grand salon" of the Maison Dorée, only that his torture had gone too far. It seemed to me that I ought to have heard his very soul scream while we were seated at supper. But in a moment he had ceased to care for me. I was nothing. To the crazy exaggeration of his jealousy I was but one amongst a hundred thousand. What was my death? Nothing. All mankind had possessed that woman. I knew what his wooing of her would be: Mine — or Dead.

All this ought to have had the clearness of noon-day, even to the veriest idiot that ever lived; and Therese was, properly speaking, exactly that. An idiot. A one-ideaed creature. Only the idea was complex; therefore it was impossible really to say what she wasn't capable of. This was what made her obscure processes so awful. She had at times the most amazing perceptions. Who could tell where her simplicity ended and her cunning began? She had also the faculty of never forgetting any fact bearing upon her one idea; and I remembered now that the conversation with me about the will had produced on her an indelible impression of the Law's surprising justice. Recalling her naïve admiration of the "just" law that required no "paper" from a sister, I saw her casting loose the raging fate with a sanctimonious air. And Therese would naturally give the key of the fencing-room to her dear, virtuous, grateful, disinterested cousin, to that damned soul with delicate whiskers, because she would think it just possible that Rita might have locked the door leading front her room into the hall; whereas

there was no earthly reason, not the slightest likelihood, that she would bother about the other. Righteousness demanded that the erring sister should be taken unawares.

All the above is the analysis of one short moment. Images are to words like light to sound — incomparably swifter. And all this was really one flash of light through my mind. A comforting thought succeeded it: that both doors were locked and that really there was no danger.

However, there had been that noise — the why and the how of it? Of course in the dark he might have fallen into the bath, but that wouldn't have been a faint noise. It wouldn't have been a rattle. There was absolutely nothing he could knock over. He might have dropped a candle-stick if Therese had left him her own. That was possible, but then those thick mats — and then, anyway, why should he drop it? and, hang it all, why shouldn't he have gone straight on and tried the door? I had suddenly a sickening vision of the fellow crouching at the key-hole, listening, listening, listening, for some movement or sigh of the sleeper he was ready to tear away from the world, alive or dead. I had a conviction that he was still listening. Why? Goodness knows! He may have been only gloating over the assurance that the night was long and that he had all these hours to himself.

I was pretty certain that he could have heard nothing of our whispers, the room was too big for that and the door too solid. I hadn't the same confidence in the efficiency of the lock. Still I . . . Guarding my lips with my hand I urged Doña Rita to go back to the sofa. She wouldn't answer me and when I got hold of her arm I discovered that she wouldn't move. She had taken root in that thick-pile Aubusson carpet; and she was so rigidly still all over that the brilliant stones in the shaft of the arrow of gold, with the six candles at the head of the sofa blazing full on them, emitted no sparkle.

I was extremely anxious that she shouldn't betray herself. I reasoned, save the mark, as a psychologist. I had no doubt that the man knew of her being there; but he only knew it by hearsay. And that was bad enough. I could not help feeling that if he obtained some evidence for his senses by any sort of noise, voice, or movement, his madness would gain strength enough to burst the lock. I was rather ridiculously worried about the locks. A horrid mistrust of the whole house possessed me. I saw it in the light of a deadly trap. I had no weapon, I couldn't say whether he had one or not. I wasn't afraid of a struggle as far as I, myself, was concerned, but I was afraid of it for Doña Rita. To be rolling at her feet, locked in a literally tooth-and-nail struggle with Ortega would have been odious. I wanted to spare her feelings, just as I would have been anxious to save from any contact with mud the feet of that goatherd of the mountains with a symbolic face. I looked at her face. For immobility it might have been a carving. I wished I knew how to deal with that embodied mystery, to influence it, to manage it. Oh, how I longed for the gift of authority! In addition, since I had become completely sane, all my scruples against laying hold of her had returned. I felt shy and embarrassed. My eyes were fixed on the bronze handle of the fencing-room door as if it were something alive. I braced myself up against the moment when it would move. This was what was going to happen next. It would move very gently. My

heart began to thump. But I was prepared to keep myself as still as death and I hoped Doña Rita would have sense enough to do the same. I stole another glance at her face and at that moment I heard the word: "Beloved!" form itself in the still air of the room, weak, distinct, piteous, like the last request of the dying.

With great presence of mind I whispered into Doña Rita's ear: "Perfect silence!" and was overjoyed to discover that she had heard me, understood me; that she even had command over her rigid lips. She answered me in a breath (our cheeks were nearly touching): "Take me out of this house."

I glanced at all her clothing scattered about the room and hissed forcibly the warning "Perfect immobility"; noticing with relief that she didn't offer to move, though animation was returning to her and her lips had remained parted in an awful, unintended effect of a smile. And I don't know whether I was pleased when she, who was not to be touched, gripped my wrist suddenly. It had the air of being done on purpose because almost instantly another: "Beloved!" louder, more agonized if possible, got into the room and, yes, went home to my heart. It was followed without any transition, preparation, or warning, by a positively bellowed: "Speak, perjured beast!" which I felt pass in a thrill right through Doña Rita like an electric shock, leaving her as motionless as before.

Till he shook the door handle, which he did immediately afterwards, I wasn't certain through which door he had spoken. The two doors (in different walls) were rather near each other. It was as I expected. He was in the fencing-room, thoroughly aroused, his senses on the alert to catch the slightest sound. A situation not to be trifled with. Leaving the room was for us out of the question. It was quite possible for him to dash round into the hall before we could get clear of the front door. As to making a bolt of it upstairs there was the same objection; and to allow ourselves to be chased all over the empty house by this maniac would have been mere folly. There was no advantage in locking ourselves up anywhere upstairs where the original doors and locks were much lighter. No, true safety was in absolute stillness and silence, so that even his rage should be brought to doubt at last and die expended, or choke him before it died; I didn't care which.

For me to go out and meet him would have been stupid. Now I was certain that he was armed. I had remembered the wall in the fencing-room decorated with trophies of cold steel in all the civilized and savage forms; sheaves of assegais, in the guise of columns and grouped between them stars and suns of choppers, swords, knives; from Italy, from Damascus, from Abyssinia, from the ends of the world. Ortega had only to make his barbarous choice. I suppose he had got up on the bench, and fumbling about amongst them must have brought one down, which, falling, had produced that rattling noise. But in any case to go to meet him would have been folly, because, after all, I might have been overpowered (even with bare hands) and then Doña Rita would have been left utterly defenceless.

"He will speak," came to me the ghostly, terrified murmur of her voice. "Take me out of the house before he begins to speak."

“Keep still,” I whispered. “He will soon get tired of this.”

“You don’t know him.”

“Oh, yes, I do. Been with him two hours.”

At this she let go my wrist and covered her face with her hands passionately. When she dropped them she had the look of one morally crushed.

“What did he say to you?”

“He raved.”

“Listen to me. It was all true!”

“I daresay, but what of that?”

These ghostly words passed between us hardly louder than thoughts; but after my last answer she ceased and gave me a searching stare, then drew in a long breath. The voice on the other side of the door burst out with an impassioned request for a little pity, just a little, and went on begging for a few words, for two words, for one word — one poor little word. Then it gave up, then repeated once more, “Say you are there, Rita, Say one word, just one word. Say ‘yes.’ Come! Just one little yes.”

“You see,” I said. She only lowered her eyelids over the anxious glance she had turned on me.

For a minute we could have had the illusion that he had stolen away, unheard, on the thick mats. But I don’t think that either of us was deceived. The voice returned, stammering words without connection, pausing and faltering, till suddenly steadied it soared into impassioned entreaty, sank to low, harsh tones, voluble, lofty sometimes and sometimes abject. When it paused it left us looking profoundly at each other.

“It’s almost comic,” I whispered.

“Yes. One could laugh,” she assented, with a sort of sinister conviction. Never had I seen her look exactly like that, for an instant another, an incredible Rita! “Haven’t I laughed at him innumerable times?” she added in a sombre whisper.

He was muttering to himself out there, and unexpectedly shouted: “What?” as though he had fancied he had heard something. He waited a while before he started up again with a loud: “Speak up, Queen of the goats, with your goat tricks. . .” All was still for a time, then came a most awful bang on the door. He must have stepped back a pace to hurl himself bodily against the panels. The whole house seemed to shake. He repeated that performance once more, and then varied it by a prolonged drumming with his fists. It was comic. But I felt myself struggling mentally with an invading gloom as though I were no longer sure of myself.

“Take me out,” whispered Doña Rita feverishly, “take me out of this house before it is too late.”

“You will have to stand it,” I answered.

“So be it; but then you must go away yourself. Go now, before it is too late.”

I didn’t condescend to answer this. The drumming on the panels stopped and the absurd thunder of it died out in the house. I don’t know why precisely then I had the acute vision of the red mouth of José Ortega wriggling with rage between his funny whiskers. He began afresh but in a tired tone:

“Do you expect a fellow to forget your tricks, you wicked little devil? Haven’t you ever seen me dodging about to get a sight of you amongst those pretty gentlemen, on horseback, like a princess, with pure cheeks like a carved saint? I wonder I didn’t throw stones at you, I wonder I didn’t run after you shouting the tale — curse my timidity! But I daresay they knew as much as I did. More. All the new tricks — if that were possible.”

While he was making this uproar, Doña Rita put her fingers in her ears and then suddenly changed her mind and clapped her hands over my ears. Instinctively I disengaged my head but she persisted. We had a short tussle without moving from the spot, and suddenly I had my head free, and there was complete silence. He had screamed himself out of breath, but Doña Rita muttering: “Too late, too late,” got her hands away from my grip and slipping altogether out of her fur coat seized some garment lying on a chair near by (I think it was her skirt), with the intention of dressing herself, I imagine, and rushing out of the house. Determined to prevent this, but indeed without thinking very much what I was doing, I got hold of her arm. That struggle was silent, too; but I used the least force possible and she managed to give me an unexpected push. Stepping back to save myself from falling I overturned the little table, bearing the six-branched candlestick. It hit the floor, rebounded with a dull ring on the carpet, and by the time it came to a rest every single candle was out. He on the other side of the door naturally heard the noise and greeted it with a triumphant screech: “Aha! I’ve managed to wake you up,” the very savagery of which had a laughable effect. I felt the weight of Doña Rita grow on my arm and thought it best to let her sink on the floor, wishing to be free in my movements and really afraid that now he had actually heard a noise he would infallibly burst the door. But he didn’t even thump it. He seemed to have exhausted himself in that scream. There was no other light in the room but the darkened glow of the embers and I could hardly make out amongst the shadows of furniture Doña Rita sunk on her knees in a penitential and despairing attitude. Before this collapse I, who had been wrestling desperately with her a moment before, felt that I dare not touch her. This emotion, too, I could not understand; this abandonment of herself, this conscience-stricken humility. A humbly imploring request to open the door came from the other side. Ortega kept on repeating: “Open the door, open the door,” in such an amazing variety of intonations, imperative, whining, persuasive, insinuating, and even unexpectedly jocose, that I really stood there smiling to myself, yet with a gloomy and uneasy heart. Then he remarked, parenthetically as it were, “Oh, you know how to torment a man, you brown-skinned, lean, grinning, dishevelled imp, you. And mark,” he expounded further, in a curiously doctoral tone — ”you are in all your limbs hateful: your eyes are hateful and your mouth is hateful, and your hair is hateful, and your body is cold and vicious like a snake — and altogether you are perdition.”

This statement was astonishingly deliberate. He drew a moaning breath after it and uttered in a heart-rending tone, “You know, Rita, that I cannot live without you. I haven’t lived. I am not living now. This isn’t life. Come, Rita, you can’t take a boy’s soul away and then let him grow up and go about the world, poor devil, while you

go amongst the rich from one pair of arms to another, showing all your best tricks. But I will forgive you if you only open the door,” he ended in an inflated tone: “You remember how you swore time after time to be my wife. You are more fit to be Satan’s wife but I don’t mind. You shall be my wife!”

A sound near the floor made me bend down hastily with a stern: “Don’t laugh,” for in his grotesque, almost burlesque discourses there seemed to me to be truth, passion, and horror enough to move a mountain.

Suddenly suspicion seized him out there. With perfectly farcical unexpectedness he yelled shrilly: “Oh, you deceitful wretch! You won’t escape me! I will have you. . . .”

And in a manner of speaking he vanished. Of course I couldn’t see him but somehow that was the impression. I had hardly time to receive it when crash! . . . he was already at the other door. I suppose he thought that his prey was escaping him. His swiftness was amazing, almost inconceivable, more like the effect of a trick or of a mechanism. The thump on the door was awful as if he had not been able to stop himself in time. The shock seemed enough to stun an elephant. It was really funny. And after the crash there was a moment of silence as if he were recovering himself. The next thing was a low grunt, and at once he picked up the thread of his fixed idea.

“You will have to be my wife. I have no shame. You swore you would be and so you will have to be.” Stifled low sounds made me bend down again to the kneeling form, white in the flush of the dark red glow. “For goodness’ sake don’t,” I whispered down. She was struggling with an appalling fit of merriment, repeating to herself, “Yes, every day, for two months. Sixty times at least, sixty times at least.” Her voice was rising high. She was struggling against laughter, but when I tried to put my hand over her lips I felt her face wet with tears. She turned it this way and that, eluding my hand with repressed low, little moans. I lost my caution and said, “Be quiet,” so sharply as to startle myself (and her, too) into expectant stillness.

Ortega’s voice in the hall asked distinctly: “Eh? What’s this?” and then he kept still on his side listening, but he must have thought that his ears had deceived him. He was getting tired, too. He was keeping quiet out there — resting. Presently he sighed deeply; then in a harsh melancholy tone he started again.

“My love, my soul, my life, do speak to me. What am I that you should take so much trouble to pretend that you aren’t there? Do speak to me,” he repeated tremulously, following this mechanical appeal with a string of extravagantly endearing names, some of them quite childish, which all of a sudden stopped dead; and then after a pause there came a distinct, unutterably weary: “What shall I do now?” as though he were speaking to himself.

I shuddered to hear rising from the floor, by my side, a vibrating, scornful: “Do! Why, slink off home looking over your shoulder as you used to years ago when I had done with you — all but the laughter.”

“Rita,” I murmured, appalled. He must have been struck dumb for a moment. Then, goodness only knows why, in his dismay or rage he was moved to speak in French with a most ridiculous accent.

“So you have found your tongue at last — Catin! You were that from the cradle. Don’t you remember how . . .”

Doña Rita sprang to her feet at my side with a loud cry, “No, George, no,” which bewildered me completely. The suddenness, the loudness of it made the ensuing silence on both sides of the door perfectly awful. It seemed to me that if I didn’t resist with all my might something in me would die on the instant. In the straight, falling folds of the night-dress she looked cold like a block of marble; while I, too, was turned into stone by the terrific clamour in the hall.

“Therese, Therese,” yelled Ortega. “She has got a man in there.” He ran to the foot of the stairs and screamed again, “Therese, Therese! There is a man with her. A man! Come down, you miserable, starved peasant, come down and see.”

I don’t know where Therese was but I am sure that this voice reached her, terrible, as if clamouring to heaven, and with a shrill over-note which made me certain that if she was in bed the only thing she would think of doing would be to put her head under the bed-clothes. With a final yell: “Come down and see,” he flew back at the door of the room and started shaking it violently.

It was a double door, very tall, and there must have been a lot of things loose about its fittings, bolts, latches, and all those brass applications with broken screws, because it rattled, it clattered, it jingled; and produced also the sound as of thunder rolling in the big, empty hall. It was deafening, distressing, and vaguely alarming as if it could bring the house down. At the same time the futility of it had, it cannot be denied, a comic effect. The very magnitude of the racket he raised was funny. But he couldn’t keep up that violent exertion continuously, and when he stopped to rest we could hear him shouting to himself in vengeful tones. He saw it all! He had been decoyed there! (Rattle, rattle, rattle.) He had been decoyed into that town, he screamed, getting more and more excited by the noise he made himself, in order to be exposed to this! (Rattle, rattle.) By this shameless “Catin! Catin! Catin!”

He started at the door again with superhuman vigour. Behind me I heard Doña Rita laughing softly, statuesque, turned all dark in the fading glow. I called out to her quite openly, “Do keep your self-control.” And she called back to me in a clear voice: “Oh, my dear, will you ever consent to speak to me after all this? But don’t ask for the impossible. He was born to be laughed at.”

“Yes,” I cried. “But don’t let yourself go.”

I don’t know whether Ortega heard us. He was exerting then his utmost strength of lung against the infamous plot to expose him to the derision of the fiendish associates of that obscene woman! . . . Then he began another interlude upon the door, so sustained and strong that I had the thought that this was growing absurdly impossible, that either the plaster would begin to fall off the ceiling or he would drop dead next moment, out there.

He stopped, uttered a few curses at the door, and seemed calmer from sheer exhaustion.

“This story will be all over the world,” we heard him begin. “Deceived, decoyed, inveighed, in order to be made a laughing-stock before the most debased of all mankind, that woman and her associates.” This was really a meditation. And then he screamed: “I will kill you all.” Once more he started worrying the door but it was a startlingly feeble effort which he abandoned almost at once. He must have been at the end of his strength. Doña Rita from the middle of the room asked me recklessly loud: “Tell me! Wasn’t he born to be laughed at?” I didn’t answer her. I was so near the door that I thought I ought to hear him panting there. He was terrifying, but he was not serious. He was at the end of his strength, of his breath, of every kind of endurance, but I did not know it. He was done up, finished; but perhaps he did not know it himself. How still he was! Just as I began to wonder at it, I heard him distinctly give a slap to his forehead. “I see it all!” he cried. “That miserable, canting peasant-woman upstairs has arranged it all. No doubt she consulted her priests. I must regain my self-respect. Let her die first.” I heard him make a dash for the foot of the stairs. I was appalled; yet to think of Therese being hoisted with her own petard was like a turn of affairs in a farce. A very ferocious farce. Instinctively I unlocked the door. Doña Rita’s contralto laugh rang out loud, bitter, and contemptuous; and I heard Ortega’s distracted screaming as if under torture. “It hurts! It hurts! It hurts!” I hesitated just an instant, half a second, no more, but before I could open the door wide there was in the hall a short groan and the sound of a heavy fall.

The sight of Ortega lying on his back at the foot of the stairs arrested me in the doorway. One of his legs was drawn up, the other extended fully, his foot very near the pedestal of the silver statuette holding the feeble and tenacious gleam which made the shadows so heavy in that hall. One of his arms lay across his breast. The other arm was extended full length on the white-and-black pavement with the hand palm upwards and the fingers rigidly spread out. The shadow of the lowest step slanted across his face but one whisker and part of his chin could be made out. He appeared strangely flattened. He didn’t move at all. He was in his shirt-sleeves. I felt an extreme distaste for that sight. The characteristic sound of a key worrying in the lock stole into my ears. I couldn’t locate it but I didn’t attend much to that at first. I was engaged in watching Señor Ortega. But for his raised leg he clung so flat to the floor and had taken on himself such a distorted shape that he might have been the mere shadow of Señor Ortega. It was rather fascinating to see him so quiet at the end of all that fury, clamour, passion, and uproar. Surely there was never anything so still in the world as this Ortega. I had a bizarre notion that he was not to be disturbed.

A noise like the rattling of chain links, a small grind and click exploded in the stillness of the hall and a voice began to swear in Italian. These surprising sounds were quite welcome, they recalled me to myself, and I perceived they came from the front door which seemed pushed a little ajar. Was somebody trying to get in? I had no objection, I went to the door and said: “Wait a moment, it’s on the chain.” The deep voice on the other side said: “What an extraordinary thing,” and I assented mentally. It was extraordinary. The chain was never put up, but Therese was a thorough sort of

person, and on this night she had put it up to keep no one out except myself. It was the old Italian and his daughters returning from the ball who were trying to get in.

Suddenly I became intensely alive to the whole situation. I bounded back, closed the door of Blunt's room, and the next moment was speaking to the Italian. "A little patience." My hands trembled but I managed to take down the chain and as I allowed the door to swing open a little more I put myself in his way. He was burly, venerable, a little indignant, and full of thanks. Behind him his two girls, in short-skirted costumes, white stockings, and low shoes, their heads powdered and earrings sparkling in their ears, huddled together behind their father, wrapped up in their light mantles. One had kept her little black mask on her face, the other held hers in her hand.

The Italian was surprised at my blocking the way and remarked pleasantly, "It's cold outside, Signor." I said, "Yes," and added in a hurried whisper: "There is a dead man in the hall." He didn't say a single word but put me aside a little, projected his body in for one searching glance. "Your daughters," I murmured. He said kindly, "Va bene, va bene." And then to them, "Come in, girls."

There is nothing like dealing with a man who has had a long past of out-of-the-way experiences. The skill with which he rounded up and drove the girls across the hall, paternal and irresistible, venerable and reassuring, was a sight to see. They had no time for more than one scared look over the shoulder. He hustled them in and locked them up safely in their part of the house, then crossed the hall with a quick, practical stride. When near Señor Ortega he trod short just in time and said: "In truth, blood"; then selecting the place, knelt down by the body in his tall hat and respectable overcoat, his white beard giving him immense authority somehow. "But — this man is not dead," he exclaimed, looking up at me. With profound sagacity, inherent as it were in his great beard, he never took the trouble to put any questions to me and seemed certain that I had nothing to do with the ghastly sight. "He managed to give himself an enormous gash in his side," was his calm remark. "And what a weapon!" he exclaimed, getting it out from under the body. It was an Abyssinian or Nubian production of a bizarre shape; the clumsiest thing imaginable, partaking of a sickle and a chopper with a sharp edge and a pointed end. A mere cruel-looking curio of inconceivable clumsiness to European eyes.

The old man let it drop with amused disdain. "You had better take hold of his legs," he decided without appeal. I certainly had no inclination to argue. When we lifted him up the head of Señor Ortega fell back desolately, making an awful, defenceless display of his large, white throat.

We found the lamp burning in the studio and the bed made up on the couch on which we deposited our burden. My venerable friend jerked the upper sheet away at once and started tearing it into strips.

"You may leave him to me," said that efficient sage, "but the doctor is your affair. If you don't want this business to make a noise you will have to find a discreet man."

He was most benevolently interested in all the proceedings. He remarked with a patriarchal smile as he tore the sheet noisily: "You had better not lose any time." I

didn't lose any time. I crammed into the next hour an astonishing amount of bodily activity. Without more words I flew out bare-headed into the last night of Carnival. Luckily I was certain of the right sort of doctor. He was an iron-grey man of forty and of a stout habit of body but who was able to put on a spurt. In the cold, dark, and deserted by-streets, he ran with earnest, and ponderous footsteps, which echoed loudly in the cold night air, while I skimmed along the ground a pace or two in front of him. It was only on arriving at the house that I perceived that I had left the front door wide open. All the town, every evil in the world could have entered the black-and-white hall. But I had no time to meditate upon my imprudence. The doctor and I worked in silence for nearly an hour and it was only then while he was washing his hands in the fencing-room that he asked:

"What was he up to, that imbecile?"

"Oh, he was examining this curiosity," I said.

"Oh, yes, and it accidentally went off," said the doctor, looking contemptuously at the Nubian knife I had thrown on the table. Then while wiping his hands: "I would bet there is a woman somewhere under this; but that of course does not affect the nature of the wound. I hope this blood-letting will do him good."

"Nothing will do him any good," I said.

"Curious house this," went on the doctor, "It belongs to a curious sort of woman, too. I happened to see her once or twice. I shouldn't wonder if she were to raise considerable trouble in the track of her pretty feet as she goes along. I believe you know her well."

"Yes."

"Curious people in the house, too. There was a Carlist officer here, a lean, tall, dark man, who couldn't sleep. He consulted me once. Do you know what became of him?"

"No."

The doctor had finished wiping his hands and flung the towel far away.

"Considerable nervous over-strain. Seemed to have a restless brain. Not a good thing, that. For the rest a perfect gentleman. And this Spaniard here, do you know him?"

"Enough not to care what happens to him," I said, "except for the trouble he might cause to the Carlist sympathizers here, should the police get hold of this affair."

"Well, then, he must take his chance in the seclusion of that conservatory sort of place where you have put him. I'll try to find somebody we can trust to look after him. Meantime, I will leave the case to you."

Chapter 8

Directly I had shut the door after the doctor I started shouting for Therese. "Come down at once, you wretched hypocrite," I yelled at the foot of the stairs in a sort of frenzy as though I had been a second Ortega. Not even an echo answered me; but all of a sudden a small flame flickered descending from the upper darkness and Therese appeared on the first floor landing carrying a lighted candle in front of a livid, hard face,

closed against remorse, compassion, or mercy by the meanness of her righteousness and of her rapacious instincts. She was fully dressed in that abominable brown stuff with motionless folds, and as I watched her coming down step by step she might have been made of wood. I stepped back and pointed my finger at the darkness of the passage leading to the studio. She passed within a foot of me, her pale eyes staring straight ahead, her face still with disappointment and fury. Yet it is only my surmise. She might have been made thus inhuman by the force of an invisible purpose. I waited a moment, then, stealthily, with extreme caution, I opened the door of the so-called Captain Blunt's room.

The glow of embers was all but out. It was cold and dark in there; but before I closed the door behind me the dim light from the hall showed me Doña Rita standing on the very same spot where I had left her, statuesque in her night-dress. Even after I shut the door she loomed up enormous, indistinctly rigid and inanimate. I picked up the candelabra, groped for a candle all over the carpet, found one, and lighted it. All that time Doña Rita didn't stir. When I turned towards her she seemed to be slowly awakening from a trance. She was deathly pale and by contrast the melted, sapphire-blue of her eyes looked black as coal. They moved a little in my direction, incurious, recognizing me slowly. But when they had recognized me completely she raised her hands and hid her face in them. A whole minute or more passed. Then I said in a low tone: "Look at me," and she let them fall slowly as if accepting the inevitable.

"Shall I make up the fire?" . . . I waited. "Do you hear me?" She made no sound and with the tip of my finger I touched her bare shoulder. But for its elasticity it might have been frozen. At once I looked round for the fur coat; it seemed to me that there was not a moment to lose if she was to be saved, as though we had been lost on an Arctic plain. I had to put her arms into the sleeves, myself, one after another. They were cold, lifeless, but flexible. Then I moved in front of her and buttoned the thing close round her throat. To do that I had actually to raise her chin with my finger, and it sank slowly down again. I buttoned all the other buttons right down to the ground. It was a very long and splendid fur. Before rising from my kneeling position I felt her feet. Mere ice. The intimacy of this sort of attendance helped the growth of my authority. "Lie down," I murmured, "I shall pile on you every blanket I can find here," but she only shook her head.

Not even in the days when she ran "shrill as a cicada and thin as a match" through the chill mists of her native mountains could she ever have felt so cold, so wretched, and so desolate. Her very soul, her grave, indignant, and fantastic soul, seemed to drowse like an exhausted traveller surrendering himself to the sleep of death. But when I asked her again to lie down she managed to answer me, "Not in this room." The dumb spell was broken. She turned her head from side to side, but oh! how cold she was! It seemed to come out of her, numbing me, too; and the very diamonds on the arrow of gold sparkled like hoar frost in the light of the one candle.

"Not in this room; not here," she protested, with that peculiar suavity of tone which made her voice unforgettable, irresistible, no matter what she said. "Not after all this!

I couldn't close my eyes in this place. It's full of corruption and ugliness all round, in me, too, everywhere except in your heart, which has nothing to do where I breathe. And here you may leave me. But wherever you go remember that I am not evil, I am not evil."

I said: "I don't intend to leave you here. There is my room upstairs. You have been in it before."

"Oh, you have heard of that," she whispered. The beginning of a wan smile vanished from her lips.

"I also think you can't stay in this room; and, surely, you needn't hesitate . . ."

"No. It doesn't matter now. He has killed me. Rita is dead."

While we exchanged these words I had retrieved the quilted, blue slippers and had put them on her feet. She was very tractable. Then taking her by the arm I led her towards the door.

"He has killed me," she repeated in a sigh. "The little joy that was in me."

"He has tried to kill himself out there in the hall," I said. She put back like a frightened child but she couldn't be dragged on as a child can be.

I assured her that the man was no longer there but she only repeated, "I can't get through the hall. I can't walk. I can't . . ."

"Well," I said, flinging the door open and seizing her suddenly in my arms, "if you can't walk then you shall be carried," and I lifted her from the ground so abruptly that she could not help catching me round the neck as any child almost will do instinctively when you pick it up.

I ought really to have put those blue slippers in my pocket. One dropped off at the bottom of the stairs as I was stepping over an unpleasant-looking mess on the marble pavement, and the other was lost a little way up the flight when, for some reason (perhaps from a sense of insecurity), she began to struggle. Though I had an odd sense of being engaged in a sort of nursery adventure she was no child to carry. I could just do it. But not if she chose to struggle. I set her down hastily and only supported her round the waist for the rest of the way. My room, of course, was perfectly dark but I led her straight to the sofa at once and let her fall on it. Then as if I had in sober truth rescued her from an Alpine height or an Arctic floe, I busied myself with nothing but lighting the gas and starting the fire. I didn't even pause to lock my door. All the time I was aware of her presence behind me, nay, of something deeper and more my own — of her existence itself — of a small blue flame, blue like her eyes, flickering and clear within her frozen body. When I turned to her she was sitting very stiff and upright, with her feet posed hieratically on the carpet and her head emerging out of the ample fur collar, such as a gem-like flower above the rim of a dark vase. I tore the blankets and the pillows off my bed and piled them up in readiness in a great heap on the floor near the couch. My reason for this was that the room was large, too large for the fireplace, and the couch was nearest to the fire. She gave no sign but one of her wistful attempts at a smile. In a most business-like way I took the arrow out of her hair and laid it on the centre table. The tawny mass fell loose at once about her shoulders

and made her look even more desolate than before. But there was an invincible need of gaiety in her heart. She said funnily, looking at the arrow sparkling in the gas light:

“Ah! That poor philistinish ornament!”

An echo of our early days, not more innocent but so much more youthful, was in her tone; and we both, as if touched with poignant regret, looked at each other with enlightened eyes.

“Yes,” I said, “how far away all this is. And you wouldn’t leave even that object behind when you came last in here. Perhaps it is for that reason it haunted me — mostly at night. I dreamed of you sometimes as a huntress nymph gleaming white through the foliage and throwing this arrow like a dart straight at my heart. But it never reached it. It always fell at my feet as I woke up. The huntress never meant to strike down that particular quarry.”

“The huntress was wild but she was not evil. And she was no nymph, but only a goatherd girl. Dream of her no more, my dear.”

I had the strength of mind to make a sign of assent and busied myself arranging a couple of pillows at one end of the sofa. “Upon my soul, goatherd, you are not responsible,” I said. “You are not! Lay down that uneasy head,” I continued, forcing a half-playful note into my immense sadness, “that has even dreamed of a crown — but not for itself.”

She lay down quietly. I covered her up, looked once into her eyes and felt the restlessness of fatigue over-power me so that I wanted to stagger out, walk straight before me, stagger on and on till I dropped. In the end I lost myself in thought. I woke with a start to her voice saying positively:

“No. Not even in this room. I can’t close my eyes. Impossible. I have a horror of myself. That voice in my ears. All true. All true.”

She was sitting up, two masses of tawny hair fell on each side of her tense face. I threw away the pillows from which she had risen and sat down behind her on the couch. “Perhaps like this,” I suggested, drawing her head gently on my breast. She didn’t resist, she didn’t even sigh, she didn’t look at me or attempt to settle herself in any way. It was I who settled her after taking up a position which I thought I should be able to keep for hours — for ages. After a time I grew composed enough to become aware of the ticking of the clock, even to take pleasure in it. The beat recorded the moments of her rest, while I sat, keeping as still as if my life depended upon it with my eyes fixed idly on the arrow of gold gleaming and glittering dimly on the table under the lowered gas-jet. And presently my breathing fell into the quiet rhythm of the sleep which descended on her at last. My thought was that now nothing mattered in the world because I had the world safe resting in my arms — or was it in my heart?

Suddenly my heart seemed torn in two within my breast and half of my breath knocked out of me. It was a tumultuous awakening. The day had come. Doña Rita had opened her eyes, found herself in my arms, and instantly had flung herself out of them with one sudden effort. I saw her already standing in the filtered sunshine of the

closed shutters, with all the childlike horror and shame of that night vibrating afresh in the awakened body of the woman.

“Daylight,” she whispered in an appalled voice. “Don’t look at me, George. I can’t face daylight. No — not with you. Before we set eyes on each other all that past was like nothing. I had crushed it all in my new pride. Nothing could touch the Rita whose hand was kissed by you. But now! Never in daylight.”

I sat there stupid with surprise and grief. This was no longer the adventure of venturesome children in a nursery-book. A grown man’s bitterness, informed, suspicious, resembling hatred, welled out of my heart.

“All this means that you are going to desert me again?” I said with contempt. “All right. I won’t throw stones after you . . . Are you going, then?”

She lowered her head slowly with a backward gesture of her arm as if to keep me off, for I had sprung to my feet all at once as if mad.

“Then go quickly,” I said. “You are afraid of living flesh and blood. What are you running after? Honesty, as you say, or some distinguished carcass to feed your vanity on? I know how cold you can be — and yet live. What have I done to you? You go to sleep in my arms, wake up and go away. Is it to impress me? Charlatanism of character, my dear.”

She stepped forward on her bare feet as firm on that floor which seemed to heave up and down before my eyes as she had ever been — goatherd child leaping on the rocks of her native hills which she was never to see again. I snatched the arrow of gold from the table and threw it after her.

“Don’t forget this thing,” I cried, “you would never forgive yourself for leaving it behind.”

It struck the back of the fur coat and fell on the floor behind her. She never looked round. She walked to the door, opened it without haste, and on the landing in the diffused light from the ground-glass skylight there appeared, rigid, like an implacable and obscure fate, the awful Therese — waiting for her sister. The heavy ends of a big black shawl thrown over her head hung massively in biblical folds. With a faint cry of dismay Doña Rita stopped just within my room.

The two women faced each other for a few moments silently. Therese spoke first. There was no austerity in her tone. Her voice was as usual, pertinacious, unfeeling, with a slight plaint in it; terrible in its unchanged purpose.

“I have been standing here before this door all night,” she said. “I don’t know how I lived through it. I thought I would die a hundred times for shame. So that’s how you are spending your time? You are worse than shameless. But God may still forgive you. You have a soul. You are my sister. I will never abandon you — till you die.”

“What is it?” Doña Rita was heard wistfully, “my soul or this house that you won’t abandon.”

“Come out and bow your head in humiliation. I am your sister and I shall help you to pray to God and all the Saints. Come away from that poor young gentleman who like all the others can have nothing but contempt and disgust for you in his heart.

Come and hide your head where no one will reproach you — but I, your sister. Come out and beat your breast: come, poor Sinner, and let me kiss you, for you are my sister!”

While Therese was speaking Doña Rita stepped back a pace and as the other moved forward still extending the hand of sisterly love, she slammed the door in Therese’s face. “You abominable girl!” she cried fiercely. Then she turned about and walked towards me who had not moved. I felt hardly alive but for the cruel pain that possessed my whole being. On the way she stooped to pick up the arrow of gold and then moved on quicker, holding it out to me in her open palm.

“You thought I wouldn’t give it to you. Amigo, I wanted nothing so much as to give it to you. And now, perhaps — you will take it.”

“Not without the woman,” I said sombrely.

“Take it,” she said. “I haven’t the courage to deliver myself up to Therese. No. Not even for your sake. Don’t you think I have been miserable enough yet?”

I snatched the arrow out of her hand then and ridiculously pressed it to my breast; but as I opened my lips she who knew what was struggling for utterance in my heart cried in a ringing tone:

“Speak no words of love, George! Not yet. Not in this house of ill-luck and falsehood. Not within a hundred miles of this house, where they came clinging to me all profaned from the mouth of that man. Haven’t you heard them — the horrible things? And what can words have to do between you and me?”

Her hands were stretched out imploringly, I said, childishly disconcerted:

“But, Rita, how can I help using words of love to you? They come of themselves on my lips!”

“They come! Ah! But I shall seal your lips with the thing itself,” she said. “Like this. . . .”

Second Note

The narrative of our man goes on for some six months more, from this, the last night of the Carnival season up to and beyond the season of roses. The tone of it is much less of exultation than might have been expected. Love as is well known having nothing to do with reason, being insensible to forebodings and even blind to evidence, the surrender of those two beings to a precarious bliss has nothing very astonishing in itself; and its portrayal, as he attempts it, lacks dramatic interest. The sentimental interest could only have a fascination for readers themselves actually in love. The response of a reader depends on the mood of the moment, so much so that a book may seem extremely interesting when read late at night, but might appear merely a lot of vapid verbiage in the morning. My conviction is that the mood in which the continuation of his story would appear sympathetic is very rare. This consideration has induced me to suppress it — all but the actual facts which round up the previous events and satisfy such curiosity as might have been aroused by the foregoing narrative.

It is to be remarked that this period is characterized more by a deep and joyous tenderness than by sheer passion. All fierceness of spirit seems to have burnt itself out in their preliminary hesitations and struggles against each other and themselves. Whether love in its entirety has, speaking generally, the same elementary meaning for women as for men, is very doubtful. Civilization has been at work there. But the fact is that those two display, in every phase of discovery and response, an exact accord. Both show themselves amazingly ingenuous in the practice of sentiment. I believe that those who know women won't be surprised to hear me say that she was as new to love as he was. During their retreat in the region of the Maritime Alps, in a small house built of dry stones and embowered with roses, they appear all through to be less like released lovers than as companions who had found out each other's fitness in a specially intense way. Upon the whole, I think that there must be some truth in his insistence of there having always been something childlike in their relation. In the unreserved and instant sharing of all thoughts, all impressions, all sensations, we see the naïveness of a children's foolhardy adventure. This unreserved expressed for him the whole truth of the situation. With her it may have been different. It might have been assumed; yet nobody is altogether a comedian; and even comedians themselves have got to believe in the part they play. Of the two she appears much the more assured and confident. But if in this she was a comedienne then it was but a great achievement of her ineradicable honesty. Having once renounced her honourable scruples she took good care that he should taste no flavour of misgivings in the cup. Being older it was she who imparted

its character to the situation. As to the man if he had any superiority of his own it was simply the superiority of him who loves with the greater self-surrender.

This is what appears from the pages I have discreetly suppressed — partly out of regard for the pages themselves. In every, even terrestrial, mystery there is as it were a sacred core. A sustained commentary on love is not fit for every eye. A universal experience is exactly the sort of thing which is most difficult to appraise justly in a particular instance.

How this particular instance affected Rose, who was the only companion of the two hermits in their rose-embowered hut of stones, I regret not to be able to report; but I will venture to say that for reasons on which I need not enlarge, the girl could not have been very reassured by what she saw. It seems to me that her devotion could never be appeased; for the conviction must have been growing on her that, no matter what happened, Madame could never have any friends. It may be that Doña Rita had given her a glimpse of the unavoidable end, and that the girl's tarnished eyes masked a certain amount of apprehensive, helpless desolation.

What meantime was becoming of the fortune of Henry Allègre is another curious question. We have been told that it was too big to be tied up in a sack and thrown into the sea. That part of it represented by the fabulous collections was still being protected by the police. But for the rest, it may be assumed that its power and significance were lost to an interested world for something like six months. What is certain is that the late Henry Allègre's man of affairs found himself comparatively idle. The holiday must have done much good to his harassed brain. He had received a note from Doña Rita saying that she had gone into retreat and that she did not mean to send him her address, not being in the humour to be worried with letters on any subject whatever. "It's enough for you" — she wrote — "to know that I am alive." Later, at irregular intervals, he received scraps of paper bearing the stamps of various post offices and containing the simple statement: "I am still alive," signed with an enormous, flourished exuberant R. I imagine Rose had to travel some distances by rail to post those messages. A thick veil of secrecy had been lowered between the world and the lovers; yet even this veil turned out not altogether impenetrable.

He — it would be convenient to call him Monsieur George to the end — shared with Doña Rita her perfect detachment from all mundane affairs; but he had to make two short visits to Marseilles. The first was prompted by his loyal affection for Dominic. He wanted to discover what had happened or was happening to Dominic and to find out whether he could do something for that man. But Dominic was not the sort of person for whom one can do much. Monsieur George did not even see him. It looked uncommonly as if Dominic's heart were broken. Monsieur George remained concealed for twenty-four hours in the very house in which Madame Léonore had her café. He spent most of that time in conversing with Madame Léonore about Dominic. She was distressed, but her mind was made up. That bright-eyed, nonchalant, and passionate woman was making arrangements to dispose of her café before departing to join Dominic. She would not say where. Having ascertained that his assistance was not required Monsieur George,

in his own words, “managed to sneak out of the town without being seen by a single soul that mattered.”

The second occasion was very prosaic and shockingly incongruous with the supermundane colouring of these days. He had neither the fortune of Henry Allègre nor a man of affairs of his own. But some rent had to be paid to somebody for the stone hut and Rose could not go marketing in the tiny hamlet at the foot of the hill without a little money. There came a time when Monsieur George had to descend from the heights of his love in order, in his own words, “to get a supply of cash.” As he had disappeared very suddenly and completely for a time from the eyes of mankind it was necessary that he should show himself and sign some papers. That business was transacted in the office of the banker mentioned in the story. Monsieur George wished to avoid seeing the man himself but in this he did not succeed. The interview was short. The banker naturally asked no questions, made no allusions to persons and events, and didn’t even mention the great Legitimist Principle which presented to him now no interest whatever. But for the moment all the world was talking of the Carlist enterprise. It had collapsed utterly, leaving behind, as usual, a large crop of recriminations, charges of incompetency and treachery, and a certain amount of scandalous gossip. The banker (his wife’s salon had been very Carlist indeed) declared that he had never believed in the success of the cause. “You are well out of it,” he remarked with a chilly smile to Monsieur George. The latter merely observed that he had been very little “in it” as a matter of fact, and that he was quite indifferent to the whole affair.

“You left a few of your feathers in it, nevertheless,” the banker concluded with a wooden face and with the curttness of a man who knows.

Monsieur George ought to have taken the very next train out of the town but he yielded to the temptation to discover what had happened to the house in the street of the Consuls after he and Doña Rita had stolen out of it like two scared yet jubilant children. All he discovered was a strange, fat woman, a sort of virago, who had, apparently, been put in as a caretaker by the man of affairs. She made some difficulties to admit that she had been in charge for the last four months; ever since the person who was there before had eloped with some Spaniard who had been lying in the house ill with fever for more than six weeks. No, she never saw the person. Neither had she seen the Spaniard. She had only heard the talk of the street. Of course she didn’t know where these people had gone. She manifested some impatience to get rid of Monsieur George and even attempted to push him towards the door. It was, he says, a very funny experience. He noticed the feeble flame of the gas-jet in the hall still waiting for extinction in the general collapse of the world.

Then he decided to have a bit of dinner at the Restaurant de la Gare where he felt pretty certain he would not meet any of his friends. He could not have asked Madame Léonore for hospitality because Madame Léonore had gone away already. His acquaintances were not the sort of people likely to happen casually into a restaurant of that kind and moreover he took the precaution to seat himself at a small table so as to face the wall. Yet before long he felt a hand laid gently on his shoulder, and, looking

up, saw one of his acquaintances, a member of the Royalist club, a young man of a very cheerful disposition but whose face looked down at him with a grave and anxious expression.

Monsieur George was far from delighted. His surprise was extreme when in the course of the first phrases exchanged with him he learned that this acquaintance had come to the station with the hope of finding him there.

“You haven’t been seen for some time,” he said. “You were perhaps somewhere where the news from the world couldn’t reach you? There have been many changes amongst our friends and amongst people one used to hear of so much. There is Madame de Lastaola for instance, who seems to have vanished from the world which was so much interested in her. You have no idea where she may be now?”

Monsieur George remarked grumpily that he couldn’t say.

The other tried to appear at ease. Tongues were wagging about it in Paris. There was a sort of international financier, a fellow with an Italian name, a shady personality, who had been looking for her all over Europe and talked in clubs — astonishing how such fellows get into the best clubs — oh! Azzolati was his name. But perhaps what a fellow like that said did not matter. The funniest thing was that there was no man of any position in the world who had disappeared at the same time. A friend in Paris wrote to him that a certain well-known journalist had rushed South to investigate the mystery but had returned no wiser than he went.

Monsieur George remarked more unamiably than before that he really could not help all that.

“No,” said the other with extreme gentleness, “only of all the people more or less connected with the Carlist affair you are the only one that had also disappeared before the final collapse.”

“What!” cried Monsieur George.

“Just so,” said the other meaningly. “You know that all my people like you very much, though they hold various opinions as to your discretion. Only the other day Jane, you know my married sister, and I were talking about you. She was extremely distressed. I assured her that you must be very far away or very deeply buried somewhere not to have given a sign of life under this provocation.”

Naturally Monsieur George wanted to know what it was all about; and the other appeared greatly relieved.

“I was sure you couldn’t have heard. I don’t want to be indiscreet, I don’t want to ask you where you were. It came to my ears that you had been seen at the bank to-day and I made a special effort to lay hold of you before you vanished again; for, after all, we have been always good friends and all our lot here liked you very much. Listen. You know a certain Captain Blunt, don’t you?”

Monsieur George owned to knowing Captain Blunt but only very slightly. His friend then informed him that this Captain Blunt was apparently well acquainted with Madame de Lastaola, or, at any rate, pretended to be. He was an honourable man, a member of a good club, he was very Parisian in a way, and all this, he contin-

ued, made all the worse that of which he was under the painful necessity of warning Monsieur George. This Blunt on three distinct occasions when the name of Madame de Lastaola came up in conversation in a mixed company of men had expressed his regret that she should have become the prey of a young adventurer who was exploiting her shamelessly. He talked like a man certain of his facts and as he mentioned names . . .

“In fact,” the young man burst out excitedly, “it is your name that he mentions. And in order to fix the exact personality he always takes care to add that you are that young fellow who was known as Monsieur George all over the South amongst the initiated Carlists.”

How Blunt had got enough information to base that atrocious calumny upon, Monsieur George couldn't imagine. But there it was. He kept silent in his indignation till his friend murmured, “I expect you will want him to know that you are here.”

“Yes,” said Monsieur George, “and I hope you will consent to act for me altogether. First of all, pray, let him know by wire that I am waiting for him. This will be enough to fetch him down here, I can assure you. You may ask him also to bring two friends with him. I don't intend this to be an affair for Parisian journalists to write paragraphs about.”

“Yes. That sort of thing must be stopped at once,” the other admitted. He assented to Monsieur George's request that the meeting should be arranged for at his elder brother's country place where the family stayed very seldom. There was a most convenient walled garden there. And then Monsieur George caught his train promising to be back on the fourth day and leaving all further arrangements to his friend. He prided himself on his impenetrability before Doña Rita; on the happiness without a shadow of those four days. However, Doña Rita must have had the intuition of there being something in the wind, because on the evening of the very same day on which he left her again on some pretence or other, she was already ensconced in the house in the street of the Consuls, with the trustworthy Rose scouting all over the town to gain information.

Of the proceedings in the walled garden there is no need to speak in detail. They were conventionally correct, but an earnestness of purpose which could be felt in the very air lifted the business above the common run of affairs of honour. One bit of byplay unnoticed by the seconds, very busy for the moment with their arrangements, must be mentioned. Disregarding the severe rules of conduct in such cases Monsieur George approached his adversary and addressed him directly.

“Captain Blunt,” he said, “the result of this meeting may go against me. In that case you will recognize publicly that you were wrong. For you are wrong and you know it. May I trust your honour?”

In answer to that appeal Captain Blunt, always correct, didn't open his lips but only made a little bow. For the rest he was perfectly ruthless. If he was utterly incapable of being carried away by love there was nothing equivocal about his jealousy. Such psychology is not very rare and really from the point of view of the combat itself one

cannot very well blame him. What happened was this. Monsieur George fired on the word and, whether luck or skill, managed to hit Captain Blunt in the upper part of the arm which was holding the pistol. That gentleman's arm dropped powerless by his side. But he did not drop his weapon. There was nothing equivocal about his determination. With the greatest deliberation he reached with his left hand for his pistol and taking careful aim shot Monsieur George through the left side of his breast. One may imagine the consternation of the four seconds and the activity of the two surgeons in the confined, drowsy heat of that walled garden. It was within an easy drive of the town and as Monsieur George was being conveyed there at a walking pace a little brougham coming from the opposite direction pulled up at the side of the road. A thickly veiled woman's head looked out of the window, took in the state of affairs at a glance, and called out in a firm voice: "Follow my carriage." The brougham turning round took the lead. Long before this convoy reached the town another carriage containing four gentlemen (of whom one was leaning back languidly with his arm in a sling) whisked past and vanished ahead in a cloud of white, Provençal dust. And this is the last appearance of Captain Blunt in Monsieur George's narrative. Of course he was only told of it later. At the time he was not in a condition to notice things. Its interest in his surroundings remained of a hazy and nightmarish kind for many days together. From time to time he had the impression that he was in a room strangely familiar to him, that he had unsatisfactory visions of Doña Rita, to whom he tried to speak as if nothing had happened, but that she always put her hand on his mouth to prevent him and then spoke to him herself in a very strange voice which sometimes resembled the voice of Rose. The face, too, sometimes resembled the face of Rose. There were also one or two men's faces which he seemed to know well enough though he didn't recall their names. He could have done so with a slight effort, but it would have been too much trouble. Then came a time when the hallucinations of Doña Rita and the faithful Rose left him altogether. Next came a period, perhaps a year, or perhaps an hour, during which he seemed to dream all through his past life. He felt no apprehension, he didn't try to speculate as to the future. He felt that all possible conclusions were out of his power, and therefore he was indifferent to everything. He was like that dream's disinterested spectator who doesn't know what is going to happen next. Suddenly for the first time in his life he had the soul-satisfying consciousness of floating off into deep slumber.

When he woke up after an hour, or a day, or a month, there was dusk in the room; but he recognized it perfectly. It was his apartment in Doña Rita's house; those were the familiar surroundings in which he had so often told himself that he must either die or go mad. But now he felt perfectly clear-headed and the full sensation of being alive came all over him, languidly delicious. The greatest beauty of it was that there was no need to move. This gave him a sort of moral satisfaction. Then the first thought independent of personal sensations came into his head. He wondered when Therese would come in and begin talking. He saw vaguely a human figure in the room but that was a man. He was speaking in a deadened voice which had yet a preternatural distinctness.

“This is the second case I have had in this house, and I am sure that directly or indirectly it was connected with that woman. She will go on like this leaving a track behind her and then some day there will be really a corpse. This young fellow might have been it.”

“In this case, Doctor,” said another voice, “one can’t blame the woman very much. I assure you she made a very determined fight.”

“What do you mean? That she didn’t want to. . . “

“Yes. A very good fight. I heard all about it. It is easy to blame her, but, as she asked me despairingly, could she go through life veiled from head to foot or go out of it altogether into a convent? No, she isn’t guilty. She is simply — what she is.”

“And what’s that?”

“Very much of a woman. Perhaps a little more at the mercy of contradictory impulses than other women. But that’s not her fault. I really think she has been very honest.”

The voices sank suddenly to a still lower murmur and presently the shape of the man went out of the room. Monsieur George heard distinctly the door open and shut. Then he spoke for the first time, discovering, with a particular pleasure, that it was quite easy to speak. He was even under the impression that he had shouted:

“Who is here?”

From the shadow of the room (he recognized at once the characteristic outlines of the bulky shape) Mills advanced to the side of the bed. Doña Rita had telegraphed to him on the day of the duel and the man of books, leaving his retreat, had come as fast as boats and trains could carry him South. For, as he said later to Monsieur George, he had become fully awake to his part of responsibility. And he added: “It was not of you alone that I was thinking.” But the very first question that Monsieur George put to him was:

“How long is it since I saw you last?”

“Something like ten months,” answered Mills’ kindly voice.

“Ah! Is Therese outside the door? She stood there all night, you know.”

“Yes, I heard of it. She is hundreds of miles away now.”

“Well, then, ask Rita to come in.”

“I can’t do that, my dear boy,” said Mills with affectionate gentleness. He hesitated a moment. “Doña Rita went away yesterday,” he said softly.

“Went away? Why?” asked Monsieur George.

“Because, I am thankful to say, your life is no longer in danger. And I have told you that she is gone because, strange as it may seem, I believe you can stand this news better now than later when you get stronger.”

It must be believed that Mills was right. Monsieur George fell asleep before he could feel any pang at that intelligence. A sort of confused surprise was in his mind but nothing else, and then his eyes closed. The awakening was another matter. But that, too, Mills had foreseen. For days he attended the bedside patiently letting the man in the bed talk to him of Doña Rita but saying little himself; till one day he was asked pointedly whether she had ever talked to him openly. And then he said that she

had, on more than one occasion. "She told me amongst other things," Mills said, "if this is any satisfaction to you to know, that till she met you she knew nothing of love. That you were to her in more senses than one a complete revelation."

"And then she went away. Ran away from the revelation," said the man in the bed bitterly.

"What's the good of being angry?" remonstrated Mills, gently. "You know that this world is not a world for lovers, not even for such lovers as you two who have nothing to do with the world as it is. No, a world of lovers would be impossible. It would be a mere ruin of lives which seem to be meant for something else. What this something is, I don't know; and I am certain," he said with playful compassion, "that she and you will never find out."

A few days later they were again talking of Doña Rita Mills said:

"Before she left the house she gave me that arrow she used to wear in her hair to hand over to you as a keepsake and also to prevent you, she said, from dreaming of her. This message sounds rather cryptic."

"Oh, I understand perfectly," said Monsieur George. "Don't give me the thing now. Leave it somewhere where I can find it some day when I am alone. But when you write to her you may tell her that now at last — surer than Mr. Blunt's bullet — the arrow has found its mark. There will be no more dreaming. Tell her. She will understand."

"I don't even know where she is," murmured Mills.

"No, but her man of affairs knows. . . . Tell me, Mills, what will become of her?"

"She will be wasted," said Mills sadly. "She is a most unfortunate creature. Not even poverty could save her now. She cannot go back to her goats. Yet who can tell? She may find something in life. She may! It won't be love. She has sacrificed that chance to the integrity of your life — heroically. Do you remember telling her once that you meant to live your life integrally — oh, you lawless young pedant! Well, she is gone; but you may be sure that whatever she finds now in life it will not be peace. You understand me? Not even in a convent."

"She was supremely lovable," said the wounded man, speaking of her as if she were lying dead already on his oppressed heart.

"And elusive," struck in Mills in a low voice. "Some of them are like that. She will never change. Amid all the shames and shadows of that life there will always lie the ray of her perfect honesty. I don't know about your honesty, but yours will be the easier lot. You will always have your . . . other love — you pig-headed enthusiast of the sea."

"Then let me go to it," cried the enthusiast. "Let me go to it."

He went to it as soon as he had strength enough to feel the crushing weight of his loss (or his gain) fully, and discovered that he could bear it without flinching. After this discovery he was fit to face anything. He tells his correspondent that if he had been more romantic he would never have looked at any other woman. But on the contrary. No face worthy of attention escaped him. He looked at them all; and each reminded him of Doña Rita, either by some profound resemblance or by the startling force of contrast.

The faithful austerity of the sea protected him from the rumours that fly on the tongues of men. He never heard of her. Even the echoes of the sale of the great Allègre collection failed to reach him. And that event must have made noise enough in the world. But he never heard. He does not know. Then, years later, he was deprived even of the arrow. It was lost to him in a stormy catastrophe; and he confesses that next day he stood on a rocky, wind-assaulted shore, looking at the seas raging over the very spot of his loss and thought that it was well. It was not a thing that one could leave behind one for strange hands — for the cold eyes of ignorance. Like the old King of Thule with the gold goblet of his mistress he would have had to cast it into the sea, before he died. He says he smiled at the romantic notion. But what else could he have done with it?

The Rescue

A ROMANCE OF THE SHALLOWS

First published in 1920, but begun in the 1890s, this novel concludes what is sometimes referred to as “The Lingard Trilogy”, a group of novels based on Conrad’s experience as mate on the steamer, Vidar. Although it is the last of the three novels to be published, after *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), the events related in the novel precede those.

The first edition

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'Allas!' quod she, 'that ever this sholde happe! For wende I never,
by possibilitee, That swich a monstre or merveille mighte be!'

— THE FRANKELEYN'S TALE

TO FREDERIC COURTLAND PENFIELD LAST AMBASSADOR OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE LATE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE, THIS OLD
TIME TALE IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED IN MEMORY OF THE RESCUE OF
CERTAIN DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS EFFECTED BY HIM IN THE WORLD'S
GREAT STORM OF THE YEAR 1914

Author's Note

Of the three long novels of mine which suffered an interruption, "The Rescue" was the one that had to wait the longest for the good pleasure of the Fates. I am betraying no secret when I state here that it had to wait precisely for twenty years. I laid it aside at the end of the summer of 1898 and it was about the end of the summer of 1918 that I took it up again with the firm determination to see the end of it and helped by the sudden feeling that I might be equal to the task.

This does not mean that I turned to it with elation. I was well aware and perhaps even too much aware of the dangers of such an adventure. The amazingly sympathetic kindness which men of various temperaments, diverse views and different literary tastes have been for years displaying towards my work has done much for me, has done all — except giving me that over-weening self-confidence which may assist an adventurer sometimes but in the long run ends by leading him to the gallows.

As the characteristic I want most to impress upon these short Author's Notes prepared for my first Collected Edition is that of absolute frankness, I hasten to declare that I founded my hopes not on my supposed merits but on the continued goodwill of my readers. I may say at once that my hopes have been justified out of all proportion to my deserts. I met with the most considerate, most delicately expressed criticism free from all antagonism and in its conclusions showing an insight which in itself could not fail to move me deeply, but was associated also with enough commendation to make me feel rich beyond the dreams of avarice — I mean an artist's avarice which seeks its treasure in the hearts of men and women.

No! Whatever the preliminary anxieties might have been this adventure was not to end in sorrow. Once more Fortune favoured audacity; and yet I have never forgotten the jocular translation of *Audaces fortuna juvat* offered to me by my tutor when I was a small boy: "The Audacious get bitten." However he took care to mention that there were various kinds of audacity. Oh, there are, there are! . . . There is, for instance, the kind of audacity almost indistinguishable from impudence. . . . I must believe that in this case I have not been impudent for I am not conscious of having been bitten.

The truth is that when "The Rescue" was laid aside it was not laid aside in despair. Several reasons contributed to this abandonment and, no doubt, the first of them was the growing sense of general difficulty in the handling of the subject. The contents and the course of the story I had clearly in my mind. But as to the way of presenting the facts, and perhaps in a certain measure as to the nature of the facts themselves, I had many doubts. I mean the telling, representative facts, helpful to carry on the idea, and, at the same time, of such a nature as not to demand an elaborate creation of the

atmosphere to the detriment of the action. I did not see how I could avoid becoming wearisome in the presentation of detail and in the pursuit of clearness. I saw the action plainly enough. What I had lost for the moment was the sense of the proper formula of expression, the only formula that would suit. This, of course, weakened my confidence in the intrinsic worth and in the possible interest of the story — that is in my invention. But I suspect that all the trouble was, in reality, the doubt of my prose, the doubt of its adequacy, of its power to master both the colours and the shades.

It is difficult to describe, exactly as I remember it, the complex state of my feelings; but those of my readers who take an interest in artistic perplexities will understand me best when I point out that I dropped “The Rescue” not to give myself up to idleness, regrets, or dreaming, but to begin “The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’” and to go on with it without hesitation and without a pause. A comparison of any page of “The Rescue” with any page of “The Nigger” will furnish an ocular demonstration of the nature and the inward meaning of this first crisis of my writing life. For it was a crisis undoubtedly. The laying aside of a work so far advanced was a very awful decision to take. It was wrung from me by a sudden conviction that there only was the road of salvation, the clear way out for an uneasy conscience. The finishing of “The Nigger” brought to my troubled mind the comforting sense of an accomplished task, and the first consciousness of a certain sort of mastery which could accomplish something with the aid of propitious stars. Why I did not return to “The Rescue” at once then, was not for the reason that I had grown afraid of it. Being able now to assume a firm attitude I said to myself deliberately: “That thing can wait.” At the same time I was just as certain in my mind that “Youth,” a story which I had then, so to speak, on the tip of my pen, could not wait. Neither could “Heart of Darkness” be put off; for the practical reason that Mr. Wm. Blackwood having requested me to write something for the No. M of his magazine I had to stir up at once the subject of that tale which had been long lying quiescent in my mind, because, obviously, the venerable Maga at her patriarchal age of 1000 numbers could not be kept waiting. Then “Lord Jim,” with about seventeen pages already written at odd times, put in his claim which was irresistible. Thus every stroke of the pen was taking me further away from the abandoned “Rescue,” not without some compunction on my part but with a gradually diminishing resistance; till at last I let myself go as if recognising a superior influence against which it was useless to contend.

The years passed and the pages grew in number, and the long reveries of which they were the outcome stretched wide between me and the deserted “Rescue” like the smooth hazy spaces of a dreamy sea. Yet I never actually lost sight of that dark speck in the misty distance. It had grown very small but it asserted itself with the appeal of old associations. It seemed to me that it would be a base thing for me to slip out of the world leaving it out there all alone, waiting for its fate — that would never come?

Sentiment, pure sentiment as you see, prompted me in the last instance to face the pains and hazards of that return. As I moved slowly towards the abandoned body of the tale it loomed up big amongst the glittering shallows of the coast, lonely but not

forbidding. There was nothing about it of a grim derelict. It had an air of expectant life. One after another I made out the familiar faces watching my approach with faint smiles of amused recognition. They had known well enough that I was bound to come back to them. But their eyes met mine seriously as was only to be expected since I, myself, felt very serious as I stood amongst them again after years of absence. At once, without wasting words, we went to work together on our renewed life; and every moment I felt more strongly that They Who had Waited bore no grudge to the man who however widely he may have wandered at times had played truant only once in his life.

1920. J. C.

Part 1 — The Man and the Brig

The shallow sea that foams and murmurs on the shores of the thousand islands, big and little, which make up the Malay Archipelago has been for centuries the scene of adventurous undertakings. The vices and the virtues of four nations have been displayed in the conquest of that region that even to this day has not been robbed of all the mystery and romance of its past — and the race of men who had fought against the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch and the English, has not been changed by the unavoidable defeat. They have kept to this day their love of liberty, their fanatical devotion to their chiefs, their blind fidelity in friendship and hate — all their lawful and unlawful instincts. Their country of land and water — for the sea was as much their country as the earth of their islands — has fallen a prey to the western race — the reward of superior strength if not of superior virtue. To-morrow the advancing civilization will obliterate the marks of a long struggle in the accomplishment of its inevitable victory.

The adventurers who began that struggle have left no descendants. The ideas of the world changed too quickly for that. But even far into the present century they have had successors. Almost in our own day we have seen one of them — a true adventurer in his devotion to his impulse — a man of high mind and of pure heart, lay the foundation of a flourishing state on the ideas of pity and justice. He recognized chivalrously the claims of the conquered; he was a disinterested adventurer, and the reward of his noble instincts is in the veneration with which a strange and faithful race cherish his memory.

Misunderstood and traduced in life, the glory of his achievement has vindicated the purity of his motives. He belongs to history. But there were others — obscure adventurers who had not his advantages of birth, position, and intelligence; who had only his sympathy with the people of forests and sea he understood and loved so well. They can not be said to be forgotten since they have not been known at all. They were lost in the common crowd of seamen-traders of the Archipelago, and if they emerged from their obscurity it was only to be condemned as law-breakers. Their lives were thrown away for a cause that had no right to exist in the face of an irresistible and orderly progress — their thoughtless lives guided by a simple feeling.

But the wasted lives, for the few who know, have tinged with romance the region of shallow waters and forest-clad islands, that lies far east, and still mysterious between the deep waters of two oceans.

Chapter 1

Out of the level blue of a shallow sea Carimata raises a lofty barrenness of grey and yellow tints, the drab eminence of its arid heights. Separated by a narrow strip of water, Suroeton, to the west, shows a curved and ridged outline resembling the backbone of a stooping giant. And to the eastward a troop of insignificant islets stand effaced, indistinct, with vague features that seem to melt into the gathering shadows. The night following from the eastward the retreat of the setting sun advanced slowly, swallowing the land and the sea; the land broken, tormented and abrupt; the sea smooth and inviting with its easy polish of continuous surface to wanderings facile and endless.

There was no wind, and a small brig that had lain all the afternoon a few miles to the northward and westward of Carimata had hardly altered its position half a mile during all these hours. The calm was absolute, a dead, flat calm, the stillness of a dead sea and of a dead atmosphere. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing but an impressive immobility. Nothing moved on earth, on the waters, and above them in the unbroken lustre of the sky. On the unruffled surface of the straits the brig floated tranquil and upright as if bolted solidly, keel to keel, with its own image reflected in the unframed and immense mirror of the sea. To the south and east the double islands watched silently the double ship that seemed fixed amongst them forever, a hopeless captive of the calm, a helpless prisoner of the shallow sea.

Since midday, when the light and capricious airs of these seas had abandoned the little brig to its lingering fate, her head had swung slowly to the westward and the end of her slender and polished jib-boom, projecting boldly beyond the graceful curve of the bow, pointed at the setting sun, like a spear poised high in the hand of an enemy. Right aft by the wheel the Malay quartermaster stood with his bare, brown feet firmly planted on the wheel-grating, and holding the spokes at right angles, in a solid grasp, as though the ship had been running before a gale. He stood there perfectly motionless, as if petrified but ready to tend the helm as soon as fate would permit the brig to gather way through the oily sea.

The only other human being then visible on the brig's deck was the person in charge: a white man of low stature, thick-set, with shaven cheeks, a grizzled moustache, and a face tinted a scarlet hue by the burning suns and by the sharp salt breezes of the seas. He had thrown off his light jacket, and clad only in white trousers and a thin cotton singlet, with his stout arms crossed on his breast — upon which they showed like two thick lumps of raw flesh — he prowled about from side to side of the half-poop. On his bare feet he wore a pair of straw sandals, and his head was protected by an enormous pith hat — once white but now very dirty — which gave to the whole man the aspect of a phenomenal and animated mushroom. At times he would interrupt his uneasy shuffle athwart the break of the poop, and stand motionless with a vague gaze fixed on the image of the brig in the calm water. He could also see down there his own head and shoulders leaning out over the rail and he would stand long, as if interested

by his own features, and mutter vague curses on the calm which lay upon the ship like an immovable burden, immense and burning.

At last, he sighed profoundly, nerved himself for a great effort, and making a start away from the rail managed to drag his slippers as far as the binnacle. There he stopped again, exhausted and bored. From under the lifted glass panes of the cabin skylight near by came the feeble chirp of a canary, which appeared to give him some satisfaction. He listened, smiled faintly muttered "Dicky, poor Dick — " and fell back into the immense silence of the world. His eyes closed, his head hung low over the hot brass of the binnacle top. Suddenly he stood up with a jerk and said sharply in a hoarse voice:

"You've been sleeping — you. Shift the helm. She has got stern way on her."

The Malay, without the least flinch of feature or pose, as if he had been an inanimate object called suddenly into life by some hidden magic of the words, spun the wheel rapidly, letting the spokes pass through his hands; and when the motion had stopped with a grinding noise, caught hold again and held on grimly. After a while, however, he turned his head slowly over his shoulder, glanced at the sea, and said in an obstinate tone:

"No catch wind — no get way."

"No catch — no catch — that's all you know about it," growled the red-faced seaman. "By and by catch Ali — " he went on with sudden condescension. "By and by catch, and then the helm will be the right way. See?"

The stolid seacannie appeared to see, and for that matter to hear, nothing. The white man looked at the impassive Malay with disgust, then glanced around the horizon — then again at the helmsman and ordered curtly:

"Shift the helm back again. Don't you feel the air from aft? You are like a dummy standing there."

The Malay revolved the spokes again with disdainful obedience, and the red-faced man was moving forward grunting to himself, when through the open skylight the hail "On deck there!" arrested him short, attentive, and with a sudden change to amiability in the expression of his face.

"Yes, sir," he said, bending his ear toward the opening. "What's the matter up there?" asked a deep voice from below.

The red-faced man in a tone of surprise said:

"Sir?"

"I hear that rudder grinding hard up and hard down. What are you up to, Shaw? Any wind?"

"Ye-es," drawled Shaw, putting his head down the skylight and speaking into the gloom of the cabin. "I thought there was a light air, and — but it's gone now. Not a breath anywhere under the heavens."

He withdrew his head and waited a while by the skylight, but heard only the chirping of the indefatigable canary, a feeble twittering that seemed to ooze through

the drooping red blossoms of geraniums growing in flower-pots under the glass panes. He strolled away a step or two before the voice from down below called hurriedly:

“Hey, Shaw? Are you there?”

“Yes, Captain Lingard,” he answered, stepping back. “Have we drifted anything this afternoon?”

“Not an inch, sir, not an inch. We might as well have been at anchor.”

“It’s always so,” said the invisible Lingard. His voice changed its tone as he moved in the cabin, and directly afterward burst out with a clear intonation while his head appeared above the slide of the cabin entrance:

“Always so! The currents don’t begin till it’s dark, when a man can’t see against what confounded thing he is being drifted, and then the breeze will come. Dead on end, too, I don’t doubt.”

Shaw moved his shoulders slightly. The Malay at the wheel, after making a dive to see the time by the cabin clock through the skylight, rang a double stroke on the small bell aft. Directly forward, on the main deck, a shrill whistle arose long drawn, modulated, dying away softly. The master of the brig stepped out of the companion upon the deck of his vessel, glanced aloft at the yards laid dead square; then, from the door-step, took a long, lingering look round the horizon.

He was about thirty-five, erect and supple. He moved freely, more like a man accustomed to stride over plains and hills, than like one who from his earliest youth had been used to counteract by sudden swayings of his body the rise and roll of cramped decks of small craft, tossed by the caprice of angry or playful seas.

He wore a grey flannel shirt, and his white trousers were held by a blue silk scarf wound tightly round his narrow waist. He had come up only for a moment, but finding the poop shaded by the main-topsail he remained on deck bareheaded. The light chestnut hair curled close about his well-shaped head, and the clipped beard glinted vividly when he passed across a narrow strip of sunlight, as if every hair in it had been a wavy and attenuated gold wire. His mouth was lost in the heavy moustache; his nose was straight, short, slightly blunted at the end; a broad band of deeper red stretched under the eyes, clung to the cheek bones. The eyes gave the face its remarkable expression. The eyebrows, darker than the hair, pencilled a straight line below the wide and unwrinkled brow much whiter than the sunburnt face. The eyes, as if glowing with the light of a hidden fire, had a red glint in their greyness that gave a scrutinizing ardour to the steadiness of their gaze.

That man, once so well known, and now so completely forgotten amongst the charming and heartless shores of the shallow sea, had amongst his fellows the nickname of “Red-Eyed Tom.” He was proud of his luck but not of his good sense. He was proud of his brig, of the speed of his craft, which was reckoned the swiftest country vessel in those seas, and proud of what she represented.

She represented a run of luck on the Victorian goldfields; his sagacious moderation; long days of planning, of loving care in building; the great joy of his youth, the incomparable freedom of the seas; a perfect because a wandering home; his independence,

his love — and his anxiety. He had often heard men say that Tom Lingard cared for nothing on earth but for his brig — and in his thoughts he would smilingly correct the statement by adding that he cared for nothing living but the brig.

To him she was as full of life as the great world. He felt her live in every motion, in every roll, in every sway of her tapering masts, of those masts whose painted trucks move forever, to a seaman's eye, against the clouds or against the stars. To him she was always precious — like old love; always desirable — like a strange woman; always tender — like a mother; always faithful — like the favourite daughter of a man's heart.

For hours he would stand elbow on rail, his head in his hand and listen — and listen in dreamy stillness to the cajoling and promising whisper of the sea, that slipped past in vanishing bubbles along the smooth black-painted sides of his craft. What passed in such moments of thoughtful solitude through the mind of that child of generations of fishermen from the coast of Devon, who like most of his class was dead to the subtle voices, and blind to the mysterious aspects of the world — the man ready for the obvious, no matter how startling, how terrible or menacing, yet defenceless as a child before the shadowy impulses of his own heart; what could have been the thoughts of such a man, when once surrendered to a dreamy mood, it is difficult to say.

No doubt he, like most of us, would be uplifted at times by the awakened lyricism of his heart into regions charming, empty, and dangerous. But also, like most of us, he was unaware of his barren journeys above the interesting cares of this earth. Yet from these, no doubt absurd and wasted moments, there remained on the man's daily life a tinge as that of a glowing and serene half-light. It softened the outlines of his rugged nature; and these moments kept close the bond between him and his brig.

He was aware that his little vessel could give him something not to be had from anybody or anything in the world; something specially his own. The dependence of that solid man of bone and muscle on that obedient thing of wood and iron, acquired from that feeling the mysterious dignity of love. She — the craft — had all the qualities of a living thing: speed, obedience, trustworthiness, endurance, beauty, capacity to do and to suffer — all but life. He — the man — was the inspirer of that thing that to him seemed the most perfect of its kind. His will was its will, his thought was its impulse, his breath was the breath of its existence. He felt all this confusedly, without ever shaping this feeling into the soundless formulas of thought. To him she was unique and dear, this brig of three hundred and fourteen tons register — a kingdom!

And now, bareheaded and burly, he walked the deck of his kingdom with a regular stride. He stepped out from the hip, swinging his arms with the free motion of a man starting out for a fifteen-mile walk into open country; yet at every twelfth stride he had to turn about sharply and pace back the distance to the taffrail.

Shaw, with his hands stuck in his waistband, had hooked himself with both elbows to the rail, and gazed apparently at the deck between his feet. In reality he was contemplating a little house with a tiny front garden, lost in a maze of riverside streets in the east end of London. The circumstance that he had not, as yet, been able to make the acquaintance of his son — now aged eighteen months — worried him slightly, and

was the cause of that flight of his fancy into the murky atmosphere of his home. But it was a placid flight followed by a quick return. In less than two minutes he was back in the brig. "All there," as his saying was. He was proud of being always "all there."

He was abrupt in manner and grumpy in speech with the seamen. To his successive captains, he was outwardly as deferential as he knew how, and as a rule inwardly hostile — so very few seemed to him of the "all there" kind. Of Lingard, with whom he had only been a short time — having been picked up in Madras Roads out of a home ship, which he had to leave after a thumping row with the master — he generally approved, although he recognized with regret that this man, like most others, had some absurd fads; he defined them as "bottom-upwards notions."

He was a man — as there were many — of no particular value to anybody but himself, and of no account but as the chief mate of the brig, and the only white man on board of her besides the captain. He felt himself immeasurably superior to the Malay seamen whom he had to handle, and treated them with lofty toleration, notwithstanding his opinion that at a pinch those chaps would be found emphatically "not there."

As soon as his mind came back from his home leave, he detached himself from the rail and, walking forward, stood by the break of the poop, looking along the port side of the main deck. Lingard on his own side stopped in his walk and also gazed absentmindedly before him. In the waist of the brig, in the narrow spars that were lashed on each side of the hatchway, he could see a group of men squatting in a circle around a wooden tray piled up with rice, which stood on the just swept deck. The dark-faced, soft-eyed silent men, squatting on their hams, fed decorously with an earnestness that did not exclude reserve.

Of the lot, only one or two wore sarongs, the others having submitted — at least at sea — to the indignity of European trousers. Only two sat on the spars. One, a man with a childlike, light yellow face, smiling with fatuous imbecility under the wisps of straight coarse hair dyed a mahogany tint, was the tindal of the crew — a kind of boatswain's or serang's mate. The other, sitting beside him on the booms, was a man nearly black, not much bigger than a large ape, and wearing on his wrinkled face that look of comical truculence which is often characteristic of men from the southwestern coast of Sumatra.

This was the kassab or store-keeper, the holder of a position of dignity and ease. The kassab was the only one of the crew taking their evening meal who noticed the presence on deck of their commander. He muttered something to the tindal who directly cocked his old hat on one side, which senseless action invested him with an altogether foolish appearance. The others heard, but went on somnolently feeding with spidery movements of their lean arms.

The sun was no more than a degree or so above the horizon, and from the heated surface of the waters a slight low mist began to rise; a mist thin, invisible to the human eye; yet strong enough to change the sun into a mere glowing red disc, a disc vertical and hot, rolling down to the edge of the horizontal and cold-looking disc of the shining

sea. Then the edges touched and the circular expanse of water took on suddenly a tint, sombre, like a frown; deep, like the brooding meditation of evil.

The falling sun seemed to be arrested for a moment in his descent by the sleeping waters, while from it, to the motionless brig, shot out on the polished and dark surface of the sea a track of light, straight and shining, resplendent and direct; a path of gold and crimson and purple, a path that seemed to lead dazzling and terrible from the earth straight into heaven through the portals of a glorious death. It faded slowly. The sea vanquished the light. At last only a vestige of the sun remained, far off, like a red spark floating on the water. It lingered, and all at once — without warning — went out as if extinguished by a treacherous hand.

“Gone,” cried Lingard, who had watched intently yet missed the last moment. “Gone! Look at the cabin clock, Shaw!”

“Nearly right, I think, sir. Three minutes past six.”

The helmsman struck four bells sharply. Another barefooted seacannie glided on the far side of the poop to relieve the wheel, and the serang of the brig came up the ladder to take charge of the deck from Shaw. He came up to the compass, and stood waiting silently.

“The course is south by east when you get the wind, serang,” said Shaw, distinctly.

“Sou’ by eas’,” repeated the elderly Malay with grave earnestness.

“Let me know when she begins to steer,” added Lingard.

“Ya, Tuan,” answered the man, glancing rapidly at the sky. “Wind coming,” he muttered.

“I think so, too,” whispered Lingard as if to himself.

The shadows were gathering rapidly round the brig. A mulatto put his head out of the companion and called out:

“Ready, sir.”

“Let’s get a mouthful of something to eat, Shaw,” said Lingard. “I say, just take a look around before coming below. It will be dark when we come up again.”

“Certainly, sir,” said Shaw, taking up a long glass and putting it to his eyes. “Blessed thing,” he went on in snatches while he worked the tubes in and out, “I can’t — never somehow — Ah! I’ve got it right at last!”

He revolved slowly on his heels, keeping the end of the tube on the sky-line. Then he shut the instrument with a click, and said decisively:

“Nothing in sight, sir.”

He followed his captain down below rubbing his hands cheerfully.

For a good while there was no sound on the poop of the brig. Then the seacannie at the wheel spoke dreamily:

“Did the malim say there was no one on the sea?”

“Yes,” grunted the serang without looking at the man behind him.

“Between the islands there was a boat,” pronounced the man very softly.

The serang, his hands behind his back, his feet slightly apart, stood very straight and stiff by the side of the compass stand. His face, now hardly visible, was as inexpressive as the door of a safe.

“Now, listen to me,” insisted the helmsman in a gentle tone.

The man in authority did not budge a hair’s breadth. The seacannie bent down a little from the height of the wheel grating.

“I saw a boat,” he murmured with something of the tender obstinacy of a lover begging for a favour. “I saw a boat, O Haji Wasub! Ya! Haji Wasub!”

The serang had been twice a pilgrim, and was not insensible to the sound of his rightful title. There was a grim smile on his face.

“You saw a floating tree, O Sali,” he said, ironically.

“I am Sali, and my eyes are better than the bewitched brass thing that pulls out to a great length,” said the pertinacious helmsman. “There was a boat, just clear of the easternmost island. There was a boat, and they in her could see the ship on the light of the west — unless they are blind men lost on the sea. I have seen her. Have you seen her, too, O Haji Wasub?”

“Am I a fat white man?” snapped the serang. “I was a man of the sea before you were born, O Sali! The order is to keep silence and mind the rudder, lest evil befall the ship.”

After these words he resumed his rigid aloofness. He stood, his legs slightly apart, very stiff and straight, a little on one side of the compass stand. His eyes travelled incessantly from the illuminated card to the shadowy sails of the brig and back again, while his body was motionless as if made of wood and built into the ship’s frame. Thus, with a forced and tense watchfulness, Haji Wasub, serang of the brig Lightning, kept the captain’s watch unwearied and wakeful, a slave to duty.

In half an hour after sunset the darkness had taken complete possession of earth and heavens. The islands had melted into the night. And on the smooth water of the Straits, the little brig lying so still, seemed to sleep profoundly, wrapped up in a scented mantle of star light and silence.

Chapter 2

It was half-past eight o’clock before Lingard came on deck again. Shaw — now with a coat on — trotted up and down the poop leaving behind him a smell of tobacco smoke. An irregularly glowing spark seemed to run by itself in the darkness before the rounded form of his head. Above the masts of the brig the dome of the clear heaven was full of lights that flickered, as if some mighty breathings high up there had been swaying about the flame of the stars. There was no sound along the brig’s decks, and the heavy shadows that lay on it had the aspect, in that silence, of secret places concealing crouching forms that waited in perfect stillness for some decisive event. Lingard struck a match to light his cheroot, and his powerful face with narrowed eyes stood out for

a moment in the night and vanished suddenly. Then two shadowy forms and two red sparks moved backward and forward on the poop. A larger, but a paler and oval patch of light from the compass lamps lay on the brasses of the wheel and on the breast of the Malay standing by the helm. Lingard's voice, as if unable altogether to master the enormous silence of the sea, sounded muffled, very calm — without the usual deep ring in it.

“Not much change, Shaw,” he said.

“No, sir, not much. I can just see the island — the big one — still in the same place. It strikes me, sir, that, for calms, this here sea is a devil of locality.”

He cut “locality” in two with an emphatic pause. It was a good word. He was pleased with himself for thinking of it. He went on again:

“Now — since noon, this big island — ”

“Carimata, Shaw,” interrupted Lingard.

“Aye, sir; Carimata — I mean. I must say — being a stranger hereabouts — I haven't got the run of those — ”

He was going to say “names” but checked himself and said, “appellations,” instead, sounding every syllable lovingly.

“Having for these last fifteen years,” he continued, “sailed regularly from London in East-Indiamen, I am more at home over there — in the Bay.”

He pointed into the night toward the northwest and stared as if he could see from where he stood that Bay of Bengal where — as he affirmed — he would be so much more at home.

“You'll soon get used — ” muttered Lingard, swinging in his rapid walk past his mate. Then he turned round, came back, and asked sharply.

“You said there was nothing afloat in sight before dark? Hey?”

“Not that I could see, sir. When I took the deck again at eight, I asked that serang whether there was anything about; and I understood him to say there was no more as when I went below at six. This is a lonely sea at times — ain't it, sir? Now, one would think at this time of the year the homeward-bounders from China would be pretty thick here.”

“Yes,” said Lingard, “we have met very few ships since we left Pedra Branca over the stern. Yes; it has been a lonely sea. But for all that, Shaw, this sea, if lonely, is not blind. Every island in it is an eye. And now, since our squadron has left for the China waters — ”

He did not finish his sentence. Shaw put his hands in his pockets, and propped his back against the sky-light, comfortably.

“They say there is going to be a war with China,” he said in a gossiping tone, “and the French are going along with us as they did in the Crimea five years ago. It seems to me we're getting mighty good friends with the French. I've not much of an opinion about that. What do you think, Captain Lingard?”

“I have met their men-of-war in the Pacific,” said Lingard, slowly. “The ships were fine and the fellows in them were civil enough to me — and very curious about my

business," he added with a laugh. "However, I wasn't there to make war on them. I had a rotten old cutter then, for trade, Shaw," he went on with animation.

"Had you, sir?" said Shaw without any enthusiasm. "Now give me a big ship — a ship, I say, that one may — "

"And later on, some years ago," interrupted Lingard, "I chummed with a French skipper in Ampanam — being the only two white men in the whole place. He was a good fellow, and free with his red wine. His English was difficult to understand, but he could sing songs in his own language about ah-moor — Ah-moor means love, in French — Shaw."

"So it does, sir — so it does. When I was second mate of a Sunderland barque, in forty-one, in the Mediterranean, I could pay out their lingo as easy as you would a five-inch warp over a ship's side — "

"Yes, he was a proper man," pursued Lingard, meditatively, as if for himself only. "You could not find a better fellow for company ashore. He had an affair with a Bali girl, who one evening threw a red blossom at him from within a doorway, as we were going together to pay our respects to the Rajah's nephew. He was a good-looking Frenchman, he was — but the girl belonged to the Rajah's nephew, and it was a serious matter. The old Rajah got angry and said the girl must die. I don't think the nephew cared particularly to have her krissed; but the old fellow made a great fuss and sent one of his own chief men to see the thing done — and the girl had enemies — her own relations approved! We could do nothing. Mind, Shaw, there was absolutely nothing else between them but that unlucky flower which the Frenchman pinned to his coat — and afterward, when the girl was dead, wore under his shirt, hung round his neck in a small box. I suppose he had nothing else to put it into."

"Would those savages kill a woman for that?" asked Shaw, incredulously.

"Aye! They are pretty moral there. That was the first time in my life I nearly went to war on my own account, Shaw. We couldn't talk those fellows over. We couldn't bribe them, though the Frenchman offered the best he had, and I was ready to back him to the last dollar, to the last rag of cotton, Shaw! No use — they were that blamed respectable. So, says the Frenchman to me: 'My friend, if they won't take our gunpowder for a gift let us burn it to give them lead.' I was armed as you see now; six eight-pounders on the main deck and a long eighteen on the forecastle — and I wanted to try 'em. You may believe me! However, the Frenchman had nothing but a few old muskets; and the beggars got to windward of us by fair words, till one morning a boat's crew from the Frenchman's ship found the girl lying dead on the beach. That put an end to our plans. She was out of her trouble anyhow, and no reasonable man will fight for a dead woman. I was never vengeful, Shaw, and — after all — she didn't throw that flower at me. But it broke the Frenchman up altogether. He began to mope, did no business, and shortly afterward sailed away. I cleared a good many pence out of that trip, I remember."

With these words he seemed to come to the end of his memories of that trip. Shaw stifled a yawn.

"Women are the cause of a lot of trouble," he said, dispassionately. "In the Morayshire, I remember, we had once a passenger — an old gentleman — who was telling us a yarn about them old-time Greeks fighting for ten years about some woman. The Turks kidnapped her, or something. Anyway, they fought in Turkey; which I may well believe. Them Greeks and Turks were always fighting. My father was master's mate on board one of the three-deckers at the battle of Navarino — and that was when we went to help those Greeks. But this affair about a woman was long before that time."

"I should think so," muttered Lingard, hanging over the rail, and watching the fleeting gleams that passed deep down in the water, along the ship's bottom.

"Yes. Times are changed. They were unenlightened in those old days. My grandfather was a preacher and, though my father served in the navy, I don't hold with war. Sinful the old gentleman called it — and I think so, too. Unless with Chinamen, or niggers, or such people as must be kept in order and won't listen to reason; having not sense enough to know what's good for them, when it's explained to them by their betters — missionaries, and such like au-tho-ri-ties. But to fight ten years. And for a woman!"

"I have read the tale in a book," said Lingard, speaking down over the side as if setting his words gently afloat upon the sea. "I have read the tale. She was very beautiful."

"That only makes it worse, sir — if anything. You may depend on it she was no good. Those pagan times will never come back, thank God. Ten years of murder and unrighteousness! And for a woman! Would anybody do it now? Would you do it, sir? Would you — "

The sound of a bell struck sharply interrupted Shaw's discourse. High aloft, some dry block sent out a screech, short and lamentable, like a cry of pain. It pierced the quietness of the night to the very core, and seemed to destroy the reserve which it had imposed upon the tones of the two men, who spoke now loudly.

"Throw the cover over the binnacle," said Lingard in his duty voice. "The thing shines like a full moon. We mustn't show more lights than we can help, when becalmed at night so near the land. No use in being seen if you can't see yourself — is there? Bear that in mind, Mr. Shaw. There may be some vagabonds prying about — "

"I thought all this was over and done for," said Shaw, busying himself with the cover, "since Sir Thomas Cochrane swept along the Borneo coast with his squadron some years ago. He did a rare lot of fighting — didn't he? We heard about it from the chaps of the sloop Diana that was refitting in Calcutta when I was there in the Warwick Castle. They took some king's town up a river hereabouts. The chaps were full of it."

"Sir Thomas did good work," answered Lingard, "but it will be a long time before these seas are as safe as the English Channel is in peace time. I spoke about that light more to get you in the way of things to be attended to in these seas than for anything else. Did you notice how few native craft we've sighted for all these days we have been drifting about — one may say — in this sea?"

"I can't say I have attached any significance to the fact, sir."

"It's a sign that something is up. Once set a rumour afloat in these waters, and it will make its way from island to island, without any breeze to drive it along."

"Being myself a deep-water man sailing steadily out of home ports nearly all my life," said Shaw with great deliberation, "I cannot pretend to see through the peculiarities of them out-of-the-way parts. But I can keep a lookout in an ordinary way, and I have noticed that craft of any kind seemed scarce, for the last few days: considering that we had land aboard of us — one side or another — nearly every day."

"You will get to know the peculiarities, as you call them, if you remain any time with me," remarked Lingard, negligently.

"I hope I shall give satisfaction, whether the time be long or short!" said Shaw, accentuating the meaning of his words by the distinctness of his utterance. "A man who has spent thirty-two years of his life on saltwater can say no more. If being an officer of home ships for the last fifteen years I don't understand the heathen ways of them there savages, in matters of seamanship and duty, you will find me all there, Captain Lingard."

"Except, judging from what you said a little while ago — except in the matter of fighting," said Lingard, with a short laugh.

"Fighting! I am not aware that anybody wants to fight me. I am a peaceable man, Captain Lingard, but when put to it, I could fight as well as any of them flat-nosed chaps we have to make shift with, instead of a proper crew of decent Christians. Fighting!" he went on with unexpected pugnacity of tone, "Fighting! If anybody comes to fight me, he will find me all there, I swear!"

"That's all right. That's all right," said Lingard, stretching his arms above his head and wriggling his shoulders. "My word! I do wish a breeze would come to let us get away from here. I am rather in a hurry, Shaw."

"Indeed, sir! Well, I never yet met a thorough seafaring man who was not in a hurry when a con-demned spell of calm had him by the heels. When a breeze comes . . . just listen to this, sir!"

"I hear it," said Lingard. "Tide-rip, Shaw."

"So I presume, sir. But what a fuss it makes. Seldom heard such a — "

On the sea, upon the furthest limits of vision, appeared an advancing streak of seething foam, resembling a narrow white ribbon, drawn rapidly along the level surface of the water by its two ends, which were lost in the darkness. It reached the brig, passed under, stretching out on each side; and on each side the water became noisy, breaking into numerous and tiny wavelets, a mimicry of an immense agitation. Yet the vessel in the midst of this sudden and loud disturbance remained as motionless and steady as if she had been securely moored between the stone walls of a safe dock. In a few moments the line of foam and ripple running swiftly north passed at once beyond sight and earshot, leaving no trace on the unconquerable calm.

"Now this is very curious — " began Shaw.

Lingard made a gesture to command silence. He seemed to listen yet, as if the wash of the ripple could have had an echo which he expected to hear. And a man's voice that was heard forward had something of the impersonal ring of voices thrown back from hard and lofty cliffs upon the empty distances of the sea. It spoke in Malay — faintly.

"What?" hailed Shaw. "What is it?"

Lingard put a restraining hand for a moment on his chief officer's shoulder, and moved forward smartly. Shaw followed, puzzled. The rapid exchange of incomprehensible words thrown backward and forward through the shadows of the brig's main deck from his captain to the lookout man and back again, made him feel sadly out of it, somehow.

Lingard had called out sharply — "What do you see?" The answer direct and quick was — "I hear, Tuan. I hear oars."

"Whereabouts?"

"The night is all around us. I hear them near."

"Port or starboard?"

There was a short delay in answer this time. On the quarter-deck, under the poop, bare feet shuffled. Somebody coughed. At last the voice forward said doubtfully:

"Kanan."

"Call the serang, Mr. Shaw," said Lingard, calmly, "and have the hands turned up. They are all lying about the decks. Look sharp now. There's something near us. It's annoying to be caught like this," he added in a vexed tone.

He crossed over to the starboard side, and stood listening, one hand grasping the royal back-stay, his ear turned to the sea, but he could hear nothing from there. The quarter-deck was filled with subdued sounds. Suddenly, a long, shrill whistle soared, reverberated loudly amongst the flat surfaces of motionless sails, and gradually grew faint as if the sound had escaped and gone away, running upon the water. Haji Wasub was on deck and ready to carry out the white man's commands. Then silence fell again on the brig, until Shaw spoke quietly.

"I am going forward now, sir, with the tindal. We're all at stations."

"Aye, Mr. Shaw. Very good. Mind they don't board you — but I can hear nothing. Not a sound. It can't be much."

"The fellow has been dreaming, no doubt. I have good ears, too, and — "

He went forward and the end of his sentence was lost in an indistinct growl. Lingard stood attentive. One by one the three seacannies off duty appeared on the poop and busied themselves around a big chest that stood by the side of the cabin companion. A rattle and clink of steel weapons turned out on the deck was heard, but the men did not even whisper. Lingard peered steadily into the night, then shook his head.

"Serang!" he called, half aloud.

The spare old man ran up the ladder so smartly that his bony feet did not seem to touch the steps. He stood by his commander, his hands behind his back; a figure indistinct but straight as an arrow.

"Who was looking out?" asked Lingard.

"Badroon, the Bugis," said Wasub, in his crisp, jerky manner.

"I can hear nothing. Badroon heard the noise in his mind."

"The night hides the boat."

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes, Tuan. Small boat. Before sunset. By the land. Now coming here — near. Badroon heard him."

"Why didn't you report it, then?" asked Lingard, sharply.

"Malim spoke. He said: 'Nothing there,' while I could see. How could I know what was in his mind or yours, Tuan?"

"Do you hear anything now?"

"No. They stopped now. Perhaps lost the ship — who knows? Perhaps afraid — "

"Well!" muttered Lingard, moving his feet uneasily. "I believe you lie. What kind of boat?"

"White men's boat. A four-men boat, I think. Small. Tuan, I hear him now! There!"

He stretched his arm straight out, pointing abeam for a time, then his arm fell slowly.

"Coming this way," he added with decision.

From forward Shaw called out in a startled tone:

"Something on the water, sir! Broad on this bow!"

"All right!" called back Lingard.

A lump of blacker darkness floated into his view. From it came over the water English words — deliberate, reaching him one by one; as if each had made its own difficult way through the profound stillness of the night.

"What — ship — is — that — pray?"

"English brig," answered Lingard, after a short moment of hesitation.

"A brig! I thought you were something bigger," went on the voice from the sea with a tinge of disappointment in its deliberate tone. "I am coming alongside — if — you — please."

"No! you don't!" called Lingard back, sharply. The leisurely drawl of the invisible speaker seemed to him offensive, and woke up a hostile feeling. "No! you don't if you care for your boat. Where do you spring from? Who are you — anyhow? How many of you are there in that boat?"

After these emphatic questions there was an interval of silence. During that time the shape of the boat became a little more distinct. She must have carried some way on her yet, for she loomed up bigger and nearly abreast of where Lingard stood, before the self-possessed voice was heard again:

"I will show you."

Then, after another short pause, the voice said, less loud but very plain:

"Strike on the gunwale. Strike hard, John!" and suddenly a blue light blazed out, illuminating with a livid flame a round patch in the night. In the smoke and splutter of that ghastly halo appeared a white, four-oared gig with five men sitting in her in a

row. Their heads were turned toward the brig with a strong expression of curiosity on their faces, which, in this glare, brilliant and sinister, took on a deathlike aspect and resembled the faces of interested corpses. Then the bowman dropped into the water the light he held above his head and the darkness, rushing back at the boat, swallowed it with a loud and angry hiss.

“Five of us,” said the composed voice out of the night that seemed now darker than before. “Four hands and myself. We belong to a yacht — a British yacht — ”

“Come on board!” shouted Lingard. “Why didn’t you speak at once? I thought you might have been some masquerading Dutchmen from a dodging gunboat.”

“Do I speak like a blamed Dutchman? Pull a stroke, boys — oars! Tend bow, John.”

The boat came alongside with a gentle knock, and a man’s shape began to climb at once up the brig’s side with a kind of ponderous agility. It poised itself for a moment on the rail to say down into the boat — ”Sheer off a little, boys,” then jumped on deck with a thud, and said to Shaw who was coming aft: “Good evening . . . Captain, sir?”

“No. On the poop!” growled Shaw.

“Come up here. Come up,” called Lingard, impatiently.

The Malays had left their stations and stood clustered by the mainmast in a silent group. Not a word was spoken on the brig’s decks, while the stranger made his way to the waiting captain. Lingard saw approaching him a short, dapper man, who touched his cap and repeated his greeting in a cool drawl:

“Good evening. . . Captain, sir?”

“Yes, I am the master — what’s the matter? Adrift from your ship? Or what?”

“Adrift? No! We left her four days ago, and have been pulling that gig in a calm, nearly ever since. My men are done. So is the water. Lucky thing I sighted you.”

“You sighted me!” exclaimed Lingard. “When? What time?”

“Not in the dark, you may be sure. We’ve been knocking about amongst some islands to the southward, breaking our hearts tugging at the oars in one channel, then in another — trying to get clear. We got round an islet — a barren thing, in shape like a loaf of sugar — and I caught sight of a vessel a long way off. I took her bearing in a hurry and we buckled to; but another of them currents must have had hold of us, for it was a long time before we managed to clear that islet. I steered by the stars, and, by the Lord Harry, I began to think I had missed you somehow — because it must have been you I saw.”

“Yes, it must have been. We had nothing in sight all day,” assented Lingard. “Where’s your vessel?” he asked, eagerly.

“Hard and fast on middling soft mud — I should think about sixty miles from here. We are the second boat sent off for assistance. We parted company with the other on Tuesday. She must have passed to the northward of you to-day. The chief officer is in her with orders to make for Singapore. I am second, and was sent off toward the Straits here on the chance of falling in with some ship. I have a letter from the owner. Our gentry are tired of being stuck in the mud and wish for assistance.”

“What assistance did you expect to find down here?”

“The letter will tell you that. May I ask, Captain, for a little water for the chaps in my boat? And I myself would thank you for a drink. We haven’t had a mouthful since this afternoon. Our breaker leaked out somehow.”

“See to it, Mr. Shaw,” said Lingard. “Come down the cabin, Mr. — ”

“Carter is my name.”

“Ah! Mr. Carter. Come down, come down,” went on Lingard, leading the way down the cabin stairs.

The steward had lighted the swinging lamp, and had put a decanter and bottles on the table. The cuddy looked cheerful, painted white, with gold mouldings round the panels. Opposite the curtained recess of the stern windows there was a sideboard with a marble top, and, above it, a looking-glass in a gilt frame. The semicircular couch round the stern had cushions of crimson plush. The table was covered with a black Indian tablecloth embroidered in vivid colours. Between the beams of the poop-deck were fitted racks for muskets, the barrels of which glinted in the light. There were twenty-four of them between the four beams. As many sword-bayonets of an old pattern encircled the polished teakwood of the rudder-casing with a double belt of brass and steel. All the doors of the state-rooms had been taken off the hinges and only curtains closed the doorways. They seemed to be made of yellow Chinese silk, and fluttered all together, the four of them, as the two men entered the cuddy.

Carter took in all at a glance, but his eyes were arrested by a circular shield hung slanting above the brass hilts of the bayonets. On its red field, in relief and brightly gilt, was represented a sheaf of conventional thunderbolts darting down the middle between the two capitals T. L. Lingard examined his guest curiously. He saw a young man, but looking still more youthful, with a boyish smooth face much sunburnt, twinkling blue eyes, fair hair and a slight moustache. He noticed his arrested gaze.

“Ah, you’re looking at that thing. It’s a present from the builder of this brig. The best man that ever launched a craft. It’s supposed to be the ship’s name between my initials — flash of lightning — d’you see? The brig’s name is Lightning and mine is Lingard.”

“Very pretty thing that: shows the cabin off well,” murmured Carter, politely.

They drank, nodding at each other, and sat down.

“Now for the letter,” said Lingard.

Carter passed it over the table and looked about, while Lingard took the letter out of an open envelope, addressed to the commander of any British ship in the Java Sea. The paper was thick, had an embossed heading: “Schooner-yacht Hermit” and was dated four days before. The message said that on a hazy night the yacht had gone ashore upon some outlying shoals off the coast of Borneo. The land was low. The opinion of the sailing-master was that the vessel had gone ashore at the top of high water, spring tides. The coast was completely deserted to all appearance. During the four days they had been stranded there they had sighted in the distance two small native vessels, which did not approach. The owner concluded by asking any commander of a homeward-bound ship to report the yacht’s position in Anjer on his way through

Sunda Straits — or to any British or Dutch man-of-war he might meet. The letter ended by anticipatory thanks, the offer to pay any expenses in connection with the sending of messages from Anjer, and the usual polite expressions.

Folding the paper slowly in the old creases, Lingard said — "I am not going to Anjer — nor anywhere near."

"Any place will do, I fancy," said Carter.

"Not the place where I am bound to," answered Lingard, opening the letter again and glancing at it uneasily. "He does not describe very well the coast, and his latitude is very uncertain," he went on. "I am not clear in my mind where exactly you are stranded. And yet I know every inch of that land — over there."

Carter cleared his throat and began to talk in his slow drawl. He seemed to dole out facts, to disclose with sparing words the features of the coast, but every word showed the minuteness of his observation, the clear vision of a seaman able to master quickly the aspect of a strange land and of a strange sea. He presented, with concise lucidity, the picture of the tangle of reefs and sandbanks, through which the yacht had miraculously blundered in the dark before she took the ground.

"The weather seems clear enough at sea," he observed, finally, and stopped to drink a long draught. Lingard, bending over the table, had been listening with eager attention. Carter went on in his curt and deliberate manner:

"I noticed some high trees on what I take to be the mainland to the south — and whoever has business in that bight was smart enough to whitewash two of them: one on the point, and another farther in. Landmarks, I guess. . . . What's the matter, Captain?"

Lingard had jumped to his feet, but Carter's exclamation caused him to sit down again.

"Nothing, nothing . . . Tell me, how many men have you in that yacht?"

"Twenty-three, besides the gentry, the owner, his wife and a Spanish gentleman — a friend they picked up in Manila."

"So you were coming from Manila?"

"Aye. Bound for Batavia. The owner wishes to study the Dutch colonial system. Wants to expose it, he says. One can't help hearing a lot when keeping watch aft — you know how it is. Then we are going to Ceylon to meet the mail-boat there. The owner is going home as he came out, overland through Egypt. The yacht would return round the Cape, of course."

"A lady?" said Lingard. "You say there is a lady on board. Are you armed?"

"Not much," replied Carter, negligently. "There are a few muskets and two sporting guns aft; that's about all — I fancy it's too much, or not enough," he added with a faint smile.

Lingard looked at him narrowly.

"Did you come out from home in that craft?" he asked.

"Not I! I am not one of them regular yacht hands. I came out of the hospital in Hongkong. I've been two years on the China coast."

He stopped, then added in an explanatory murmur:

“Opium clippers — you know. Nothing of brass buttons about me. My ship left me behind, and I was in want of work. I took this job but I didn’t want to go home particularly. It’s slow work after sailing with old Robinson in the Ly-e-moon. That was my ship. Heard of her, Captain?”

“Yes, yes,” said Lingard, hastily. “Look here, Mr. Carter, which way was your chief officer trying for Singapore? Through the Straits of Rhio?”

“I suppose so,” answered Carter in a slightly surprised tone; “why do you ask?”

“Just to know . . . What is it, Mr. Shaw?”

“There’s a black cloud rising to the northward, sir, and we shall get a breeze directly,” said Shaw from the doorway.

He lingered there with his eyes fixed on the decanters.

“Will you have a glass?” said Lingard, leaving his seat. “I will go up and have a look.”

He went on deck. Shaw approached the table and began to help himself, handling the bottles in profound silence and with exaggerated caution, as if he had been measuring out of fragile vessels a dose of some deadly poison. Carter, his hands in his pockets, and leaning back, examined him from head to foot with a cool stare. The mate of the brig raised the glass to his lips, and glaring above the rim at the stranger, drained the contents slowly.

“You have a fine nose for finding ships in the dark, Mister,” he said, distinctly, putting the glass on the table with extreme gentleness.

“Eh? What’s that? I sighted you just after sunset.”

“And you knew where to look, too,” said Shaw, staring hard.

“I looked to the westward where there was still some light, as any sensible man would do,” retorted the other a little impatiently. “What are you trying to get at?”

“And you have a ready tongue to blow about yourself — haven’t you?”

“Never saw such a man in my life,” declared Carter, with a return of his nonchalant manner. “You seem to be troubled about something.”

“I don’t like boats to come sneaking up from nowhere in particular, alongside a ship when I am in charge of the deck. I can keep a lookout as well as any man out of home ports, but I hate to be circumvented by muffled oars and such ungentlemanlike tricks. Yacht officer — indeed. These seas must be full of such yachtsmen. I consider you played a mean trick on me. I told my old man there was nothing in sight at sunset — and no more there was. I believe you blundered upon us by chance — for all your boasting about sunsets and bearings. Gammon! I know you came on blindly on top of us, and with muffled oars, too. D’ye call that decent?”

“If I did muffle the oars it was for a good reason. I wanted to slip past a cove where some native craft were moored. That was common prudence in such a small boat, and not armed — as I am. I saw you right enough, but I had no intention to startle anybody. Take my word for it.”

"I wish you had gone somewhere else," growled Shaw. "I hate to be put in the wrong through accident and untruthfulness — there! Here's my old man calling me — "

He left the cabin hurriedly and soon afterward Lingard came down, and sat again facing Carter across the table. His face was grave but resolute.

"We shall get the breeze directly," he said.

"Then, sir," said Carter, getting up, "if you will give me back that letter I shall go on cruising about here to speak some other ship. I trust you will report us wherever you are going."

"I am going to the yacht and I shall keep the letter," answered Lingard with decision. "I know exactly where she is, and I must go to the rescue of those people. It's most fortunate you've fallen in with me, Mr. Carter. Fortunate for them and fortunate for me," he added in a lower tone.

"Yes," drawled Carter, reflectively. "There may be a tidy bit of salvage money if you should get the vessel off, but I don't think you can do much. I had better stay out here and try to speak some gunboat — "

"You must come back to your ship with me," said Lingard, authoritatively. "Never mind the gunboats."

"That wouldn't be carrying out my orders," argued Carter. "I've got to speak a homeward-bound ship or a man-of-war — that's plain enough. I am not anxious to knock about for days in an open boat, but — let me fill my fresh-water breaker, Captain, and I will be off."

"Nonsense," said Lingard, sharply. "You've got to come with me to show the place and — and help. I'll take your boat in tow."

Carter did not seem convinced. Lingard laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, young fellow. I am Tom Lingard and there's not a white man among these islands, and very few natives, that have not heard of me. My luck brought you into my ship — and now I've got you, you must stay. You must!"

The last "must" burst out loud and sharp like a pistol-shot. Carter stepped back.

"Do you mean you would keep me by force?" he asked, startled.

"Force," repeated Lingard. "It rests with you. I cannot let you speak any vessel. Your yacht has gone ashore in a most inconvenient place — for me; and with your boats sent off here and there, you would bring every infernal gunboat buzzing to a spot that was as quiet and retired as the heart of man could wish. You stranding just on that spot of the whole coast was my bad luck. And that I could not help. You coming upon me like this is my good luck. And that I hold!"

He dropped his clenched fist, big and muscular, in the light of the lamp on the black cloth, amongst the glitter of glasses, with the strong fingers closed tight upon the firm flesh of the palm. He left it there for a moment as if showing Carter that luck he was going to hold. And he went on:

"Do you know into what hornet's nest your stupid people have blundered? How much d'ye think their lives are worth, just now? Not a brass farthing if the breeze fails

me for another twenty-four hours. You may well open your eyes. It is so! And it may be too late now, while I am arguing with you here.”

He tapped the table with his knuckles, and the glasses, waking up, jingled a thin, plaintive finale to his speech. Carter stood leaning against the sideboard. He was amazed by the unexpected turn of the conversation; his jaw dropped slightly and his eyes never swerved for a moment from Lingard’s face. The silence in the cabin lasted only a few seconds, but to Carter, who waited breathlessly, it seemed very long. And all at once he heard in it, for the first time, the cabin clock tick distinctly, in pulsating beats, as though a little heart of metal behind the dial had been started into sudden palpitation.

“A gunboat!” shouted Lingard, suddenly, as if he had seen only in that moment, by the light of some vivid flash of thought, all the difficulties of the situation. “If you don’t go back with me there will be nothing left for you to go back to — very soon. Your gunboat won’t find a single ship’s rib or a single corpse left for a landmark. That she won’t. It isn’t a gunboat skipper you want. I am the man you want. You don’t know your luck when you see it, but I know mine, I do — and — look here — ”

He touched Carter’s chest with his forefinger, and said with a sudden gentleness of tone:

“I am a white man inside and out; I won’t let inoffensive people — and a woman, too — come to harm if I can help it. And if I can’t help, nobody can. You understand — nobody! There’s no time for it. But I am like any other man that is worth his salt: I won’t let the end of an undertaking go by the board while there is a chance to hold on — and it’s like this — ”

His voice was persuasive — almost caressing; he had hold now of a coat button and tugged at it slightly as he went on in a confidential manner:

“As it turns out, Mr. Carter, I would — in a manner of speaking — I would as soon shoot you where you stand as let you go to raise an alarm all over this sea about your confounded yacht. I have other lives to consider — and friends — and promises — and — and myself, too. I shall keep you,” he concluded, sharply.

Carter drew a long breath. On the deck above, the two men could hear soft footfalls, short murmurs, indistinct words spoken near the skylight. Shaw’s voice rang out loudly in growling tones:

“Furl the royals, you tindal!”

“It’s the queerest old go,” muttered Carter, looking down on to the floor. “You are a strange man. I suppose I must believe what you say — unless you and that fat mate of yours are a couple of escaped lunatics that got hold of a brig by some means. Why, that chap up there wanted to pick a quarrel with me for coming aboard, and now you threaten to shoot me rather than let me go. Not that I care much about that; for some time or other you would get hanged for it; and you don’t look like a man that will end that way. If what you say is only half true, I ought to get back to the yacht as quick as ever I can. It strikes me that your coming to them will be only a small mercy, anyhow — and I may be of some use — But this is the queerest. . . . May I go in my boat?”

“As you like,” said Lingard. “There’s a rain squall coming.”

“I am in charge and will get wet along of my chaps. Give us a good long line, Captain.”

“It’s done already,” said Lingard. “You seem a sensible sailorman and can see that it would be useless to try and give me the slip.”

“For a man so ready to shoot, you seem very trustful,” drawled Carter. “If I cut adrift in a squall, I stand a pretty fair chance not to see you again.”

“You just try,” said Lingard, drily. “I have eyes in this brig, young man, that will see your boat when you couldn’t see the ship. You are of the kind I like, but if you monkey with me I will find you — and when I find you I will run you down as surely as I stand here.”

Carter slapped his thigh and his eyes twinkled.

“By the Lord Harry!” he cried. “If it wasn’t for the men with me, I would try for sport. You are so cocksure about the lot you can do, Captain. You would aggravate a saint into open mutiny.”

His easy good humour had returned; but after a short burst of laughter, he became serious.

“Never fear,” he said, “I won’t slip away. If there is to be any throat-cutting — as you seem to hint — mine will be there, too, I promise you, and. . . .”

He stretched his arms out, glanced at them, shook them a little.

“And this pair of arms to take care of it,” he added, in his old, careless drawl.

But the master of the brig sitting with both his elbows on the table, his face in his hands, had fallen unexpectedly into a meditation so concentrated and so profound that he seemed neither to hear, see, nor breathe. The sight of that man’s complete absorption in thought was to Carter almost more surprising than any other occurrence of that night. Had his strange host vanished suddenly from before his eyes, it could not have made him feel more uncomfortably alone in that cabin where the pertinacious clock kept ticking off the useless minutes of the calm before it would, with the same steady beat, begin to measure the aimless disturbance of the storm.

Chapter 3

After waiting a moment, Carter went on deck. The sky, the sea, the brig itself had disappeared in a darkness that had become impenetrable, palpable, and stifling. An immense cloud had come up running over the heavens, as if looking for the little craft, and now hung over it, arrested. To the south there was a livid trembling gleam, faint and sad, like a vanishing memory of destroyed starlight. To the north, as if to prove the impossible, an incredibly blacker patch outlined on the tremendous blackness of the sky the heart of the coming squall. The glimmers in the water had gone out and the invisible sea all around lay mute and still as if it had died suddenly of fright.

Carter could see nothing. He felt about him people moving; he heard them in the darkness whispering faintly as if they had been exchanging secrets important or infamous. The night effaced even words, and its mystery had captured everything and every sound — had left nothing free but the unexpected that seemed to hover about one, ready to stretch out its stealthy hand in a touch sudden, familiar, and appalling. Even the careless disposition of the young ex-officer of an opium-clipper was affected by the ominous aspect of the hour. What was this vessel? What were those people? What would happen to-morrow? To the yacht? To himself? He felt suddenly without any additional reason but the darkness that it was a poor show, anyhow, a dashed poor show for all hands. The irrational conviction made him falter for a second where he stood and he gripped the slide of the companionway hard.

Shaw's voice right close to his ear relieved and cleared his troubled thoughts.

"Oh! it's you, Mister. Come up at last," said the mate of the brig slowly. "It appears we've got to give you a tow now. Of all the rum incidents, this beats all. A boat sneaks up from nowhere and turns out to be a long-expected friend! For you are one of them friends the skipper was going to meet somewhere here. Ain't you now? Come! I know more than you may think. Are we off to — you may just as well tell — off to — h'm ha . . . you know?"

"Yes. I know. Don't you?" articulated Carter, innocently.

Shaw remained very quiet for a minute.

"Where's my skipper?" he asked at last.

"I left him down below in a kind of trance. Where's my boat?"

"Your boat is hanging astern. And my opinion is that you are as uncivil as I've proved you to be untruthful. Egzz-actly."

Carter stumbled toward the taffrail and in the first step he made came full against somebody who glided away. It seemed to him that such a night brings men to a lower level. He thought that he might have been knocked on the head by anybody strong enough to lift a crow-bar. He felt strangely irritated. He said loudly, aiming his words at Shaw whom he supposed somewhere near:

"And my opinion is that you and your skipper will come to a sudden bad end before —"

"I thought you were in your boat. Have you changed your mind?" asked Lingard in his deep voice close to Carter's elbow.

Carter felt his way along the rail, till his hand found a line that seemed, in the calm, to stream out of its own accord into the darkness. He hailed his boat, and directly heard the wash of water against her bows as she was hauled quickly under the counter. Then he loomed up shapeless on the rail, and the next moment disappeared as if he had fallen out of the universe. Lingard heard him say:

"Catch hold of my leg, John." There were hollow sounds in the boat; a voice growled, "All right."

“Keep clear of the counter,” said Lingard, speaking in quiet warning tones into the night. “The brig may get a lot of sternway on her should this squall not strike her fairly.”

“Aye, aye. I will mind,” was the muttered answer from the water.

Lingard crossed over to the port side, and looked steadily at the sooty mass of approaching vapours. After a moment he said curtly, “Brace up for the port tack, Mr. Shaw,” and remained silent, with his face to the sea. A sound, sorrowful and startling like the sigh of some immense creature, travelling across the starless space, passed above the vertical and lofty spars of the motionless brig.

It grew louder, then suddenly ceased for a moment, and the taut rigging of the brig was heard vibrating its answer in a singing note to this threatening murmur of the winds. A long and slow undulation lifted the level of the waters, as if the sea had drawn a deep breath of anxious suspense. The next minute an immense disturbance leaped out of the darkness upon the sea, kindling upon it a livid clearness of foam, and the first gust of the squall boarded the brig in a stinging flick of rain and spray. As if overwhelmed by the suddenness of the fierce onset, the vessel remained for a second upright where she floated, shaking with tremendous jerks from trucks to keel; while high up in the night the invisible canvas was heard rattling and beating about violently.

Then, with a quick double report, as of heavy guns, both topsails filled at once and the brig fell over swiftly on her side. Shaw was thrown headlong against the skylight, and Lingard, who had encircled the weather rail with his arm, felt the vessel under his feet dart forward smoothly, and the deck become less slanting — the speed of the brig running off a little now, easing the overturning strain of the wind upon the distended surfaces of the sails. It was only the fineness of the little vessel’s lines and the perfect shape of her hull that saved the canvas, and perhaps the spars, by enabling the ready craft to get way upon herself with such lightning-like rapidity. Lingard drew a long breath and yelled jubilantly at Shaw who was struggling up against wind and rain to his commander’s side.

“She’ll do. Hold on everything.”

Shaw tried to speak. He swallowed great mouthfuls of tepid water which the wind drove down his throat. The brig seemed to sail through undulating waves that passed swishing between the masts and swept over the decks with the fierce rush and noise of a cataract. From every spar and every rope a ragged sheet of water streamed flicking to leeward. The overpowering deluge seemed to last for an age; became unbearable — and, all at once, stopped. In a couple of minutes the shower had run its length over the brig and now could be seen like a straight grey wall, going away into the night under the fierce whispering of dissolving clouds. The wind eased. To the northward, low down in the darkness, three stars appeared in a row, leaping in and out between the crests of waves like the distant heads of swimmers in a running surf; and the retreating edge of the cloud, perfectly straight from east to west, slipped along the dome of the sky like an immense hemispheric, iron shutter pivoting down smoothly

as if operated by some mighty engine. An inspiring and penetrating freshness flowed together with the shimmer of light, through the augmented glory of the heaven, a glory exalted, undimmed, and strangely startling as if a new world had been created during the short flight of the stormy cloud. It was a return to life, a return to space; the earth coming out from under a pall to take its place in the renewed and immense scintillation of the universe.

The brig, her yards slightly checked in, ran with an easy motion under the topsails, jib and driver, pushing contemptuously aside the turbulent crowd of noisy and agitated waves. As the craft went swiftly ahead she unrolled behind her over the uneasy darkness of the sea a broad ribbon of seething foam shot with wispy gleams of dark discs escaping from under the rudder. Far away astern, at the end of a line no thicker than a black thread, which dipped now and then its long curve in the bursting froth, a toy-like object could be made out, elongated and dark, racing after the brig over the snowy whiteness of her wake.

Lingard walked aft, and, with both his hands on the taffrail, looked eagerly for Carter's boat. The first glance satisfied him that the yacht's gig was towing easily at the end of the long scope of line, and he turned away to look ahead and to leeward with a steady gaze. It was then half an hour past midnight and Shaw, relieved by Wasub, had gone below. Before he went, he said to Lingard, "I will be off, sir, if you're not going to make more sail yet." "Not yet for a while," had answered Lingard in a preoccupied manner; and Shaw departed aggrieved at such a neglect of making the best of a good breeze.

On the main deck dark-skinned men, whose clothing clung to their shivering limbs as if they had been overboard, had finished recoiling the braces, and clearing the gear. The kassab, after having hung the fore-topsail halyards in the becket, strutted into the waist toward a row of men who stood idly with their shoulders against the side of the long boat amidships. He passed along looking up close at the stolid faces. Room was made for him, and he took his place at the end.

"It was a great rain and a mighty wind, O men," he said, dogmatically, "but no wind can ever hurt this ship. That I knew while I stood minding the sail which is under my care."

A dull and inexpressive murmur was heard from the men. Over the high weather rail, a topping wave flung into their eyes a handful of heavy drops that stung like hail. There were low groans of indignation. A man sighed. Another emitted a spasmodic laugh through his chattering teeth. No one moved away. The little kassab wiped his face and went on in his cracked voice, to the accompaniment of the swishing sounds made by the seas that swept regularly astern along the ship's side.

"Have you heard him shout at the wind — louder than the wind? I have heard, being far forward. And before, too, in the many years I served this white man I have heard him often cry magic words that make all safe. Ya-wa! This is truth. Ask Wasub who is a Haji, even as I am."

“I have seen white men’s ships with their masts broken — also wrecked like our own praus,” remarked sadly a lean, lank fellow who shivered beside the kassab, hanging his head and trying to grasp his shoulder blades.

“True,” admitted the kassab. “They are all the children of Satan but to some more favour is shown. To obey such men on the sea or in a fight is good. I saw him who is master here fight with wild men who eat their enemies — far away to the eastward — and I dealt blows by his side without fear; for the charms he, no doubt, possesses protect his servants also. I am a believer and the Stoned One can not touch my forehead. Yet the reward of victory comes from the accursed. For six years have I sailed with that white man; first as one who minds the rudder, for I am a man of the sea, born in a prau, and am skilled in such work. And now, because of my great knowledge of his desires, I have the care of all things in this ship.”

Several voices muttered, “True. True.” They remained apathetic and patient, in the rush of wind, under the repeated short flights of sprays. The slight roll of the ship balanced them stiffly all together where they stood propped against the big boat. The breeze humming between the inclined masts enveloped their dark and silent figures in the unceasing resonance of its breath.

The brig’s head had been laid so as to pass a little to windward of the small islands of the Carimata group. They had been till then hidden in the night, but now both men on the lookout reported land ahead in one long cry. Lingard, standing to leeward abreast of the wheel, watched the islet first seen. When it was nearly abeam of the brig he gave his orders, and Wasub hurried off to the main deck. The helm was put down, the yards on the main came slowly square and the wet canvas of the main-topsail clung suddenly to the mast after a single heavy flap. The dazzling streak of the ship’s wake vanished. The vessel lost her way and began to dip her bows into the quick succession of the running head seas. And at every slow plunge of the craft, the song of the wind would swell louder amongst the waving spars, with a wild and mournful note.

Just as the brig’s boat had been swung out, ready for lowering, the yacht’s gig hauled up by its line appeared tossing and splashing on the lee quarter. Carter stood up in the stern sheets balancing himself cleverly to the disordered motion of his cockleshell. He hailed the brig twice to know what was the matter, not being able from below and in the darkness to make out what that confused group of men on the poop were about. He got no answer, though he could see the shape of a man standing by himself aft, and apparently watching him. He was going to repeat his hail for the third time when he heard the rattling of tackles followed by a heavy splash, a burst of voices, scrambling hollow sounds — and a dark mass detaching itself from the brig’s side swept past him on the crest of a passing wave. For less than a second he could see on the shimmer of the night sky the shape of a boat, the heads of men, the blades of oars pointing upward while being got out hurriedly. Then all this sank out of sight, reappeared once more far off and hardly discernible, before vanishing for good.

“Why, they’ve lowered a boat!” exclaimed Carter, falling back in his seat. He remembered that he had seen only a few hours ago three native praus lurking amongst those

very islands. For a moment he had the idea of casting off to go in chase of that boat, so as to find out. . . . Find out what? He gave up his idea at once. What could he do?

The conviction that the yacht, and everything belonging to her, were in some indefinite but very real danger, took afresh a strong hold of him, and the persuasion that the master of the brig was going there to help did not by any means assuage his alarm. The fact only served to complicate his uneasiness with a sense of mystery.

The white man who spoke as if that sea was all his own, or as if people intruded upon his privacy by taking the liberty of getting wrecked on a coast where he and his friends did some queer business, seemed to him an undesirable helper. That the boat had been lowered to communicate with the praus seen and avoided by him in the evening he had no doubt. The thought had flashed on him at once. It had an ugly look. Yet the best thing to do after all was to hang on and get back to the yacht and warn them. . . . Warn them against whom? The man had been perfectly open with him. Warn them against what? It struck him that he hadn't the slightest conception of what would happen, of what was even likely to happen. That strange rescuer himself was bringing the news of danger. Danger from the natives of course. And yet he was in communication with those natives. That was evident. That boat going off in the night. . . . Carter swore heartily to himself. His perplexity became positive bodily pain as he sat, wet, uncomfortable, and still, one hand on the tiller, thrown up and down in headlong swings of his boat. And before his eyes, towering high, the black hull of the brig also rose and fell, setting her stern down in the sea, now and again, with a tremendous and foaming splash. Not a sound from her reached Carter's ears. She seemed an abandoned craft but for the outline of a man's head and body still visible in a watchful attitude above the taffrail.

Carter told his bowman to haul up closer and hailed:

"Brig ahoy. Anything wrong?"

He waited, listening. The shadowy man still watched. After some time a curt "No" came back in answer.

"Are you going to keep hove-to long?" shouted Carter.

"Don't know. Not long. Drop your boat clear of the ship. Drop clear. Do damage if you don't."

"Slack away, John!" said Carter in a resigned tone to the elderly seaman in the bow. "Slack away and let us ride easy to the full scope. They don't seem very talkative on board there."

Even while he was speaking the line ran out and the regular undulations of the passing seas drove the boat away from the brig. Carter turned a little in his seat to look at the land. It loomed up dead to leeward like a lofty and irregular cone only a mile or a mile and a half distant. The noise of the surf beating upon its base was heard against the wind in measured detonations. The fatigue of many days spent in the boat asserted itself above the restlessness of Carter's thoughts and, gradually, he lost the notion of the passing time without altogether losing the consciousness of his situation.

In the intervals of that benumbed stupor — rather than sleep — he was aware that the interrupted noise of the surf had grown into a continuous great rumble, swelling periodically into a loud roar; that the high islet appeared now bigger, and that a white fringe of foam was visible at its feet. Still there was no stir or movement of any kind on board the brig. He noticed that the wind was moderating and the sea going down with it, and then dozed off again for a minute. When next he opened his eyes with a start, it was just in time to see with surprise a new star soar noiselessly straight up from behind the land, take up its position in a brilliant constellation — and go out suddenly. Two more followed, ascending together, and after reaching about the same elevation, expired side by side.

“Them’s rockets, sir — ain’t they?” said one of the men in a muffled voice.

“Aye, rockets,” grunted Carter. “And now, what’s the next move?” he muttered to himself dismally.

He got his answer in the fierce swishing whirr of a slender ray of fire that, shooting violently upward from the sombre hull of the brig, dissolved at once into a dull red shower of falling sparks. Only one, white and brilliant, remained alone poised high overhead, and after glowing vividly for a second, exploded with a feeble report. Almost at the same time he saw the brig’s head fall off the wind, made out the yards swinging round to fill the main topsail, and heard distinctly the thud of the first wave thrown off by the advancing bows. The next minute the tow-line got the strain and his boat started hurriedly after the brig with a sudden jerk.

Leaning forward, wide awake and attentive, Carter steered. His men sat one behind another with shoulders up, and arched backs, dozing, uncomfortable but patient, upon the thwarts. The care requisite to steer the boat properly in the track of the seething and disturbed water left by the brig in her rapid course prevented him from reflecting much upon the incertitude of the future and upon his own unusual situation.

Now he was only exceedingly anxious to see the yacht again, and it was with a feeling of very real satisfaction that he saw all plain sail being made on the brig. Through the remaining hours of the night he sat grasping the tiller and keeping his eyes on the shadowy and high pyramid of canvas gliding steadily ahead of his boat with a slight balancing movement from side to side.

Chapter 4

It was noon before the brig, piloted by Lingard through the deep channels between the outer coral reefs, rounded within pistol-shot a low hummock of sand which marked the end of a long stretch of stony ledges that, being mostly awash, showed a black head only, here and there amongst the hissing brown froth of the yellow sea. As the brig drew clear of the sandy patch there appeared, dead to windward and beyond a maze of broken water, sandspits, and clusters of rocks, the black hull of the yacht heeling over, high and motionless upon the great expanse of glittering shallows. Her long, naked

spars were inclined slightly as if she had been sailing with a good breeze. There was to the lookers-on aboard the brig something sad and disappointing in the yacht's aspect as she lay perfectly still in an attitude that in a seaman's mind is associated with the idea of rapid motion.

"Here she is!" said Shaw, who, clad in a spotless white suit, came just then from forward where he had been busy with the anchors. "She is well on, sir — isn't she? Looks like a mudflat to me from here."

"Yes. It is a mudflat," said Lingard, slowly, raising the long glass to his eye. "Haul the mainsail up, Mr. Shaw," he went on while he took a steady look at the yacht. "We will have to work in short tacks here."

He put the glass down and moved away from the rail. For the next hour he handled his little vessel in the intricate and narrow channel with careless certitude, as if every stone, every grain of sand upon the treacherous bottom had been plainly disclosed to his sight. He handled her in the fitful and unsteady breeze with a matter-of-fact audacity that made Shaw, forward at his station, gasp in sheer alarm. When heading toward the inshore shoals the brig was never put round till the quick, loud cries of the leadsmen announced that there were no more than three feet of water under her keel; and when standing toward the steep inner edge of the long reef, where the lead was of no use, the helm would be put down only when the cutwater touched the faint line of the bordering foam. Lingard's love for his brig was a man's love, and was so great that it could never be appeased unless he called on her to put forth all her qualities and her power, to repay his exacting affection by a faithfulness tried to the very utmost limit of endurance. Every flutter of the sails flew down from aloft along the taut leeches, to enter his heart in a sense of acute delight; and the gentle murmur of water alongside, which, continuous and soft, showed that in all her windings his incomparable craft had never, even for an instant, ceased to carry her way, was to him more precious and inspiring than the soft whisper of tender words would have been to another man. It was in such moments that he lived intensely, in a flush of strong feeling that made him long to press his little vessel to his breast. She was his perfect world full of trustful joy.

The people on board the yacht, who watched eagerly the first sail they had seen since they had been ashore on that deserted part of the coast, soon made her out, with some disappointment, to be a small merchant brig beating up tack for tack along the inner edge of the reef — probably with the intention to communicate and offer assistance. The general opinion among the seafaring portion of her crew was that little effective assistance could be expected from a vessel of that description. Only the sailing-master of the yacht remarked to the boatswain (who had the advantage of being his first cousin): "This man is well acquainted here; you can see that by the way he handles his brig. I shan't be sorry to have somebody to stand by us. Can't tell when we will get off this mud, George."

A long board, sailed very close, enabled the brig to fetch the southern limit of discoloured water over the bank on which the yacht had stranded. On the very edge of the muddy patch she was put in stays for the last time. As soon as she had paid off on

the other tack, sail was shortened smartly, and the brig commenced the stretch that was to bring her to her anchorage, under her topsails, lower staysails and jib. There was then less than a quarter of a mile of shallow water between her and the yacht; but while that vessel had gone ashore with her head to the eastward the brig was moving slowly in a west-northwest direction, and consequently, sailed — so to speak — past the whole length of the yacht. Lingard saw every soul in the schooner on deck, watching his advent in a silence which was as unbroken and perfect as that on board his own vessel.

A little man with a red face framed in white whiskers waved a gold-laced cap above the rail in the waist of the yacht. Lingard raised his arm in return. Further aft, under the white awnings, he could see two men and a woman. One of the men and the lady were in blue. The other man, who seemed very tall and stood with his arm entwined round an awning stanchion above his head, was clad in white. Lingard saw them plainly. They looked at the brig through binoculars, turned their faces to one another, moved their lips, seemed surprised. A large dog put his forepaws on the rail, and, lifting up his big, black head, sent out three loud and plaintive barks, then dropped down out of sight. A sudden stir and an appearance of excitement amongst all hands on board the yacht was caused by their perceiving that the boat towing astern of the stranger was their own second gig.

Arms were outstretched with pointing fingers. Someone shouted out a long sentence of which not a word could be made out; and then the brig, having reached the western limit of the bank, began to move diagonally away, increasing her distance from the yacht but bringing her stern gradually into view. The people aft, Lingard noticed, left their places and walked over to the taffrail so as to keep him longer in sight.

When about a mile off the bank and nearly in line with the stern of the yacht the brig's topsails fluttered and the yards came down slowly on the caps; the fore and aft canvas ran down; and for some time she floated quietly with folded wings upon the transparent sheet of water, under the radiant silence of the sky. Then her anchor went to the bottom with a rumbling noise resembling the roll of distant thunder. In a moment her head tended to the last puffs of the northerly airs and the ensign at the peak stirred, unfurled itself slowly, collapsed, flew out again, and finally hung down straight and still, as if weighted with lead.

“Dead calm, sir,” said Shaw to Lingard. “Dead calm again. We got into this funny place in the nick of time, sir.”

They stood for a while side by side, looking round upon the coast and the sea. The brig had been brought up in the middle of a broad belt of clear water. To the north rocky ledges showed in black and white lines upon the slight swell setting in from there. A small island stood out from the broken water like the square tower of some submerged building. It was about two miles distant from the brig. To the eastward the coast was low; a coast of green forests fringed with dark mangroves. There was in its sombre dullness a clearly defined opening, as if a small piece had been cut out with a

sharp knife. The water in it shone like a patch of polished silver. Lingard pointed it out to Shaw.

“This is the entrance to the place where we are going,” he said.

Shaw stared, round-eyed.

“I thought you came here on account of this here yacht,” he stammered, surprised.

“Ah. The yacht,” said Lingard, musingly, keeping his eyes on the break in the coast. “The yacht — ” He stamped his foot suddenly. “I would give all I am worth and throw in a few days of life into the bargain if I could get her off and away before to-night.”

He calmed down, and again stood gazing at the land. A little within the entrance from behind the wall of forests an invisible fire belched out steadily the black and heavy convolutions of thick smoke, which stood out high, like a twisted and shivering pillar against the clear blue of the sky.

“We must stop that game, Mr. Shaw,” said Lingard, abruptly.

“Yes, sir. What game?” asked Shaw, looking round in wonder.

“This smoke,” said Lingard, impatiently. “It’s a signal.”

“Certainly, sir — though I don’t see how we can do it. It seems far inland. A signal for what, sir?”

“It was not meant for us,” said Lingard in an unexpectedly savage tone. “Here, Shaw, make them put a blank charge into that fore-castle gun. Tell ‘em to ram hard the wadding and grease the mouth. We want to make a good noise. If old Jorgenson hears it, that fire will be out before you have time to turn round twice. . . . In a minute, Mr. Carter.”

The yacht’s boat had come alongside as soon as the brig had been brought up, and Carter had been waiting to take Lingard on board the yacht. They both walked now to the gangway. Shaw, following his commander, stood by to take his last orders.

“Put all the boats in the water, Mr. Shaw,” Lingard was saying, with one foot on the rail, ready to leave his ship, “and mount the four-pounder swivel in the longboat’s bow. Cast off the sea lashings of the guns, but don’t run ‘em out yet. Keep the topsails loose and the jib ready for setting, I may want the sails in a hurry. Now, Mr. Carter, I am ready for you.”

“Shove off, boys,” said Carter as soon as they were seated in the boat. “Shove off, and give way for a last pull before you get a long rest.”

The men lay back on their oars, grunting. Their faces were drawn, grey and streaked with the dried salt sprays. They had the worried expression of men who had a long call made upon their endurance. Carter, heavy-eyed and dull, steered for the yacht’s gangway. Lingard asked as they were crossing the brig’s bows:

“Water enough alongside your craft, I suppose?”

“Yes. Eight to twelve feet,” answered Carter, hoarsely. “Say, Captain! Where’s your show of cutthroats? Why! This sea is as empty as a church on a week-day.”

The booming report, nearly over his head, of the brig’s eighteen-pounder interrupted him. A round puff of white vapour, spreading itself lazily, clung in fading shreds about the foreyard. Lingard, turning half round in the stern sheets, looked at the smoke on

the shore. Carter remained silent, staring sleepily at the yacht they were approaching. Lingard kept watching the smoke so intensely that he almost forgot where he was, till Carter's voice pronouncing sharply at his ear the words "way enough," recalled him to himself.

They were in the shadow of the yacht and coming alongside her ladder. The master of the brig looked upward into the face of a gentleman, with long whiskers and a shaved chin, staring down at him over the side through a single eyeglass. As he put his foot on the bottom step he could see the shore smoke still ascending, unceasing and thick; but even as he looked the very base of the black pillar rose above the ragged line of tree-tops. The whole thing floated clear away from the earth, and rolling itself into an irregularly shaped mass, drifted out to seaward, travelling slowly over the blue heavens, like a threatening and lonely cloud.

Part 2 — The Shore of Refuge

Chapter 1

The coast off which the little brig, floating upright above her anchor, seemed to guard the high hull of the yacht has no distinctive features. It is land without form. It stretches away without cape or bluff, long and low — indefinitely; and when the heavy gusts of the northeast monsoon drive the thick rain slanting over the sea, it is seen faintly under the grey sky, black and with a blurred outline like the straight edge of a dissolving shore. In the long season of unclouded days, it presents to view only a narrow band of earth that appears crushed flat upon the vast level of waters by the weight of the sky, whose immense dome rests on it in a line as fine and true as that of the sea horizon itself.

Notwithstanding its nearness to the centres of European power, this coast has been known for ages to the armed wanderers of these seas as “The Shore of Refuge.” It has no specific name on the charts, and geography manuals don’t mention it at all; but the wreckage of many defeats unerringly drifts into its creeks. Its approaches are extremely difficult for a stranger. Looked at from seaward, the innumerable islets fringing what, on account of its vast size, may be called the mainland, merge into a background that presents not a single landmark to point the way through the intricate channels. It may be said that in a belt of sea twenty miles broad along that low shore there is much more coral, mud, sand, and stones than actual sea water. It was amongst the outlying shoals of this stretch that the yacht had gone ashore and the events consequent upon her stranding took place.

The diffused light of the short daybreak showed the open water to the westward, sleeping, smooth and grey, under a faded heaven. The straight coast threw a heavy belt of gloom along the shoals, which, in the calm of expiring night, were unmarked by the slightest ripple. In the faint dawn the low clumps of bushes on the sandbanks appeared immense.

Two figures, noiseless like two shadows, moved slowly over the beach of a rocky islet, and stopped side by side on the very edge of the water. Behind them, between the mats from which they had arisen, a small heap of black embers smouldered quietly. They stood upright and perfectly still, but for the slight movement of their heads from right to left and back again as they swept their gaze through the grey emptiness of the waters where, about two miles distant, the hull of the yacht loomed up to seaward, black and shapeless, against the wan sky.

The two figures looked beyond without exchanging as much as a murmur. The taller of the two grounded, at arm's length, the stock of a gun with a long barrel; the hair of the other fell down to its waist; and, near by, the leaves of creepers drooping from the summit of the steep rock stirred no more than the festooned stone. The faint light, disclosing here and there a gleam of white sandbanks and the blurred hummocks of islets scattered within the gloom of the coast, the profound silence, the vast stillness all round, accentuated the loneliness of the two human beings who, urged by a sleepless hope, had risen thus, at break of day, to look afar upon the veiled face of the sea.

"Nothing!" said the man with a sigh, and as if awakening from a long period of musing.

He was clad in a jacket of coarse blue cotton, of the kind a poor fisherman might own, and he wore it wide open on a muscular chest the colour and smoothness of bronze. From the twist of threadbare sarong wound tightly on the hips protruded outward to the left the ivory hilt, ringed with six bands of gold, of a weapon that would not have disgraced a ruler. Silver glittered about the flintlock and the hardwood stock of his gun. The red and gold handkerchief folded round his head was of costly stuff, such as is woven by high-born women in the households of chiefs, only the gold threads were tarnished and the silk frayed in the folds. His head was thrown back, the dropped eyelids narrowed the gleam of his eyes. His face was hairless, the nose short with mobile nostrils, and the smile of careless good-humour seemed to have been permanently wrought, as if with a delicate tool, into the slight hollows about the corners of rather full lips. His upright figure had a negligent elegance. But in the careless face, in the easy gestures of the whole man there was something attentive and restrained.

After giving the offing a last searching glance, he turned and, facing the rising sun, walked bare-footed on the elastic sand. The trailed butt of his gun made a deep furrow. The embers had ceased to smoulder. He looked down at them pensively for a while, then called over his shoulder to the girl who had remained behind, still scanning the sea:

"The fire is out, Immada."

At the sound of his voice the girl moved toward the mats. Her black hair hung like a mantle. Her sarong, the kilt-like garment which both sexes wear, had the national check of grey and red, but she had not completed her attire by the belt, scarves, the loose upper wrappings, and the head-covering of a woman. A black silk jacket, like that of a man of rank, was buttoned over her bust and fitted closely to her slender waist. The edge of a stand-up collar, stiff with gold embroidery, rubbed her cheek. She had no bracelets, no anklets, and although dressed practically in man's clothes, had about her person no weapon of any sort. Her arms hung down in exceedingly tight sleeves slit a little way up from the wrist, gold-braided and with a row of small gold buttons. She walked, brown and alert, all of a piece, with short steps, the eyes lively in an impassive little face, the arched mouth closed firmly; and her whole person breathed in its rigid

grace the fiery gravity of youth at the beginning of the task of life — at the beginning of beliefs and hopes.

This was the day of Lingard's arrival upon the coast, but, as is known, the brig, delayed by the calm, did not appear in sight of the shallows till the morning was far advanced. Disappointed in their hope to see the expected sail shining in the first rays of the rising sun, the man and the woman, without attempting to relight the fire, lounged on their sleeping mats. At their feet a common canoe, hauled out of the water, was, for more security, moored by a grass rope to the shaft of a long spear planted firmly on the white beach, and the incoming tide lapped monotonously against its stern.

The girl, twisting up her black hair, fastened it with slender wooden pins. The man, reclining at full length, had made room on his mat for the gun — as one would do for a friend — and, supported on his elbow, looked toward the yacht with eyes whose fixed dreaminess like a transparent veil would show the slow passage of every gloomy thought by deepening gradually into a sombre stare.

"We have seen three sunrises on this islet, and no friend came from the sea," he said without changing his attitude, with his back toward the girl who sat on the other side of the cold embers.

"Yes; and the moon is waning," she answered in a low voice. "The moon is waning. Yet he promised to be here when the nights are light and the water covers the sandbanks as far as the bushes."

"The traveller knows the time of his setting out, but not the time of his return," observed the man, calmly.

The girl sighed.

"The nights of waiting are long," she murmured.

"And sometimes they are vain," said the man with the same composure. "Perhaps he will never return."

"Why?" exclaimed the girl.

"The road is long and the heart may grow cold," was the answer in a quiet voice. "If he does not return it is because he has forgotten."

"Oh, Hassim, it is because he is dead," cried the girl, indignantly.

The man, looking fixedly to seaward, smiled at the ardour of her tone.

They were brother and sister, and though very much alike, the family resemblance was lost in the more general traits common to the whole race.

They were natives of Wajo and it is a common saying amongst the Malay race that to be a successful traveller and trader a man must have some Wajo blood in his veins. And with those people trading, which means also travelling afar, is a romantic and an honourable occupation. The trader must possess an adventurous spirit and a keen understanding; he should have the fearlessness of youth and the sagacity of age; he should be diplomatic and courageous, so as to secure the favour of the great and inspire fear in evil-doers.

These qualities naturally are not expected in a shopkeeper or a Chinaman pedlar; they are considered indispensable only for a man who, of noble birth and perhaps

related to the ruler of his own country, wanders over the seas in a craft of his own and with many followers; carries from island to island important news as well as merchandise; who may be trusted with secret messages and valuable goods; a man who, in short, is as ready to intrigue and fight as to buy and sell. Such is the ideal trader of Wajo.

Trading, thus understood, was the occupation of ambitious men who played an occult but important part in all those national risings, religious disturbances, and also in the organized piratical movements on a large scale which, during the first half of the last century, affected the fate of more than one native dynasty and, for a few years at least, seriously endangered the Dutch rule in the East. When, at the cost of much blood and gold, a comparative peace had been imposed on the islands the same occupation, though shorn of its glorious possibilities, remained attractive for the most adventurous of a restless race. The younger sons and relations of many a native ruler traversed the seas of the Archipelago, visited the innumerable and little-known islands, and the then practically unknown shores of New Guinea; every spot where European trade had not penetrated — from Aru to Atjeh, from Sumbawa to Palawan.

Chapter 2

It was in the most unknown perhaps of such spots, a small bay on the coast of New Guinea, that young Pata Hassim, the nephew of one of the greatest chiefs of Wajo, met Lingard for the first time.

He was a trader after the Wajo manner, and in a stout sea-going prau armed with two guns and manned by young men who were related to his family by blood or dependence, had come in there to buy some birds of paradise skins for the old Sultan of Ternate; a risky expedition undertaken not in the way of business but as a matter of courtesy toward the aged Sultan who had entertained him sumptuously in that dismal brick palace at Ternate for a month or more.

While lying off the village, very much on his guard, waiting for the skins and negotiating with the treacherous coast-savages who are the go-betweens in that trade, Hassim saw one morning Lingard's brig come to an anchor in the bay, and shortly afterward observed a white man of great stature with a beard that shone like gold, land from a boat and stroll on unarmed, though followed by four Malays of the brig's crew, toward the native village.

Hassim was struck with wonder and amazement at the cool recklessness of such a proceeding; and, after, in true Malay fashion, discussing with his people for an hour or so the urgency of the case, he also landed, but well escorted and armed, with the intention of going to see what would happen.

The affair really was very simple, "such as" — Lingard would say — "such as might have happened to anybody." He went ashore with the intention to look for some stream

where he could conveniently replenish his water casks, this being really the motive which had induced him to enter the bay.

While, with his men close by and surrounded by a mop-headed, sooty crowd, he was showing a few cotton handkerchiefs, and trying to explain by signs the object of his landing, a spear, lunged from behind, grazed his neck. Probably the Papuan wanted only to ascertain whether such a creature could be killed or hurt, and most likely firmly believed that it could not; but one of Lingard's seamen at once retaliated by striking at the experimenting savage with his parang — three such choppers brought for the purpose of clearing the bush, if necessary, being all the weapons the party from the brig possessed.

A deadly tumult ensued with such suddenness that Lingard, turning round swiftly, saw his defender, already speared in three places, fall forward at his feet. Wasub, who was there, and afterward told the story once a week on an average, used to horrify his hearers by showing how the man blinked his eyes quickly before he fell. Lingard was unarmed. To the end of his life he remained incorrigibly reckless in that respect, explaining that he was "much too quick tempered to carry firearms on the chance of a row. And if put to it," he argued, "I can make shift to kill a man with my fist anyhow; and then — don't ye see — you know what you're doing and are not so apt to start a trouble from sheer temper or funk — see?"

In this case he did his best to kill a man with a blow from the shoulder and catching up another by the middle flung him at the naked, wild crowd. "He hurled men about as the wind hurls broken boughs. He made a broad way through our enemies!" related Wasub in his jerky voice. It is more probable that Lingard's quick movements and the amazing aspect of such a strange being caused the warriors to fall back before his rush.

Taking instant advantage of their surprise and fear, Lingard, followed by his men, dashed along the kind of ruinous jetty leading to the village which was erected as usual over the water. They darted into one of the miserable huts built of rotten mats and bits of decayed canoes, and in this shelter showing daylight through all its sides, they had time to draw breath and realize that their position was not much improved.

The women and children screaming had cleared out into the bush, while at the shore end of the jetty the warriors capered and yelled, preparing for a general attack. Lingard noticed with mortification that his boat-keeper apparently had lost his head, for, instead of swimming off to the ship to give the alarm, as he was perfectly able to do, the man actually struck out for a small rock a hundred yards away and was frantically trying to climb up its perpendicular side. The tide being out, to jump into the horrible mud under the houses would have been almost certain death. Nothing remained therefore — since the miserable dwelling would not have withstood a vigorous kick, let alone a siege — but to rush back on shore and regain possession of the boat. To this Lingard made up his mind quickly and, arming himself with a crooked stick he found under his hand, sallied forth at the head of his three men. As he bounded along, far in advance, he had just time to perceive clearly the desperate nature of the undertaking, when he heard two shots fired to his right. The solid mass of black

bodies and frizzly heads in front of him wavered and broke up. They did not run away, however.

Lingard pursued his course, but now with that thrill of exultation which even a faint prospect of success inspires in a sanguine man. He heard a shout of many voices far off, then there was another report of a shot, and a musket ball fired at long range spurted a tiny jet of sand between him and his wild enemies. His next bound would have carried him into their midst had they awaited his onset, but his uplifted arm found nothing to strike. Black backs were leaping high or gliding horizontally through the grass toward the edge of the bush.

He flung his stick at the nearest pair of black shoulders and stopped short. The tall grasses swayed themselves into a rest, a chorus of yells and piercing shrieks died out in a dismal howl, and all at once the wooded shores and the blue bay seemed to fall under the spell of a luminous stillness. The change was as startling as the awakening from a dream. The sudden silence struck Lingard as amazing.

He broke it by lifting his voice in a stentorian shout, which arrested the pursuit of his men. They retired reluctantly, glaring back angrily at the wall of a jungle where not a single leaf stirred. The strangers, whose opportune appearance had decided the issue of that adventure, did not attempt to join in the pursuit but halted in a compact body on the ground lately occupied by the savages.

Lingard and the young leader of the Wajo traders met in the splendid light of noonday, and amidst the attentive silence of their followers, on the very spot where the Malay seaman had lost his life. Lingard, striding up from one side, thrust out his open palm; Hassim responded at once to the frank gesture and they exchanged their first hand-clasp over the prostrate body, as if fate had already exacted the price of a death for the most ominous of her gifts — the gift of friendship that sometimes contains the whole good or evil of a life.

"I'll never forget this day," cried Lingard in a hearty tone; and the other smiled quietly.

Then after a short pause — "Will you burn the village for vengeance?" asked the Malay with a quick glance down at the dead Lascar who, on his face and with stretched arms, seemed to cling desperately to that earth of which he had known so little.

Lingard hesitated.

"No," he said, at last. "It would do good to no one."

"True," said Hassim, gently, "but was this man your debtor — a slave?"

"Slave?" cried Lingard. "This is an English brig. Slave? No. A free man like myself."

"Hai. He is indeed free now," muttered the Malay with another glance downward. "But who will pay the bereaved for his life?"

"If there is anywhere a woman or child belonging to him, I — my serang would know — I shall seek them out," cried Lingard, remorsefully.

"You speak like a chief," said Hassim, "only our great men do not go to battle with naked hands. O you white men! O the valour of you white men!"

"It was folly, pure folly," protested Lingard, "and this poor fellow has paid for it."

“He could not avoid his destiny,” murmured the Malay. “It is in my mind my trading is finished now in this place,” he added, cheerfully.

Lingard expressed his regret.

“It is no matter, it is no matter,” assured the other courteously, and after Lingard had given a pressing invitation for Hassim and his two companions of high rank to visit the brig, the two parties separated.

The evening was calm when the Malay craft left its berth near the shore and was rowed slowly across the bay to Lingard’s anchorage. The end of a stout line was thrown on board, and that night the white man’s brig and the brown man’s prau swung together to the same anchor.

The sun setting to seaward shot its last rays between the headlands, when the body of the killed Lascar, wrapped up decently in a white sheet, according to Mohammedan usage, was lowered gently below the still waters of the bay upon which his curious glances, only a few hours before, had rested for the first time. At the moment the dead man, released from slip-ropes, disappeared without a ripple before the eyes of his shipmates, the bright flash and the heavy report of the brig’s bow gun were succeeded by the muttering echoes of the encircling shores and by the loud cries of sea birds that, wheeling in clouds, seemed to scream after the departing seaman a wild and eternal good-bye. The master of the brig, making his way aft with hanging head, was followed by low murmurs of pleased surprise from his crew as well as from the strangers who crowded the main deck. In such acts performed simply, from conviction, what may be called the romantic side of the man’s nature came out; that responsive sensitiveness to the shadowy appeals made by life and death, which is the groundwork of a chivalrous character.

Lingard entertained his three visitors far into the night. A sheep from the brig’s sea stock was given to the men of the prau, while in the cabin, Hassim and his two friends, sitting in a row on the stern settee, looked very splendid with costly metals and flawed jewels. The talk conducted with hearty friendship on Lingard’s part, and on the part of the Malays with the well-bred air of discreet courtesy, which is natural to the better class of that people, touched upon many subjects and, in the end, drifted to politics.

“It is in my mind that you are a powerful man in your own country,” said Hassim, with a circular glance at the cuddy.

“My country is upon a far-away sea where the light breezes are as strong as the winds of the rainy weather here,” said Lingard; and there were low exclamations of wonder. “I left it very young, and I don’t know about my power there where great men alone are as numerous as the poor people in all your islands, Tuan Hassim. But here,” he continued, “here, which is also my country — being an English craft and worthy of it, too — I am powerful enough. In fact, I am Rajah here. This bit of my country is all my own.”

The visitors were impressed, exchanged meaning glances, nodded at each other.

“Good, good,” said Hassim at last, with a smile. “You carry your country and your power with you over the sea. A Rajah upon the sea. Good!”

Lingard laughed thunderously while the others looked amused.

“Your country is very powerful — we know,” began again Hassim after a pause, “but is it stronger than the country of the Dutch who steal our land?”

“Stronger?” cried Lingard. He opened a broad palm. “Stronger? We could take them in our hand like this — ” and he closed his fingers triumphantly.

“And do you make them pay tribute for their land?” enquired Hassim with eagerness.

“No,” answered Lingard in a sobered tone; “this, Tuan Hassim, you see, is not the custom of white men. We could, of course — but it is not the custom.”

“Is it not?” said the other with a sceptical smile. “They are stronger than we are and they want tribute from us. And sometimes they get it — even from Wajo where every man is free and wears a kris.”

There was a period of dead silence while Lingard looked thoughtful and the Malays gazed stonily at nothing.

“But we burn our powder amongst ourselves,” went on Hassim, gently, “and blunt our weapons upon one another.”

He sighed, paused, and then changing to an easy tone began to urge Lingard to visit Wajo “for trade and to see friends,” he said, laying his hand on his breast and inclining his body slightly.

“Aye. To trade with friends,” cried Lingard with a laugh, “for such a ship” — he waved his arm — “for such a vessel as this is like a household where there are many behind the curtain. It is as costly as a wife and children.”

The guests rose and took their leave.

“You fired three shots for me, Panglima Hassim,” said Lingard, seriously, “and I have had three barrels of powder put on board your prau; one for each shot. But we are not quits.”

The Malay’s eyes glittered with pleasure.

“This is indeed a friend’s gift. Come to see me in my country!”

“I promise,” said Lingard, “to see you — some day.”

The calm surface of the bay reflected the glorious night sky, and the brig with the prau riding astern seemed to be suspended amongst the stars in a peace that was almost unearthly in the perfection of its unstirring silence. The last hand-shakes were exchanged on deck, and the Malays went aboard their own craft. Next morning, when a breeze sprang up soon after sunrise, the brig and the prau left the bay together. When clear of the land Lingard made all sail and sheered alongside to say good-bye before parting company — the brig, of course, sailing three feet to the prau’s one. Hassim stood on the high deck aft.

“Prosperous road,” hailed Lingard.

“Remember the promise!” shouted the other. “And come soon!” he went on, raising his voice as the brig forged past. “Come soon — lest what perhaps is written should come to pass!”

The brig shot ahead.

“What?” yelled Lingard in a puzzled tone, “what’s written?”

He listened. And floating over the water came faintly the words:
"No one knows!"

Chapter 3

"My word! I couldn't help liking the chap," would shout Lingard when telling the story; and looking around at the eyes that glittered at him through the smoke of cheroots, this Brixham trawler-boy, afterward a youth in colliers, deep-water man, gold-digger, owner and commander of "the finest brig afloat," knew that by his listeners — seamen, traders, adventurers like himself — this was accepted not as the expression of a feeling, but as the highest commendation he could give his Malay friend.

"By heavens! I shall go to Wajo!" he cried, and a semicircle of heads nodded grave approbation while a slightly ironical voice said deliberately — "You are a made man, Tom, if you get on the right side of that Rajah of yours."

"Go in — and look out for yourself," cried another with a laugh.

A little professional jealousy was unavoidable, Wajo, on account of its chronic state of disturbance, being closed to the white traders; but there was no real ill-will in the banter of these men, who, rising with handshakes, dropped off one by one. Lingard went straight aboard his vessel and, till morning, walked the poop of the brig with measured steps. The riding lights of ships twinkled all round him; the lights ashore twinkled in rows, the stars twinkled above his head in a black sky; and reflected in the black water of the roadstead twinkled far below his feet. And all these innumerable and shining points were utterly lost in the immense darkness. Once he heard faintly the rumbling chain of some vessel coming to an anchor far away somewhere outside the official limits of the harbour. A stranger to the port — thought Lingard — one of us would have stood right in. Perhaps a ship from home? And he felt strangely touched at the thought of that ship, weary with months of wandering, and daring not to approach the place of rest. At sunrise, while the big ship from the West, her sides streaked with rust and grey with the salt of the sea, was moving slowly in to take up a berth near the shore, Lingard left the roadstead on his way to the eastward.

A heavy gulf thunderstorm was raging, when after a long passage and at the end of a sultry calm day, wasted in drifting helplessly in sight of his destination, Lingard, taking advantage of fitful gusts of wind, approached the shores of Wajo. With characteristic audacity, he held on his way, closing in with a coast to which he was a stranger, and on a night that would have appalled any other man; while at every dazzling flash, Hassim's native land seemed to leap nearer at the brig — and disappear instantly as though it had crouched low for the next spring out of an impenetrable darkness. During the long day of the calm, he had obtained from the deck and from aloft, such good views of the coast, and had noted the lay of the land and the position of the dangers so carefully that, though at the precise moment when he gave the order to let go the anchor, he had been for some time able to see no further than if his head had

been wrapped in a woollen blanket, yet the next flickering bluish flash showed him the brig, anchored almost exactly where he had judged her to be, off a narrow white beach near the mouth of a river.

He could see on the shore a high cluster of bamboo huts perched upon piles, a small grove of tall palms all bowed together before the blast like stalks of grass, something that might have been a palisade of pointed stakes near the water, and far off, a sombre background resembling an immense wall — the forest-clad hills. Next moment, all this vanished utterly from his sight, as if annihilated and, before he had time to turn away, came back to view with a sudden crash, appearing unscathed and motionless under hooked darts of flame, like some legendary country of immortals, withstanding the wrath and fire of Heaven.

Made uneasy by the nature of his holding ground, and fearing that in one of the terrific off-shore gusts the brig would start her anchor, Lingard remained on deck to watch over the safety of his vessel. With one hand upon the lead-line which would give him instant warning of the brig beginning to drag, he stood by the rail, most of the time deafened and blinded, but also fascinated, by the repeated swift visions of an unknown shore, a sight always so inspiring, as much perhaps by its vague suggestion of danger as by the hopes of success it never fails to awaken in the heart of a true adventurer. And its immutable aspect of profound and still repose, seen thus under streams of fire and in the midst of a violent uproar, made it appear inconceivably mysterious and amazing.

Between the squalls there were short moments of calm, while now and then even the thunder would cease as if to draw breath. During one of those intervals. Lingard, tired and sleepy, was beginning to doze where he stood, when suddenly it occurred to him that, somewhere below, the sea had spoken in a human voice. It had said, "Praise be to God — " and the voice sounded small, clear, and confident, like the voice of a child speaking in a cathedral. Lingard gave a start and thought — I've dreamed this — and directly the sea said very close to him, "Give a rope."

The thunder growled wickedly, and Lingard, after shouting to the men on deck, peered down at the water, until at last he made out floating close alongside the up-turned face of a man with staring eyes that gleamed at him and then blinked quickly to a flash of lightning. By that time all hands in the brig were wildly active and many ropes-ends had been thrown over. Then together with a gust of wind, and, as if blown on board, a man tumbled over the rail and fell all in a heap upon the deck. Before any one had the time to pick him up, he leaped to his feet, causing the people around him to step back hurriedly. A sinister blue glare showed the bewildered faces and the petrified attitudes of men completely deafened by the accompanying peal of thunder. After a time, as if to beings plunged in the abyss of eternal silence, there came to their ears an unfamiliar thin, far-away voice saying:

"I seek the white man."

"Here," cried Lingard. Then, when he had the stranger, dripping and naked but for a soaked waistcloth, under the lamp of the cabin, he said, "I don't know you."

“My name is Jaffir, and I come from Pata Hassim, who is my chief and your friend. Do you know this?”

He held up a thick gold ring, set with a fairly good emerald.

“I have seen it before on the Rajah’s finger,” said Lingard, looking very grave.

“It is the witness of the truth I speak — the message from Hassim is — ‘Depart and forget!’”

“I don’t forget,” said Lingard, slowly. “I am not that kind of man. What folly is this?”

It is unnecessary to give at full length the story told by Jaffir. It appears that on his return home, after the meeting with Lingard, Hassim found his relative dying and a strong party formed to oppose his rightful successor. The old Rajah Tulla died late at night and — as Jaffir put it — before the sun rose there were already blows exchanged in the courtyard of the ruler’s dalam. This was the preliminary fight of a civil war, fostered by foreign intrigues; a war of jungle and river, of assaulted stockades and forest ambushes. In this contest, both parties — according to Jaffir — displayed great courage, and one of them an unswerving devotion to what, almost from the first, was a lost cause. Before a month elapsed Hassim, though still chief of an armed band, was already a fugitive. He kept up the struggle, however, with some vague notion that Lingard’s arrival would turn the tide.

“For weeks we lived on wild rice; for days we fought with nothing but water in our bellies,” declaimed Jaffir in the tone of a true fire-eater.

And then he went on to relate, how, driven steadily down to the sea, Hassim, with a small band of followers, had been for days holding the stockade by the waterside.

“But every night some men disappeared,” confessed Jaffir. “They were weary and hungry and they went to eat with their enemies. We are only ten now — ten men and a woman with the heart of a man, who are tonight starving, and to-morrow shall die swiftly. We saw your ship afar all day; but you have come too late. And for fear of treachery and lest harm should befall you — his friend — the Rajah gave me the ring and I crept on my stomach over the sand, and I swam in the night — and I, Jaffir, the best swimmer in Wajo, and the slave of Hassim, tell you — his message to you is ‘Depart and forget’ — and this is his gift — take!”

He caught hold suddenly of Lingard’s hand, thrust roughly into it the ring, and then for the first time looked round the cabin with wondering but fearless eyes. They lingered over the semicircle of bayonets and rested fondly on musket-racks. He grunted in admiration.

“Ya-wa, this is strength!” he murmured as if to himself. “But it has come too late.”

“Perhaps not,” cried Lingard.

“Too late,” said Jaffir, “we are ten only, and at sunrise we go out to die.” He went to the cabin door and hesitated there with a puzzled air, being unused to locks and door handles.

“What are you going to do?” asked Lingard.

"I shall swim back," replied Jaffir. "The message is spoken and the night can not last forever."

"You can stop with me," said Lingard, looking at the man searchingly.

"Hassim waits," was the curt answer.

"Did he tell you to return?" asked Lingard.

"No! What need?" said the other in a surprised tone.

Lingard seized his hand impulsively.

"If I had ten men like you!" he cried.

"We are ten, but they are twenty to one," said Jaffir, simply.

Lingard opened the door.

"Do you want anything that a man can give?" he asked.

The Malay had a moment of hesitation, and Lingard noticed the sunken eyes, the prominent ribs, and the worn-out look of the man.

"Speak out," he urged with a smile; "the bearer of a gift must have a reward."

"A drink of water and a handful of rice for strength to reach the shore," said Jaffir sturdily. "For over there" — he tossed his head — "we had nothing to eat to-day."

"You shall have it — give it to you with my own hands," muttered Lingard.

He did so, and thus lowered himself in Jaffir's estimation for a time. While the messenger, squatting on the floor, ate without haste but with considerable earnestness, Lingard thought out a plan of action. In his ignorance as to the true state of affairs in the country, to save Hassim from the immediate danger of his position was all that he could reasonably attempt. To that end Lingard proposed to swing out his long-boat and send her close inshore to take off Hassim and his men. He knew enough of Malays to feel sure that on such a night the besiegers, now certain of success, and being, Jaffir said, in possession of everything that could float, would not be very vigilant, especially on the sea front of the stockade. The very fact of Jaffir having managed to swim off undetected proved that much. The brig's boat could — when the frequency of lightning abated — approach unseen close to the beach, and the defeated party, either stealing out one by one or making a rush in a body, would embark and be received in the brig.

This plan was explained to Jaffir, who heard it without the slightest mark of interest, being apparently too busy eating. When the last grain of rice was gone, he stood up, took a long pull at the water bottle, muttered: "I hear. Good. I will tell Hassim," and tightening the rag round his loins, prepared to go. "Give me time to swim ashore," he said, "and when the boat starts, put another light beside the one that burns now like a star above your vessel. We shall see and understand. And don't send the boat till there is less lightning: a boat is bigger than a man in the water. Tell the rowers to pull for the palm-grove and cease when an oar, thrust down with a strong arm, touches the bottom. Very soon they will hear our hail; but if no one comes they must go away before daylight. A chief may prefer death to life, and we who are left are all of true heart. Do you understand, O big man?"

"The chap has plenty of sense," muttered Lingard to himself, and when they stood side by side on the deck, he said: "But there may be enemies on the beach, O Jaffir,

and they also may shout to deceive my men. So let your hail be Lightning! Will you remember?"

For a time Jaffir seemed to be choking.

"Lit-ing! Is that right? I say — is that right, O strong man?" Next moment he appeared upright and shadowy on the rail.

"Yes. That's right. Go now," said Lingard, and Jaffir leaped off, becoming invisible long before he struck the water. Then there was a splash; after a while a spluttering voice cried faintly, "Lit-ing! Ah, ha!" and suddenly the next thunder-squall burst upon the coast. In the crashing flares of light Lingard had again and again the quick vision of a white beach, the inclined palm-trees of the grove, the stockade by the sea, the forest far away: a vast landscape mysterious and still — Hassim's native country sleeping unmoved under the wrath and fire of Heaven.

Chapter 4

A Traveller visiting Wajo to-day may, if he deserves the confidence of the common people, hear the traditional account of the last civil war, together with the legend of a chief and his sister, whose mother had been a great princess suspected of sorcery and on her death-bed had communicated to these two the secrets of the art of magic. The chief's sister especially, "with the aspect of a child and the fearlessness of a great fighter," became skilled in casting spells. They were defeated by the son of their uncle, because — will explain the narrator simply — "The courage of us Wajo people is so great that magic can do nothing against it. I fought in that war. We had them with their backs to the sea." And then he will go on to relate in an awed tone how on a certain night "when there was such a thunderstorm as has been never heard of before or since" a ship, resembling the ships of white men, appeared off the coast, "as though she had sailed down from the clouds. She moved," he will affirm, "with her sails bellying against the wind; in size she was like an island; the lightning played between her masts which were as high as the summits of mountains; a star burned low through the clouds above her. We knew it for a star at once because no flame of man's kindling could have endured the wind and rain of that night. It was such a night that we on the watch hardly dared look upon the sea. The heavy rain was beating down our eyelids. And when day came, the ship was nowhere to be seen, and in the stockade where the day before there were a hundred or more at our mercy, there was no one. The chief, Hassim, was gone, and the lady who was a princess in the country — and nobody knows what became of them from that day to this. Sometimes traders from our parts talk of having heard of them here, and heard of them there, but these are the lies of men who go afar for gain. We who live in the country believe that the ship sailed back into the clouds whence the Lady's magic made her come. Did we not see the ship with our own eyes? And as to Rajah Hassim and his sister, Mas Immada, some men say one thing and some another, but God alone knows the truth."

Such is the traditional account of Lingard's visit to the shores of Boni. And the truth is he came and went the same night; for, when the dawn broke on a cloudy sky the brig, under reefed canvas and smothered in sprays, was storming along to the southward on her way out of the Gulf. Lingard, watching over the rapid course of his vessel, looked ahead with anxious eyes and more than once asked himself with wonder, why, after all, was he thus pressing her under all the sail she could carry. His hair was blown about by the wind, his mind was full of care and the indistinct shapes of many new thoughts, and under his feet, the obedient brig dashed headlong from wave to wave.

Her owner and commander did not know where he was going. That adventurer had only a confused notion of being on the threshold of a big adventure. There was something to be done, and he felt he would have to do it. It was expected of him. The seas expected it; the land expected it. Men also. The story of war and of suffering; Jaffir's display of fidelity, the sight of Hassim and his sister, the night, the tempest, the coast under streams of fire — all this made one inspiring manifestation of a life calling to him distinctly for interference. But what appealed to him most was the silent, the complete, unquestioning, and apparently uncurious, trust of these people. They came away from death straight into his arms as it were, and remained in them passive as though there had been no such thing as doubt or hope or desire. This amazing unconcern seemed to put him under a heavy load of obligation.

He argued to himself that had not these defeated men expected everything from him they could not have been so indifferent to his action. Their dumb quietude stirred him more than the most ardent pleading. Not a word, not a whisper, not a questioning look even! They did not ask! It flattered him. He was also rather glad of it, because if the unconscious part of him was perfectly certain of its action, he, himself, did not know what to do with those bruised and battered beings a playful fate had delivered suddenly into his hands.

He had received the fugitives personally, had helped some over the rail; in the darkness, slashed about by lightning, he had guessed that not one of them was unwounded, and in the midst of tottering shapes he wondered how on earth they had managed to reach the long-boat that had brought them off. He caught unceremoniously in his arms the smallest of these shapes and carried it into the cabin, then without looking at his light burden ran up again on deck to get the brig under way. While shouting out orders he was dimly aware of someone hovering near his elbow. It was Hassim.

"I am not ready for war," he explained, rapidly, over his shoulder, "and to-morrow there may be no wind." Afterward for a time he forgot everybody and everything while he coned the brig through the few outlying dangers. But in half an hour, and running off with the wind on the quarter, he was quite clear of the coast and breathed freely. It was only then that he approached two others on that poop where he was accustomed in moments of difficulty to commune alone with his craft. Hassim had called his sister out of the cabin; now and then Lingard could see them with fierce distinctness, side

by side, and with twined arms, looking toward the mysterious country that seemed at every flash to leap away farther from the brig — unscathed and fading.

The thought uppermost in Lingard's mind was: "What on earth am I going to do with them?" And no one seemed to care what he would do. Jaffir with eight others quartered on the main hatch, looked to each other's wounds and conversed interminably in low tones, cheerful and quiet, like well-behaved children. Each of them had saved his kris, but Lingard had to make a distribution of cotton cloth out of his trade-goods. Whenever he passed by them, they all looked after him gravely. Hassim and Immada lived in the cuddy. The chief's sister took the air only in the evening and those two could be heard every night, invisible and murmuring in the shadows of the quarter-deck. Every Malay on board kept respectfully away from them.

Lingard, on the poop, listened to the soft voices, rising and falling, in a melancholy cadence; sometimes the woman cried out as if in anger or in pain. He would stop short. The sound of a deep sigh would float up to him on the stillness of the night. Attentive stars surrounded the wandering brig and on all sides their light fell through a vast silence upon a noiseless sea. Lingard would begin again to pace the deck, muttering to himself.

"Belarab's the man for this job. His is the only place where I can look for help, but I don't think I know enough to find it. I wish I had old Jorgenson here — just for ten minutes."

This Jorgenson knew things that had happened a long time ago, and lived amongst men efficient in meeting the accidents of the day, but who did not care what would happen to-morrow and who had no time to remember yesterday. Strictly speaking, he did not live amongst them. He only appeared there from time to time. He lived in the native quarter, with a native woman, in a native house standing in the middle of a plot of fenced ground where grew plantains, and furnished only with mats, cooking pots, a queer fishing net on two sticks, and a small mahogany case with a lock and a silver plate engraved with the words "Captain H. C. Jorgenson. Barque Wild Rose."

It was like an inscription on a tomb. The Wild Rose was dead, and so was Captain H. C. Jorgenson, and the sextant case was all that was left of them. Old Jorgenson, gaunt and mute, would turn up at meal times on board any trading vessel in the Roads, and the stewards — Chinamen or mulattos — would sulkily put on an extra plate without waiting for orders. When the seamen traders foregathered noisily round a glittering cluster of bottles and glasses on a lighted verandah, old Jorgenson would emerge up the stairs as if from a dark sea, and, stepping up with a kind of tottering jauntiness, would help himself in the first tumbler to hand.

"I drink to you all. No — no chair."

He would stand silent over the talking group. His taciturnity was as eloquent as the repeated warning of the slave of the feast. His flesh had gone the way of all flesh, his spirit had sunk in the turmoil of his past, but his immense and bony frame survived as if made of iron. His hands trembled but his eyes were steady. He was supposed to know details about the end of mysterious men and of mysterious enterprises. He was

an evident failure himself, but he was believed to know secrets that would make the fortune of any man; yet there was also a general impression that his knowledge was not of that nature which would make it profitable for a moderately prudent person.

This powerful skeleton, dressed in faded blue serge and without any kind of linen, existed anyhow. Sometimes, if offered the job, he piloted a home ship through the Straits of Rhio, after, however, assuring the captain:

“You don’t want a pilot; a man could go through with his eyes shut. But if you want me, I’ll come. Ten dollars.”

Then, after seeing his charge clear of the last island of the group he would go back thirty miles in a canoe, with two old Malays who seemed to be in some way his followers. To travel thirty miles at sea under the equatorial sun and in a cranky dug-out where once down you must not move, is an achievement that requires the endurance of a fakir and the virtue of a salamander. Ten dollars was cheap and generally he was in demand. When times were hard he would borrow five dollars from any of the adventurers with the remark:

“I can’t pay you back, very soon, but the girl must eat, and if you want to know anything, I can tell you.”

It was remarkable that nobody ever smiled at that “anything.” The usual thing was to say:

“Thank you, old man; when I am pushed for a bit of information I’ll come to you.”

Jorgenson nodded then and would say: “Remember that unless you young chaps are like we men who ranged about here years ago, what I could tell you would be worse than poison.”

It was from Jorgenson, who had his favourites with whom he was less silent, that Lingard had heard of Darat-es-Salam, the “Shore of Refuge.” Jorgenson had, as he expressed it, “known the inside of that country just after the high old times when the white-clad Padris preached and fought all over Sumatra till the Dutch shook in their shoes.” Only he did not say “shook” and “shoes” but the above paraphrase conveys well enough his contemptuous meaning. Lingard tried now to remember and piece together the practical bits of old Jorgenson’s amazing tales; but all that had remained with him was an approximate idea of the locality and a very strong but confused notion of the dangerous nature of its approaches. He hesitated, and the brig, answering in her movements to the state of the man’s mind, lingered on the road, seemed to hesitate also, swinging this way and that on the days of calm.

It was just because of that hesitation that a big New York ship, loaded with oil in cases for Japan, and passing through the Billiton passage, sighted one morning a very smart brig being hove-to right in the fair-way and a little to the east of Carimata. The lank skipper, in a frock-coat, and the big mate with heavy moustaches, judged her almost too pretty for a Britisher, and wondered at the man on board laying his topsail to the mast for no reason that they could see. The big ship’s sails fanned her along, flapping in the light air, and when the brig was last seen far astern she had still her mainyard aback as if waiting for someone. But when, next day, a London tea-clipper

passed on the same track, she saw no pretty brig hesitating, all white and still at the parting of the ways. All that night Lingard had talked with Hassim while the stars streamed from east to west like an immense river of sparks above their heads. Immada listened, sometimes exclaiming low, sometimes holding her breath. She clapped her hands once. A faint dawn appeared.

“You shall be treated like my father in the country,” Hassim was saying. A heavy dew dripped off the rigging and the darkened sails were black on the pale azure of the sky. “You shall be the father who advises for good — ”

“I shall be a steady friend, and as a friend I want to be treated — no more,” said Lingard. “Take back your ring.”

“Why do you scorn my gift?” asked Hassim, with a sad and ironic smile.

“Take it,” said Lingard. “It is still mine. How can I forget that, when facing death, you thought of my safety? There are many dangers before us. We shall be often separated — to work better for the same end. If ever you and Immada need help at once and I am within reach, send me a message with this ring and if I am alive I will not fail you.” He looked around at the pale daybreak. “I shall talk to Belarab straight — like we whites do. I have never seen him, but I am a strong man. Belarab must help us to reconquer your country and when our end is attained I won’t let him eat you up.”

Hassim took the ring and inclined his head.

“It’s time for us to be moving,” said Lingard. He felt a slight tug at his sleeve. He looked back and caught Immada in the act of pressing her forehead to the grey flannel. “Don’t, child!” he said, softly.

The sun rose above the faint blue line of the Shore of Refuge.

The hesitation was over. The man and the vessel, working in accord, had found their way to the faint blue shore. Before the sun had descended half-way to its rest the brig was anchored within a gunshot of the slimy mangroves, in a place where for a hundred years or more no white man’s vessel had been entrusted to the hold of the bottom. The adventurers of two centuries ago had no doubt known of that anchorage for they were very ignorant and incomparably audacious. If it is true, as some say, that the spirits of the dead haunt the places where the living have sinned and toiled, then they might have seen a white long-boat, pulled by eight oars and steered by a man sunburnt and bearded, a cabbage-leaf hat on head, and pistols in his belt, skirting the black mud, full of twisted roots, in search of a likely opening.

Creek after creek was passed and the boat crept on slowly like a monstrous water-spider with a big body and eight slender legs. . . . Did you follow with your ghostly eyes the quest of this obscure adventurer of yesterday, you shades of forgotten adventurers who, in leather jerkins and sweating under steel helmets, attacked with long rapiers the palisades of the strange heathen, or, musket on shoulder and match in cock, guarded timber blockhouses built upon the banks of rivers that command good trade? You, who, wearied with the toil of fighting, slept wrapped in frieze mantles on the sand of quiet beaches, dreaming of fabulous diamonds and of a far-off home.

“Here’s an opening,” said Lingard to Hassim, who sat at his side, just as the sun was setting away to his left. “Here’s an opening big enough for a ship. It’s the entrance we are looking for, I believe. We shall pull all night up this creek if necessary and it’s the very devil if we don’t come upon Belarab’s lair before daylight.”

He shoved the tiller hard over and the boat, swerving sharply, vanished from the coast.

And perhaps the ghosts of old adventurers nodded wisely their ghostly heads and exchanged the ghost of a wistful smile.

Chapter 5

“What’s the matter with King Tom of late?” would ask someone when, all the cards in a heap on the table, the traders lying back in their chairs took a spell from a hard gamble.

“Tom has learned to hold his tongue, he must be up to some dam’ good thing,” opined another; while a man with hooked features and of German extraction who was supposed to be agent for a Dutch crockery house — the famous “Sphinx” mark — broke in resentfully:

“Nefer mind him, shentlemens, he’s matt, matt as a Marsh Hase. Dree monats ago I call on board his prig to talk pizness. And he says like dis — ‘Glear oudt.’ ‘Vat for?’ I say. ‘Glear oudt before I shuck you oferboard.’ Gott-for-dam! Iss dat the vay to talk pizness? I vant sell him ein liddle case first chop grockery for trade and — ”

“Ha, ha, ha! I don’t blame Tom,” interrupted the owner of a pearling schooner, who had come into the Roads for stores. “Why, Mosey, there isn’t a mangy cannibal left in the whole of New Guinea that hasn’t got a cup and saucer of your providing. You’ve flooded the market, savee?”

Jorgenson stood by, a skeleton at the gaming table.

“Because you are a Dutch spy,” he said, suddenly, in an awful tone.

The agent of the Sphinx mark jumped up in a sudden fury.

“Vat? Vat? Shentlemens, you all know me!” Not a muscle moved in the faces around. “Know me,” he stammered with wet lips. “Vat, funf year — berfegtly acquaint — grockery — Verfluchte sponsher. Ich? Spy. Vat for spy? Vordamte English pedlars!”

The door slammed. “Is that so?” asked a New England voice. “Why don’t you let daylight into him?”

“Oh, we can’t do that here,” murmured one of the players. “Your deal, Trench, let us get on.”

“Can’t you?” drawled the New England voice. “You law-abiding, get-a-summons, act-of — parliament lot of sons of Belial — can’t you? Now, look a-here, these Colt pistols I am selling — ” He took the pearler aside and could be heard talking earnestly in the corner. “See — you load — and — see?” There were rapid clicks. “Simple, isn’t it? And if any trouble — say with your divers” — click, click, click — ”Through and

through — like a sieve — warranted to cure the worst kind of cussedness in any nigger. Yes, siree! A case of twenty-four or single specimens — as you like. No? Shot-guns — rifles? No! Waal, I guess you're of no use to me, but I could do a deal with that Tom — what d'ye call him? Where d'ye catch him? Everywhere — eh? Waal — that's nowhere. But I shall find him some day — yes, siree."

Jorgenson, utterly disregarded, looked down dreamily at the falling cards. "Spy — I tell you," he muttered to himself. "If you want to know anything, ask me."

When Lingard returned from Wajo — after an uncommonly long absence — everyone remarked a great change. He was less talkative and not so noisy, he was still hospitable but his hospitality was less expansive, and the man who was never so happy as when discussing impossibly wild projects with half a dozen congenial spirits often showed a disinclination to meet his best friends. In a word, he returned much less of a good fellow than he went away. His visits to the Settlements were not less frequent, but much shorter; and when there he was always in a hurry to be gone.

During two years the brig had, in her way, as hard a life of it as the man. Swift and trim she flitted amongst the islands of little known groups. She could be descried afar from lonely headlands, a white speck travelling fast over the blue sea; the apathetic keepers of rare lighthouses dotting the great highway to the east came to know the cut of her topsails. They saw her passing east, passing west. They had faint glimpses of her flying with masts aslant in the mist of a rain-squall, or could observe her at leisure, upright and with shivering sails, forging ahead through a long day of unsteady airs. Men saw her battling with a heavy monsoon in the Bay of Bengal, lying becalmed in the Java Sea, or gliding out suddenly from behind a point of land, graceful and silent in the clear moonlight. Her activity was the subject of excited but low-toned conversations, which would be interrupted when her master appeared.

"Here he is. Came in last night," whispered the gossiping group.

Lingard did not see the covert glances of respect tempered by irony; he nodded and passed on.

"Hey, Tom! No time for a drink?" would shout someone.

He would shake his head without looking back — far away already.

Florid and burly he could be seen, for a day or two, getting out of dusty gharries, striding in sunshine from the Occidental Bank to the Harbour Office, crossing the Esplanade, disappearing down a street of Chinese shops, while at his elbow and as tall as himself, old Jorgenson paced along, lean and faded, obstinate and disregarded, like a haunting spirit from the past eager to step back into the life of men.

Lingard ignored this wreck of an adventurer, sticking to him closer than his shadow, and the other did not try to attract attention. He waited patiently at the doors of offices, would vanish at tiffin time, would invariably turn up again in the evening and then he kept his place till Lingard went aboard for the night. The police peons on duty looked disdainfully at the phantom of Captain H. C. Jorgenson, Barque Wild Rose, wandering on the silent quay or standing still for hours at the edge of the sombre

roadstead speckled by the anchor lights of ships — an adventurous soul longing to recross the waters of oblivion.

The sampan-men, sculling lazily homeward past the black hull of the brig at anchor, could hear far into the night the drawl of the New England voice escaping through the lifted panes of the cabin skylight. Snatches of nasal sentences floated in the stillness around the still craft.

“Yes, siree! Mexican war rifles — good as new — six in a case — my people in Baltimore — that’s so. Hundred and twenty rounds thrown in for each specimen — marked to suit your requirements. Suppose — musical instruments, this side up with care — how’s that for your taste? No, no! Cash down — my people in Balt — Shooting sea-gulls you say? Waal! It’s a risky business — see here — ten per cent. discount — it’s out of my own pocket — ”

As time wore on, and nothing happened, at least nothing that one could hear of, the excitement died out. Lingard’s new attitude was accepted as only “his way.” There was nothing in it, maintained some. Others dissented. A good deal of curiosity, however, remained and the faint rumour of something big being in preparation followed him into every harbour he went to, from Rangoon to Hongkong.

He felt nowhere so much at home as when his brig was anchored on the inner side of the great stretch of shoals. The centre of his life had shifted about four hundred miles — from the Straits of Malacca to the Shore of Refuge — and when there he felt himself within the circle of another existence, governed by his impulse, nearer his desire. Hassim and Immada would come down to the coast and wait for him on the islet. He always left them with regret.

At the end of the first stage in each trip, Jorgenson waited for him at the top of the boat-stairs and without a word fell into step at his elbow. They seldom exchanged three words in a day; but one evening about six months before Lingard’s last trip, as they were crossing the short bridge over the canal where native craft lie moored in clusters, Jorgenson lengthened his stride and came abreast. It was a moonlight night and nothing stirred on earth but the shadows of high clouds. Lingard took off his hat and drew in a long sigh in the tepid breeze. Jorgenson spoke suddenly in a cautious tone: “The new Rajah Tulla smokes opium and is sometimes dangerous to speak to. There is a lot of discontent in Wajo amongst the big people.”

“Good! Good!” whispered Lingard, excitedly, off his guard for once. Then — ”How the devil do you know anything about it?” he asked.

Jorgenson pointed at the mass of praus, coasting boats, and sampans that, jammed up together in the canal, lay covered with mats and flooded by the cold moonlight with here and there a dim lantern burning amongst the confusion of high sterns, spars, masts and lowered sails.

“There!” he said, as they moved on, and their hatted and clothed shadows fell heavily on the queer-shaped vessels that carry the fortunes of brown men upon a shallow sea. “There! I can sit with them, I can talk to them, I can come and go as I like. They know

me now — it's time-thirty-five years. Some of them give a plate of rice and a bit of fish to the white man. That's all I get — after thirty-five years — given up to them."

He was silent for a time.

"I was like you once," he added, and then laying his hand on Lingard's sleeve, murmured — "Are you very deep in this thing?"

"To the very last cent," said Lingard, quietly, and looking straight before him.

The glitter of the roadstead went out, and the masts of anchored ships vanished in the invading shadow of a cloud.

"Drop it," whispered Jorgenson.

"I am in debt," said Lingard, slowly, and stood still.

"Drop it!"

"Never dropped anything in my life."

"Drop it!"

"By God, I won't!" cried Lingard, stamping his foot.

There was a pause.

"I was like you — once," repeated Jorgenson. "Five and thirty years — never dropped anything. And what you can do is only child's play to some jobs I have had on my hands — understand that — great man as you are, Captain Lingard of the Lightning. . . . You should have seen the Wild Rose," he added with a sudden break in his voice.

Lingard leaned over the guard-rail of the pier. Jorgenson came closer.

"I set fire to her with my own hands!" he said in a vibrating tone and very low, as if making a monstrous confession.

"Poor devil," muttered Lingard, profoundly moved by the tragic enormity of the act. "I suppose there was no way out?"

"I wasn't going to let her rot to pieces in some Dutch port," said Jorgenson, gloomily. "Did you ever hear of Dawson?"

"Something — I don't remember now — " muttered Lingard, who felt a chill down his back at the idea of his own vessel decaying slowly in some Dutch port. "He died — didn't he?" he asked, absently, while he wondered whether he would have the pluck to set fire to the brig — on an emergency.

"Cut his throat on the beach below Fort Rotterdam," said Jorgenson. His gaunt figure wavered in the unsteady moonshine as though made of mist. "Yes. He broke some trade regulation or other and talked big about law-courts and legal trials to the lieutenant of the Komet. 'Certainly,' says the hound. 'Jurisdiction of Macassar, I will take your schooner there.' Then coming into the roads he tows her full tilt on a ledge of rocks on the north side — smash! When she was half full of water he takes his hat off to Dawson. 'There's the shore,' says he — 'go and get your legal trial, you — Englishman — " He lifted a long arm and shook his fist at the moon which dodged suddenly behind a cloud. "All was lost. Poor Dawson walked the streets for months barefooted and in rags. Then one day he begged a knife from some charitable soul, went down to take a last look at the wreck, and — "

"I don't interfere with the Dutch," interrupted Lingard, impatiently. "I want Hassim to get back his own —"

"And suppose the Dutch want the things just so," returned Jorgenson. "Anyway there is a devil in such work — drop it!"

"Look here," said Lingard, "I took these people off when they were in their last ditch. That means something. I ought not to have meddled and it would have been all over in a few hours. I must have meant something when I interfered, whether I knew it or not. I meant it then — and did not know it. Very well. I mean it now — and do know it. When you save people from death you take a share in their life. That's how I look at it."

Jorgenson shook his head.

"Foolishness!" he cried, then asked softly in a voice that trembled with curiosity — "Where did you leave them?"

"With Belarab," breathed out Lingard. "You knew him in the old days."

"I knew him, I knew his father," burst out the other in an excited whisper. "Whom did I not know? I knew Sentot when he was King of the South Shore of Java and the Dutch offered a price for his head — enough to make any man's fortune. He slept twice on board the Wild Rose when things had begun to go wrong with him. I knew him, I knew all his chiefs, the priests, the fighting men, the old regent who lost heart and went over to the Dutch, I knew —" he stammered as if the words could not come out, gave it up and sighed — "Belarab's father escaped with me," he began again, quietly, "and joined the Padris in Sumatra. He rose to be a great leader. Belarab was a youth then. Those were the times. I ranged the coast — and laughed at the cruisers; I saw every battle fought in the Battak country — and I saw the Dutch run; I was at the taking of Singal and escaped. I was the white man who advised the chiefs of Manangkabo. There was a lot about me in the Dutch papers at the time. They said I was a Frenchman turned Mohammedan —" he swore a great oath, and, reeling against the guard-rail, panted, muttering curses on newspapers.

"Well, Belarab has the job in hand," said Lingard, composedly. "He is the chief man on the Shore of Refuge. There are others, of course. He has sent messages north and south. We must have men."

"All the devils unchained," said Jorgenson. "You have done it and now — look out — look out. . . ."

"Nothing can go wrong as far as I can see," argued Lingard. "They all know what's to be done. I've got them in hand. You don't think Belarab unsafe? Do you?"

"Haven't seen him for fifteen years — but the whole thing's unsafe," growled Jorgenson.

"I tell you I've fixed it so that nothing can go wrong. It would be better if I had a white man over there to look after things generally. There is a good lot of stores and arms — and Belarab would bear watching — no doubt. Are you in any want?" he added, putting his hand in his pocket.

"No, there's plenty to eat in the house," answered Jorgenson, curtly. "Drop it," he burst out. "It would be better for you to jump overboard at once. Look at me. I came out a boy of eighteen. I can speak English, I can speak Dutch, I can speak every cursed lingo of these islands — I remember things that would make your hair stand on end — but I have forgotten the language of my own country. I've traded, I've fought, I never broke my word to white or native. And, look at me. If it hadn't been for the girl I would have died in a ditch ten years ago. Everything left me — youth, money, strength, hope — the very sleep. But she stuck by the wreck."

"That says a lot for her and something for you," said Lingard, cheerily.

Jorgenson shook his head.

"That's the worst of all," he said with slow emphasis. "That's the end. I came to them from the other side of the earth and they took me and — see what they made of me."

"What place do you belong to?" asked Lingard.

"Tromso," groaned out Jorgenson; "I will never see snow again," he sobbed out, his face in his hands.

Lingard looked at him in silence.

"Would you come with me?" he said. "As I told you, I am in want of a — "

"I would see you damned first!" broke out the other, savagely. "I am an old white loafer, but you don't get me to meddle in their infernal affairs. They have a devil of their own — "

"The thing simply can't fail. I've calculated every move. I've guarded against everything. I am no fool."

"Yes — you are. Good-night."

"Well, good-bye," said Lingard, calmly.

He stepped into his boat, and Jorgenson walked up the jetty. Lingard, clearing the yoke lines, heard him call out from a distance:

"Drop it!"

"I sail before sunrise," he shouted in answer, and went on board.

When he came up from his cabin after an uneasy night, it was dark yet. A lank figure strolled across the deck.

"Here I am," said Jorgenson, huskily. "Die there or here — all one. But, if I die there, remember the girl must eat."

Lingard was one of the few who had seen Jorgenson's girl. She had a wrinkled brown face, a lot of tangled grey hair, a few black stumps of teeth, and had been married to him lately by an enterprising young missionary from Bukit Timah. What her appearance might have been once when Jorgenson gave for her three hundred dollars and several brass guns, it was impossible to say. All that was left of her youth was a pair of eyes, undimmed and mournful, which, when she was alone, seemed to look stonily into the past of two lives. When Jorgenson was near they followed his movements with anxious pertinacity. And now within the sarong thrown over the grey

head they were dropping unseen tears while Jorgenson's girl rocked herself to and fro, squatting alone in a corner of the dark hut.

"Don't you worry about that," said Lingard, grasping Jorgenson's hand. "She shall want for nothing. All I expect you to do is to look a little after Belarab's morals when I am away. One more trip I must make, and then we shall be ready to go ahead. I've foreseen every single thing. Trust me!"

In this way did the restless shade of Captain H. C. Jorgenson recross the water of oblivion to step back into the life of men.

Chapter 6

For two years, Lingard, who had thrown himself body and soul into the great enterprise, had lived in the long intoxication of slowly preparing success. No thought of failure had crossed his mind, and no price appeared too heavy to pay for such a magnificent achievement. It was nothing less than bringing Hassim triumphantly back to that country seen once at night under the low clouds and in the incessant tumult of thunder. When at the conclusion of some long talk with Hassim, who for the twentieth time perhaps had related the story of his wrongs and his struggle, he lifted his big arm and shaking his fist above his head, shouted: "We will stir them up. We will wake up the country!" he was, without knowing it in the least, making a complete confession of the idealism hidden under the simplicity of his strength. He would wake up the country! That was the fundamental and unconscious emotion on which were engrafted his need of action, the primitive sense of what was due to justice, to gratitude, to friendship, the sentimental pity for the hard lot of Immada — poor child — the proud conviction that of all the men in the world, in his world, he alone had the means and the pluck "to lift up the big end" of such an adventure.

Money was wanted and men were wanted, and he had obtained enough of both in two years from that day when, pistols in his belt and a cabbage-leaf hat on head, he had unexpectedly, and at early dawn, confronted in perfect silence that mysterious Belarab, who himself was for a moment too astounded for speech at the sight of a white face.

The sun had not yet cleared the forests of the interior, but a sky already full of light arched over a dark oval lagoon, over wide fields as yet full of shadows, that seemed slowly changing into the whiteness of the morning mist. There were huts, fences, palisades, big houses that, erected on lofty piles, were seen above the tops of clustered fruit trees, as if suspended in the air.

Such was the aspect of Belarab's settlement when Lingard set his eyes on it for the first time. There were all these things, a great number of faces at the back of the spare and muffled-up figure confronting him, and in the swiftly increasing light a complete stillness that made the murmur of the word "Marhaba" (welcome), pronounced at last by the chief, perfectly audible to every one of his followers. The bodyguards who stood

about him in black skull-caps and with long-shafted lances, preserved an impassive aspect. Across open spaces men could be seen running to the waterside. A group of women standing on a low knoll gazed intently, and nothing of them but the heads showed above the unstirring stalks of a maize field. Suddenly within a cluster of empty huts near by the voice of an invisible hag was heard scolding with shrill fury an invisible young girl:

“Strangers! You want to see the strangers? O devoid of all decency! Must I so lame and old husk the rice alone? May evil befall thee and the strangers! May they never find favour! May they be pursued with swords! I am old. I am old. There is no good in strangers! O girl! May they burn.”

“Welcome,” repeated Belarab, gravely, and looking straight into Lingard’s eyes.

Lingard spent six days that time in Belarab’s settlement. Of these, three were passed in observing each other without a question being asked or a hint given as to the object in view. Lingard lounged on the fine mats with which the chief had furnished a small bamboo house outside a fortified enclosure, where a white flag with a green border fluttered on a high and slender pole but still below the walls of long, high-roofed buildings, raised forty feet or more on hard-wood posts.

Far away the inland forests were tinted a shimmering blue, like the forests of a dream. On the seaward side the belt of great trunks and matted undergrowth came to the western shore of the oval lagoon; and in the pure freshness of the air the groups of brown houses reflected in the water or seen above the waving green of the fields, the clumps of palm trees, the fenced-in plantations, the groves of fruit trees, made up a picture of sumptuous prosperity.

Above the buildings, the men, the women, the still sheet of water and the great plain of crops glistening with dew, stretched the exalted, the miraculous peace of a cloudless sky. And no road seemed to lead into this country of splendour and stillness. One could not believe the unquiet sea was so near, with its gifts and its unending menace. Even during the months of storms, the great clamour rising from the whitened expanse of the Shallows dwelt high in the air in a vast murmur, now feeble now stronger, that seemed to swing back and forth on the wind above the earth without any one being able to tell whence it came. It was like the solemn chant of a waterfall swelling and dying away above the woods, the fields, above the roofs of houses and the heads of men, above the secret peace of that hidden and flourishing settlement of vanquished fanatics, fugitives, and outcasts.

Every afternoon Belarab, followed by an escort that stopped outside the door, entered alone the house of his guest. He gave the salutation, inquired after his health, conversed about insignificant things with an inscrutable mien. But all the time the steadfast gaze of his thoughtful eyes seemed to seek the truth within that white face. In the cool of the evening, before the sun had set, they talked together, passing and repassing between the rugged pillars of the grove near the gate of the stockade. The escort away in the oblique sunlight, followed with their eyes the strolling figures appearing and vanishing behind the trees. Many words were pronounced, but nothing

was said that would disclose the thoughts of the two men. They clasped hands demonstratively before separating, and the heavy slam of the gate was followed by the triple thud of the wooden bars dropped into iron clamps.

On the third night, Lingard was awakened from a light sleep by the sound of whispering outside. A black shadow obscured the stars in the doorway, and a man entering suddenly, stood above his couch while another could be seen squatting — a dark lump on the threshold of the hut.

“Fear not. I am Belarab,” said a cautious voice.

“I was not afraid,” whispered Lingard. “It is the man coming in the dark and without warning who is in danger.”

“And did you not come to me without warning? I said ‘welcome’ — it was as easy for me to say ‘kill him.’”

“You were within reach of my arm. We would have died together,” retorted Lingard, quietly.

The other clicked his tongue twice, and his indistinct shape seemed to sink half-way through the floor.

“It was not written thus before we were born,” he said, sitting cross-legged near the mats, and in a deadened voice. “Therefore you are my guest. Let the talk between us be straight like the shaft of a spear and shorter than the remainder of this night. What do you want?”

“First, your long life,” answered Lingard, leaning forward toward the gleam of a pair of eyes, “and then — your help.”

Chapter 7

The faint murmur of the words spoken on that night lingered for a long time in Lingard’s ears, more persistent than the memory of an uproar; he looked with a fixed gaze at the stars burning peacefully in the square of the doorway, while after listening in silence to all he had to say, Belarab, as if seduced by the strength and audacity of the white man, opened his heart without reserve. He talked of his youth surrounded by the fury of fanaticism and war, of battles on the hills, of advances through the forests, of men’s unswerving piety, of their unextinguishable hate. Not a single wandering cloud obscured the gentle splendour of the rectangular patch of starlight framed in the opaque blackness of the hut. Belarab murmured on of a succession of reverses, of the ring of disasters narrowing round men’s fading hopes and undiminished courage. He whispered of defeat and flight, of the days of despair, of the nights without sleep, of unending pursuit, of the bewildered horror and sombre fury, of their women and children killed in the stockade before the besieged sallied forth to die.

“I have seen all this before I was in years a man,” he cried, low.

His voice vibrated. In the pause that succeeded they heard a light sigh of the sleeping follower who, clasping his legs above his ankles, rested his forehead on his knees.

“And there was amongst us,” began Belarab again, “one white man who remained to the end, who was faithful with his strength, with his courage, with his wisdom. A great man. He had great riches but a greater heart.”

The memory of Jorgenson, emaciated and grey-haired, and trying to borrow five dollars to get something to eat for the girl, passed before Lingard suddenly upon the pacific glitter of the stars.

“He resembled you,” pursued Belarab, abruptly. “We escaped with him, and in his ship came here. It was a solitude. The forest came near to the sheet of water, the rank grass waved upon the heads of tall men. Telal, my father, died of weariness; we were only a few, and we all nearly died of trouble and sadness — here. On this spot! And no enemies could tell where we had gone. It was the Shore of Refuge — and starvation.”

He droned on in the night, with rising and falling inflections. He told how his desperate companions wanted to go out and die fighting on the sea against the ships from the west, the ships with high sides and white sails; and how, unflinching and alone, he kept them battling with the thorny bush, with the rank grass, with the soaring and enormous trees. Lingard, leaning on his elbow and staring through the door, recalled the image of the wide fields outside, sleeping now, in an immensity of serenity and starlight. This quiet and almost invisible talker had done it all; in him was the origin, the creation, the fate; and in the wonder of that thought the shadowy murmuring figure acquired a gigantic greatness of significance, as if it had been the embodiment of some natural force, of a force forever masterful and undying.

“And even now my life is unsafe as if I were their enemy,” said Belarab, mournfully. “Eyes do not kill, nor angry words; and curses have no power, else the Dutch would not grow fat living on our land, and I would not be alive to-night. Do you understand? Have you seen the men who fought in the old days? They have not forgotten the times of war. I have given them homes and quiet hearts and full bellies. I alone. And they curse my name in the dark, in each other’s ears — because they can never forget.”

This man, whose talk had been of war and violence, discovered unexpectedly a passionate craving for security and peace. No one would understand him. Some of those who would not understand had died. His white teeth gleamed cruelly in the dark. But there were others he could not kill. The fools. He wanted the land and the people in it to be forgotten as if they had been swallowed by the sea. But they had neither wisdom nor patience. Could they not wait? They chanted prayers five times every day, but they had not the faith.

“Death comes to all — and to the believers the end of trouble. But you white men who are too strong for us, you also die. You die. And there is a Paradise as great as all earth and all Heaven together, but not for you — not for you!”

Lingard, amazed, listened without a sound. The sleeper snored faintly. Belarab continued very calm after this almost involuntary outburst of a consoling belief. He explained that he wanted somebody at his back, somebody strong and whom he could trust, some outside force that would awe the unruly, that would inspire their ignorance with fear, and make his rule secure. He groped in the dark and seizing Lingard’s arm

above the elbow pressed it with force — then let go. And Lingard understood why his temerity had been so successful.

Then and there, in return for Lingard's open support, a few guns and a little money, Belarab promised his help for the conquest of Wajo. There was no doubt he could find men who would fight. He could send messages to friends at a distance and there were also many unquiet spirits in his own district ready for any adventure. He spoke of these men with fierce contempt and an angry tenderness, in mingled accents of envy and disdain. He was wearied by their folly, by their recklessness, by their impatience — and he seemed to resent these as if they had been gifts of which he himself had been deprived by the fatality of his wisdom. They would fight. When the time came Lingard had only to speak, and a sign from him would send them to a vain death — those men who could not wait for an opportunity on this earth or for the eternal revenge of Heaven.

He ceased, and towered upright in the gloom.

“Awake!” he exclaimed, low, bending over the sleeping man.

Their black shapes, passing in turn, eclipsed for two successive moments the glitter of the stars, and Lingard, who had not stirred, remained alone. He lay back full length with an arm thrown across his eyes.

When three days afterward he left Belarab's settlement, it was on a calm morning of unclouded peace. All the boats of the brig came up into the lagoon armed and manned to make more impressive the solemn fact of a concluded alliance. A staring crowd watched his imposing departure in profound silence and with an increased sense of wonder at the mystery of his apparition. The progress of the boats was smooth and slow while they crossed the wide lagoon. Lingard looked back once. A great stillness had laid its hand over the earth, the sky, and the men; upon the immobility of landscape and people. Hassim and Immada, standing out clearly by the side of the chief, raised their arms in a last salutation; and the distant gesture appeared sad, futile, lost in space, like a sign of distress made by castaways in the vain hope of an impossible help.

He departed, he returned, he went away again, and each time those two figures, lonely on some sandbank of the Shallows, made at him the same futile sign of greeting or good-bye. Their arms at each movement seemed to draw closer around his heart the bonds of a protecting affection. He worked prosaically, earning money to pay the cost of the romantic necessity that had invaded his life. And the money ran like water out of his hands. The owner of the New England voice remitted not a little of it to his people in Baltimore. But import houses in the ports of the Far East had their share. It paid for a fast prau which, commanded by Jaffir, sailed into unfrequented bays and up unexplored rivers, carrying secret messages, important news, generous bribes. A good part of it went to the purchase of the Emma.

The Emma was a battered and decrepit old schooner that, in the decline of her existence, had been much ill-used by a paunchy white trader of cunning and gluttonous aspect. This man boasted outrageously afterward of the good price he had got “for that rotten old hooker of mine — you know.” The Emma left port mysteriously in company

with the brig and henceforth vanished from the seas forever. Lingard had her towed up the creek and ran her aground upon that shore of the lagoon farthest from Belarab's settlement. There had been at that time a great rise of waters, which retiring soon after left the old craft cradled in the mud, with her bows grounded high between the trunks of two big trees, and leaning over a little as though after a hard life she had settled wearily to an everlasting rest. There, a few months later, Jorgenson found her when, called back into the life of men, he reappeared, together with Lingard, in the Land of Refuge.

"She is better than a fort on shore," said Lingard, as side by side they leant over the taffrail, looking across the lagoon on the houses and palm groves of the settlement. "All the guns and powder I have got together so far are stored in her. Good idea, wasn't it? There will be, perhaps, no other such flood for years, and now they can't come alongside unless right under the counter, and only one boat at a time. I think you are perfectly safe here; you could keep off a whole fleet of boats; she isn't easy to set fire to; the forest in front is better than a wall. Well?"

Jorgenson assented in grunts. He looked at the desolate emptiness of the decks, at the stripped spars, at the dead body of the dismantled little vessel that would know the life of the seas no more. The gloom of the forest fell on her, mournful like a winding sheet. The bushes of the bank tapped their twigs on the bluff of her bows, and a pendent spike of tiny brown blossoms swung to and fro over the ruins of her windlass.

Hassim's companions garrisoned the old hulk, and Jorgenson, left in charge, prowled about from stem to stern, taciturn and anxiously faithful to his trust. He had been received with astonishment, respect — and awe. Belarab visited him often. Sometimes those whom he had known in their prime years ago, during a struggle for faith and life, would come to talk with the white man. Their voices were like the echoes of stirring events, in the pale glamour of a youth gone by. They nodded their old heads. Do you remember? — they said. He remembered only too well! He was like a man raised from the dead, for whom the fascinating trust in the power of life is tainted by the black scepticism of the grave.

Only at times the invincible belief in the reality of existence would come back, insidious and inspiring. He squared his shoulders, held himself straight, and walked with a firmer step. He felt a glow within him and the quickened beat of his heart. Then he calculated in silent excitement Lingard's chances of success, and he lived for a time with the life of that other man who knew nothing of the black scepticism of the grave. The chances were good, very good.

"I should like to see it through," Jorgenson muttered to himself ardently; and his lustreless eyes would flash for a moment.

Part 3 — The Capture

Chapter 1

“Some people,” said Lingard, “go about the world with their eyes shut. You are right. The sea is free to all of us. Some work on it, and some play the fool on it — and I don’t care. Only you may take it from me that I will let no man’s play interfere with my work. You want me to understand you are a very great man — ”

Mr. Travers smiled, coldly.

“Oh, yes,” continued Lingard, “I understand that well enough. But remember you are very far from home, while I, here, I am where I belong. And I belong where I am. I am just Tom Lingard, no more, no less, wherever I happen to be, and — you may ask — ” A sweep of his hand along the western horizon entrusted with perfect confidence the remainder of his speech to the dumb testimony of the sea.

He had been on board the yacht for more than an hour, and nothing, for him, had come of it but the birth of an unreasoning hate. To the unconscious demand of these people’s presence, of their ignorance, of their faces, of their voices, of their eyes, he had nothing to give but a resentment that had in it a germ of reckless violence. He could tell them nothing because he had not the means. Their coming at this moment, when he had wandered beyond that circle which race, memories, early associations, all the essential conditions of one’s origin, trace round every man’s life, deprived him in a manner of the power of speech. He was confounded. It was like meeting exacting spectres in a desert.

He stared at the open sea, his arms crossed, with a reflective fierceness. His very appearance made him utterly different from everyone on board that vessel. The grey shirt, the blue sash, one rolled-up sleeve baring a sculptural forearm, the negligent masterfulness of his tone and pose were very distasteful to Mr. Travers, who, having made up his mind to wait for some kind of official assistance, regarded the intrusion of that inexplicable man with suspicion. From the moment Lingard came on board the yacht, every eye in that vessel had been fixed upon him. Only Carter, within earshot and leaning with his elbow upon the rail, stared down at the deck as if overcome with drowsiness or lost in thought.

Of the three other persons aft, Mr. Travers kept his hands in the side pockets of his jacket and did not conceal his growing disgust.

On the other side of the deck, a lady, in a long chair, had a passive attitude that to Mr. d’Alcacer, standing near her, seemed characteristic of the manner in which she

accepted the necessities of existence. Years before, as an attache of his Embassy in London, he had found her an interesting hostess. She was even more interesting now, since a chance meeting and Mr. Travers' offer of a passage to Batavia had given him an opportunity of studying the various shades of scorn which he suspected to be the secret of her acquiescence in the shallowness of events and the monotony of a worldly existence.

There were things that from the first he had not been able to understand; for instance, why she should have married Mr. Travers. It must have been from ambition. He could not help feeling that such a successful mistake would explain completely her scorn and also her acquiescence. The meeting in Manila had been utterly unexpected to him, and he accounted for it to his uncle, the Governor-General of the colony, by pointing out that Englishmen, when worsted in the struggle of love or politics, travel extensively, as if by encompassing a large portion of earth's surface they hoped to gather fresh strength for a renewed contest. As to himself, he judged — but did not say — that his contest with fate was ended, though he also travelled, leaving behind him in the capitals of Europe a story in which there was nothing scandalous but the publicity of an excessive feeling, and nothing more tragic than the early death of a woman whose brilliant perfections were no better known to the great world than the discreet and passionate devotion she had innocently inspired.

The invitation to join the yacht was the culminating point of many exchanged civilities, and was mainly prompted by Mr. Travers' desire to have somebody to talk to. D'Alcacer had accepted with the reckless indifference of a man to whom one method of flight from a relentless enemy is as good as another. Certainly the prospect of listening to long monologues on commerce, administration, and politics did not promise much alleviation to his sorrow; and he could not expect much else from Mr. Travers, whose life and thought, ignorant of human passion, were devoted to extracting the greatest possible amount of personal advantage from human institutions. D'Alcacer found, however, that he could attain a measure of forgetfulness — the most precious thing for him now — in the society of Edith Travers.

She had awakened his curiosity, which he thought nothing and nobody on earth could do any more.

These two talked of things indifferent and interesting, certainly not connected with human institutions, and only very slightly with human passions; but d'Alcacer could not help being made aware of her latent capacity for sympathy developed in those who are disenchanted with life or death. How far she was disenchanted he did not know, and did not attempt to find out. This restraint was imposed upon him by the chivalrous respect he had for the secrets of women and by a conviction that deep feeling is often impenetrably obscure, even to those it masters for their inspiration or their ruin. He believed that even she herself would never know; but his grave curiosity was satisfied by the observation of her mental state, and he was not sorry that the stranding of the yacht prolonged his opportunity.

Time passed on that mudbank as well as anywhere else, and it was not from a multiplicity of events, but from the lapse of time alone, that he expected relief. Yet in the sameness of days upon the Shallows, time flowing ceaselessly, flowed imperceptibly; and, since every man clings to his own, be it joy, be it grief, he was pleased after the unrest of his wanderings to be able to fancy the whole universe and even time itself apparently come to a standstill; as if unwilling to take him away further from his sorrow, which was fading indeed but undiminished, as things fade, not in the distance but in the mist.

Chapter 2

D'Alcacer was a man of nearly forty, lean and sallow, with hollow eyes and a drooping brown moustache. His gaze was penetrating and direct, his smile frequent and fleeting. He observed Lingard with great interest. He was attracted by that elusive something — a line, a fold, perhaps the form of the eye, the droop of an eyelid, the curve of a cheek, that trifling trait which on no two faces on earth is alike, that in each face is the very foundation of expression, as if, all the rest being heredity, mystery, or accident, it alone had been shaped consciously by the soul within.

Now and then he bent slightly over the slow beat of a red fan in the curve of the deck chair to say a few words to Mrs. Travers, who answered him without looking up, without a modulation of tone or a play of feature, as if she had spoken from behind the veil of an immense indifference stretched between her and all men, between her heart and the meaning of events, between her eyes and the shallow sea which, like her gaze, appeared profound, forever stilled, and seemed, far off in the distance of a faint horizon, beyond the reach of eye, beyond the power of hand or voice, to lose itself in the sky.

Mr. Travers stepped aside, and speaking to Carter, overwhelmed him with reproaches.

“You misunderstood your instructions,” murmured Mr. Travers rapidly. “Why did you bring this man here? I am surprised — ”

“Not half so much as I was last night,” growled the young seaman, without any reverence in his tone, very provoking to Mr. Travers.

“I perceive now you were totally unfit for the mission I entrusted you with,” went on the owner of the yacht.

“It's he who got hold of me,” said Carter. “Haven't you heard him yourself, sir?”

“Nonsense,” whispered Mr. Travers, angrily. “Have you any idea what his intentions may be?”

“I half believe,” answered Carter, “that his intention was to shoot me in his cabin last night if I — ”

“That's not the point,” interrupted Mr. Travers. “Have you any opinion as to his motives in coming here?”

Carter raised his weary, bloodshot eyes in a face scarlet and peeling as though it had been licked by a flame. "I know no more than you do, sir. Last night when he had me in that cabin of his, he said he would just as soon shoot me as let me go to look for any other help. It looks as if he were desperately bent upon getting a lot of salvage money out of a stranded yacht."

Mr. Travers turned away, and, for a moment, appeared immersed in deep thought. This accident of stranding upon a deserted coast was annoying as a loss of time. He tried to minimize it by putting in order the notes collected during the year's travel in the East. He had sent off for assistance; his sailing-master, very crestfallen, made bold to say that the yacht would most likely float at the next spring tides; d'Alcacer, a person of undoubted nobility though of inferior principles, was better than no company, in so far at least that he could play picquet.

Mr. Travers had made up his mind to wait. Then suddenly this rough man, looking as if he had stepped out from an engraving in a book about buccaneers, broke in upon his resignation with mysterious allusions to danger, which sounded absurd yet were disturbing; with dark and warning sentences that sounded like disguised menaces.

Mr. Travers had a heavy and rather long chin which he shaved. His eyes were blue, a chill, naive blue. He faced Lingard untouched by travel, without a mark of weariness or exposure, with the air of having been born invulnerable. He had a full, pale face; and his complexion was perfectly colourless, yet amazingly fresh, as if he had been reared in the shade.

He thought:

"I must put an end to this preposterous hectoring. I won't be intimidated into paying for services I don't need."

Mr. Travers felt a strong disgust for the impudence of the attempt; and all at once, incredibly, strangely, as though the thing, like a contest with a rival or a friend, had been of profound importance to his career, he felt inexplicably elated at the thought of defeating the secret purposes of that man.

Lingard, unconscious of everything and everybody, contemplated the sea. He had grown on it, he had lived with it; it had enticed him away from home; on it his thoughts had expanded and his hand had found work to do. It had suggested endeavour, it had made him owner and commander of the finest brig afloat; it had lulled him into a belief in himself, in his strength, in his luck — and suddenly, by its complicity in a fatal accident, it had brought him face to face with a difficulty that looked like the beginning of disaster.

He had said all he dared to say — and he perceived that he was not believed. This had not happened to him for years. It had never happened. It bewildered him as if he had suddenly discovered that he was no longer himself. He had come to them and had said: "I mean well by you. I am Tom Lingard — " and they did not believe! Before such scepticism he was helpless, because he had never imagined it possible. He had said: "You are in the way of my work. You are in the way of what I can not give up for any one; but I will see you through all safe if you will only trust me — me, Tom

Lingard.” And they would not believe him! It was intolerable. He imagined himself sweeping their disbelief out of his way. And why not? He did not know them, he did not care for them, he did not even need to lift his hand against them! All he had to do was to shut his eyes now for a day or two, and afterward he could forget that he had ever seen them. It would be easy. Let their disbelief vanish, their folly disappear, their bodies perish. . . . It was that — or ruin!

Chapter 3

Lingard’s gaze, detaching itself from the silent sea, travelled slowly over the silent figures clustering forward, over the faces of the seamen attentive and surprised, over the faces never seen before yet suggesting old days — his youth — other seas — the distant shores of early memories. Mr. Travers gave a start also, and the hand which had been busy with his left whisker went into the pocket of his jacket, as though he had plucked out something worth keeping. He made a quick step toward Lingard.

“I don’t see my way to utilize your services,” he said, with cold finality.

Lingard, grasping his beard, looked down at him thoughtfully for a short time.

“Perhaps it’s just as well,” he said, very slowly, “because I did not offer my services. I’ve offered to take you on board my brig for a few days, as your only chance of safety. And you asked me what were my motives. My motives! If you don’t see them they are not for you to know.”

And these men who, two hours before had never seen each other, stood for a moment close together, antagonistic, as if they had been life-long enemies, one short, dapper and glaring upward, the other towering heavily, and looking down in contempt and anger.

Mr. d’Alcacer, without taking his eyes off them, bent low over the deck chair.

“Have you ever seen a man dashing himself at a stone wall?” he asked, confidentially.

“No,” said Mrs. Travers, gazing straight before her above the slow flutter of the fan. “No, I did not know it was ever done; men burrow under or slip round quietly while they look the other way.”

“Ah! you define diplomacy,” murmured d’Alcacer. “A little of it here would do no harm. But our picturesque visitor has none of it. I’ve a great liking for him.”

“Already!” breathed out Mrs. Travers, with a smile that touched her lips with its bright wing and was flown almost before it could be seen.

“There is liking at first sight,” affirmed d’Alcacer, “as well as love at first sight — the coup de foudre — you know.”

She looked up for a moment, and he went on, gravely: “I think it is the truest, the most profound of sentiments. You do not love because of what is in the other. You love because of something that is in you — something alive — in yourself.” He struck his breast lightly with the tip of one finger. “A capacity in you. And not everyone may have it — not everyone deserves to be touched by fire from heaven.”

“And die,” she said.

He made a slight movement.

“Who can tell? That is as it may be. But it is always a privilege, even if one must live a little after being burnt.”

Through the silence between them, Mr. Travers’ voice came plainly, saying with irritation:

“I’ve told you already that I do not want you. I’ve sent a messenger to the governor of the Straits. Don’t be importunate.”

Then Lingard, standing with his back to them, growled out something which must have exasperated Mr. Travers, because his voice was pitched higher:

“You are playing a dangerous game, I warn you. Sir John, as it happens, is a personal friend of mine. He will send a cruiser — ” and Lingard interrupted recklessly loud:

“As long as she does not get here for the next ten days, I don’t care. Cruisers are scarce just now in the Straits; and to turn my back on you is no hanging matter anyhow. I would risk that, and more! Do you hear? And more!”

He stamped his foot heavily, Mr. Travers stepped back.

“You will gain nothing by trying to frighten me,” he said. “I don’t know who you are.”

Every eye in the yacht was wide open. The men, crowded upon each other, stared stupidly like a flock of sheep. Mr. Travers pulled out a handkerchief and passed it over his forehead. The face of the sailing-master who leaned against the main mast — as near as he dared to approach the gentry — was shining and crimson between white whiskers, like a glowing coal between two patches of snow.

D’Alcacer whispered:

“It is a quarrel, and the picturesque man is angry. He is hurt.”

Mrs. Travers’ fan rested on her knees, and she sat still as if waiting to hear more.

“Do you think I ought to make an effort for peace?” asked d’Alcacer.

She did not answer, and after waiting a little, he insisted:

“What is your opinion? Shall I try to mediate — as a neutral, as a benevolent neutral? I like that man with the beard.”

The interchange of angry phrases went on aloud, amidst general consternation.

“I would turn my back on you only I am thinking of these poor devils here,” growled Lingard, furiously. “Did you ask them how they feel about it?”

“I ask no one,” spluttered Mr. Travers. “Everybody here depends on my judgment.”

“I am sorry for them then,” pronounced Lingard with sudden deliberation, and leaning forward with his arms crossed on his breast.

At this Mr. Travers positively jumped, and forgot himself so far as to shout:

“You are an impudent fellow. I have nothing more to say to you.”

D’Alcacer, after muttering to himself, “This is getting serious,” made a movement, and could not believe his ears when he heard Mrs. Travers say rapidly with a kind of fervour:

“Don’t go, pray; don’t stop them. Oh! This is truth — this is anger — something real at last.”

D’Alcacer leaned back at once against the rail.

Then Mr. Travers, with one arm extended, repeated very loudly:

“Nothing more to say. Leave my ship at once!”

And directly the black dog, stretched at his wife’s feet, muzzle on paws and blinking yellow eyes, growled discontentedly at the noise. Mrs. Travers laughed a faint, bright laugh, that seemed to escape, to glide, to dart between her white teeth. D’Alcacer, concealing his amazement, was looking down at her gravely: and after a slight gasp, she said with little bursts of merriment between every few words:

“No, but this is — such — such a fresh experience for me to hear — to see something — genuine and human. Ah! ah! one would think they had waited all their lives for this opportunity — ah! ah! ah! All their lives — for this! ah! ah! ah!”

These strange words struck d’Alcacer as perfectly just, as throwing an unexpected light. But after a smile, he said, seriously:

“This reality may go too far. A man who looks so picturesque is capable of anything. Allow me — ” And he left her side, moving toward Lingard, loose-limbed and gaunt, yet having in his whole bearing, in his walk, in every leisurely movement, an air of distinction and ceremony.

Lingard spun round with aggressive mien to the light touch on his shoulder, but as soon as he took his eyes off Mr. Travers, his anger fell, seemed to sink without a sound at his feet like a rejected garment.

“Pardon me,” said d’Alcacer, composedly. The slight wave of his hand was hardly more than an indication, the beginning of a conciliating gesture. “Pardon me; but this is a matter requiring perfect confidence on both sides. Don Martin, here, who is a person of importance. . . .”

“I’ve spoken my mind plainly. I have said as much as I dare. On my word I have,” declared Lingard with an air of good temper.

“Ah!” said d’Alcacer, reflectively, “then your reserve is a matter of pledged faith — of — of honour?”

Lingard also appeared thoughtful for a moment.

“You may put it that way. And I owe nothing to a man who couldn’t see my hand when I put it out to him as I came aboard.”

“You have so much the advantage of us here,” replied d’Alcacer, “that you may well be generous and forget that oversight; and then just a little more confidence. . . .”

“My dear d’Alcacer, you are absurd,” broke in Mr. Travers, in a calm voice but with white lips. “I did not come out all this way to shake hands promiscuously and receive confidences from the first adventurer that comes along.”

D’Alcacer stepped back with an almost imperceptible inclination of the head at Lingard, who stood for a moment with twitching face.

“I am an adventurer,” he burst out, “and if I hadn’t been an adventurer, I would have had to starve or work at home for such people as you. If I weren’t an adventurer,

you would be most likely lying dead on this deck with your cut throat gaping at the sky.”

Mr. Travers waved this speech away. But others also had heard. Carter listened watchfully and something, some alarming notion seemed to dawn all at once upon the thick little sailing-master, who rushed on his short legs, and tugging at Carter’s sleeve, stammered desperately:

“What’s he saying? Who’s he? What’s up? Are the natives unfriendly? My book says — ‘Natives friendly all along this coast!’ My book says — ”

Carter, who had glanced over the side, jerked his arm free.

“You go down into the pantry, where you belong, Skipper, and read that bit about the natives over again,” he said to his superior officer, with savage contempt. “I’ll be hanged if some of them ain’t coming aboard now to eat you — book and all. Get out of the way, and let the gentlemen have the first chance of a row.”

Then addressing Lingard, he drawled in his old way:

“That crazy mate of yours has sent your boat back, with a couple of visitors in her, too.”

Before he apprehended plainly the meaning of these words, Lingard caught sight of two heads rising above the rail, the head of Hassim and the head of Immada. Then their bodies ascended into view as though these two beings had gradually emerged from the Shallows. They stood for a moment on the platform looking down on the deck as if about to step into the unknown, then descended and walking aft entered the half-light under the awning shading the luxurious surroundings, the complicated emotions of the, to them, inconceivable existences.

Lingard without waiting a moment cried:

“What news, O Rajah?”

Hassim’s eyes made the round of the schooner’s decks. He had left his gun in the boat and advanced empty handed, with a tranquil assurance as if bearing a welcome offering in the faint smile of his lips. Immada, half hidden behind his shoulder, followed lightly, her elbows pressed close to her side. The thick fringe of her eyelashes was dropped like a veil; she looked youthful and brooding; she had an aspect of shy resolution.

They stopped within arm’s length of the whites, and for some time nobody said a word. Then Hassim gave Lingard a significant glance, and uttered rapidly with a slight toss of the head that indicated in a manner the whole of the yacht:

“I see no guns!”

“N — no!” said Lingard, looking suddenly confused. It had occurred to him that for the first time in two years or more he had forgotten, utterly forgotten, these people’s existence.

Immada stood slight and rigid with downcast eyes. Hassim, at his ease, scrutinized the faces, as if searching for elusive points of similitude or for subtle shades of difference.

“What is this new intrusion?” asked Mr. Travers, angrily.

“These are the fisher-folk, sir,” broke in the sailing-master, “we’ve observed these three days past flitting about in a canoe; but they never had the sense to answer our

hail; and yet a bit of fish for your breakfast — ” He smiled obsequiously, and all at once, without provocation, began to bellow:

“Hey! Johnnie! Hab got fish? Fish! One peecee fish! Eh? Savee? Fish! Fish — ” He gave it up suddenly to say in a deferential tone — ”Can’t make them savages understand anything, sir,” and withdrew as if after a clever feat.

Hassim looked at Lingard.

“Why did the little white man make that outcry?” he asked, anxiously.

“Their desire is to eat fish,” said Lingard in an enraged tone.

Then before the air of extreme surprise which incontinently appeared on the other’s face, he could not restrain a short and hopeless laugh.

“Eat fish,” repeated Hassim, staring. “O you white people! O you white people! Eat fish! Good! But why make that noise? And why did you send them here without guns?” After a significant glance down upon the slope of the deck caused by the vessel being on the ground, he added with a slight nod at Lingard — ”And without knowledge?”

“You should not have come here, O Hassim,” said Lingard, testily. “Here no one understands. They take a rajah for a fisherman — ”

“Ya-wa! A great mistake, for, truly, the chief of ten fugitives without a country is much less than the headman of a fishing village,” observed Hassim, composedly. Immada sighed. “But you, Tuan, at least know the truth,” he went on with quiet irony; then after a pause — ”We came here because you had forgotten to look toward us, who had waited, sleeping little at night, and in the day watching with hot eyes the empty water at the foot of the sky for you.”

Immada murmured, without lifting her head:

“You never looked for us. Never, never once.”

“There was too much trouble in my eyes,” explained Lingard with that patient gentleness of tone and face which, every time he spoke to the young girl, seemed to disengage itself from his whole person, enveloping his fierceness, softening his aspect, such as the dreamy mist that in the early radiance of the morning weaves a veil of tender charm about a rugged rock in mid-ocean. “I must look now to the right and to the left as in a time of sudden danger,” he added after a moment and she whispered an appalled “Why?” so low that its pain floated away in the silence of attentive men, without response, unheard, ignored, like the pain of an impalpable thought.

Chapter 4

D’Alcacer, standing back, surveyed them all with a profound and alert attention. Lingard seemed unable to tear himself away from the yacht, and remained, checked, as it were in the act of going, like a man who has stopped to think out the last thing to say; and that stillness of a body, forgotten by the labouring mind, reminded Carter of that moment in the cabin, when alone he had seen this man thus wrestling with his thought, motionless and locked in the grip of his conscience.

Mr. Travers muttered audibly through his teeth:

“How long is this performance going to last? I have desired you to go.”

“Think of these poor devils,” whispered Lingard, with a quick glance at the crew huddled up near by.

“You are the kind of man I would be least disposed to trust — in any case,” said Mr. Travers, incisively, very low, and with an inexplicable but very apparent satisfaction. “You are only wasting your time here.”

“You — You — ” He stammered and stared. He chewed with growls some insulting word and at last swallowed it with an effort. “My time pays for your life,” he said.

He became aware of a sudden stir, and saw that Mrs. Travers had risen from her chair.

She walked impulsively toward the group on the quarter-deck, making straight for Immada. Hassim had stepped aside and his detached gaze of a Malay gentleman passed by her as if she had been invisible.

She was tall, supple, moving freely. Her complexion was so dazzling in the shade that it seemed to throw out a halo round her head. Upon a smooth and wide brow an abundance of pale fair hair, fine as silk, undulating like the sea, heavy like a helmet, descended low without a trace of gloss, without a gleam in its coils, as though it had never been touched by a ray of light; and a throat white, smooth, palpitating with life, a round neck modelled with strength and delicacy, supported gloriously that radiant face and that pale mass of hair unvisited by sunshine.

She said with animation:

“Why, it’s a girl!”

Mrs. Travers extorted from d’Alcacer a fresh tribute of curiosity. A strong puff of wind fluttered the awnings and one of the screens blowing out wide let in upon the quarter-deck the rippling glitter of the Shallows, showing to d’Alcacer the luminous vastness of the sea, with the line of the distant horizon, dark like the edge of the encompassing night, drawn at the height of Mrs. Travers’ shoulder. . . . Where was it he had seen her last — a long time before, on the other side of the world? There was also the glitter of splendour around her then, and an impression of luminous vastness. The encompassing night, too, was there, the night that waits for its time to move forward upon the glitter, the splendour, the men, the women.

He could not remember for the moment, but he became convinced that of all the women he knew, she alone seemed to be made for action. Every one of her movements had firmness, ease, the meaning of a vital fact, the moral beauty of a fearless expression. Her supple figure was not dishonoured by any faltering of outlines under the plain dress of dark blue stuff moulding her form with bold simplicity.

She had only very few steps to make, but before she had stopped, confronting Immada, d’Alcacer remembered her suddenly as he had seen her last, out West, far away, impossibly different, as if in another universe, as if presented by the fantasy of a fevered memory. He saw her in a luminous perspective of palatial drawing rooms, in the restless eddy and flow of a human sea, at the foot of walls high as cliffs, under

lofty ceilings that like a tropical sky flung light and heat upon the shallow glitter of uniforms, of stars, of diamonds, of eyes sparkling in the weary or impassive faces of the throng at an official reception. Outside he had found the unavoidable darkness with its aspect of patient waiting, a cloudy sky holding back the dawn of a London morning. It was difficult to believe.

Lingard, who had been looking dangerously fierce, slapped his thigh and showed signs of agitation.

“By heavens, I had forgotten all about you!” he pronounced in dismay.

Mrs. Travers fixed her eyes on Immada. Fairhaired and white she asserted herself before the girl of olive face and raven locks with the maturity of perfection, with the superiority of the flower over the leaf, of the phrase that contains a thought over the cry that can only express an emotion. Immense spaces and countless centuries stretched between them: and she looked at her as when one looks into one’s own heart with absorbed curiosity, with still wonder, with an immense compassion. Lingard murmured, warningly:

“Don’t touch her.”

Mrs. Travers looked at him.

“Do you think I could hurt her?” she asked, softly, and was so startled to hear him mutter a gloomy “Perhaps,” that she hesitated before she smiled.

“Almost a child! And so pretty! What a delicate face,” she said, while another deep sigh of the sea breeze lifted and let fall the screens, so that the sound, the wind, and the glitter seemed to rush in together and bear her words away into space. “I had no idea of anything so charmingly gentle,” she went on in a voice that without effort glowed, caressed, and had a magic power of delight to the soul. “So young! And she lives here — does she? On the sea — or where? Lives — ” Then faintly, as if she had been in the act of speaking, removed instantly to a great distance, she was heard again: “How does she live?”

Lingard had hardly seen Edith Travers till then. He had seen no one really but Mr. Travers. He looked and listened with something of the stupor of a new sensation.

Then he made a distinct effort to collect his thoughts and said with a remnant of anger:

“What have you got to do with her? She knows war. Do you know anything about it? And hunger, too, and thirst, and unhappiness; things you have only heard about. She has been as near death as I am to you — and what is all that to any of you here?”

“That child!” she said in slow wonder.

Immada turned upon Mrs. Travers her eyes black as coal, sparkling and soft like a tropical night; and the glances of the two women, their dissimilar and inquiring glances met, seemed to touch, clasp, hold each other with the grip of an intimate contact. They separated.

“What are they come for? Why did you show them the way to this place?” asked Immada, faintly.

Lingard shook his head in denial.

“Poor girl,” said Mrs. Travers. “Are they all so pretty?”

“Who-all?” mumbled Lingard. “There isn’t an other one like her if you were to ransack the islands all round the compass.”

“Edith!” ejaculated Mr. Travers in a remonstrating, acrimonious voice, and everyone gave him a look of vague surprise.

Then Mrs. Travers asked:

“Who is she?”

Lingard very red and grave declared curtly:

“A princess.”

Immediately he looked round with suspicion. No one smiled. D’Alcacer, courteous and nonchalant, lounged up close to Mrs. Travers’ elbow.

“If she is a princess, then this man is a knight,” he murmured with conviction. “A knight as I live! A descendant of the immortal hidalgo errant upon the sea. It would be good for us to have him for a friend. Seriously I think that you ought — ”

The two stepped aside and spoke low and hurriedly.

“Yes, you ought — ”

“How can I?” she interrupted, catching the meaning like a ball.

“By saying something.”

“Is it really necessary?” she asked, doubtfully.

“It would do no harm,” said d’Alcacer with sudden carelessness; “a friend is always better than an enemy.”

“Always?” she repeated, meaningly. “But what could I say?”

“Some words,” he answered; “I should think any words in your voice — ”

“Mr. d’Alcacer!”

“Or you could perhaps look at him once or twice as though he were not exactly a robber,” he continued.

“Mr. d’Alcacer, are you afraid?”

“Extremely,” he said, stooping to pick up the fan at her feet. “That is the reason I am so anxious to conciliate. And you must not forget that one of your queens once stepped on the cloak of perhaps such a man.”

Her eyes sparkled and she dropped them suddenly.

“I am not a queen,” she said, coldly.

“Unfortunately not,” he admitted; “but then the other was a woman with no charm but her crown.”

At that moment Lingard, to whom Hassim had been talking earnestly, protested aloud:

“I never saw these people before.”

Immada caught hold of her brother’s arm. Mr. Travers said harshly:

“Oblige me by taking these natives away.”

“Never before,” murmured Immada as if lost in ecstasy. D’Alcacer glanced at Mrs. Travers and made a step forward.

“Could not the difficulty, whatever it is, be arranged, Captain?” he said with careful politeness. “Observe that we are not only men here — ”

“Let them die!” cried Immada, triumphantly.

Though Lingard alone understood the meaning of these words, all on board felt oppressed by the uneasy silence which followed her cry.

“Ah! He is going. Now, Mrs. Travers,” whispered d’Alcacer.

“I hope!” said Mrs. Travers, impulsively, and stopped as if alarmed at the sound.

Lingard stood still.

“I hope,” she began again, “that this poor girl will know happier days — ” She hesitated.

Lingard waited, attentive and serious.

“Under your care,” she finished. “And I believe you meant to be friendly to us.”

“Thank you,” said Lingard with dignity.

“You and d’Alcacer,” observed Mr. Travers, austere, “are unnecessarily detaining this — ah — person, and — ah — friends — ah!”

“I had forgotten you — and now — what? One must — it is hard — hard — ” went on Lingard, disconnectedly, while he looked into Mrs. Travers’ violet eyes, and felt his mind overpowered and troubled as if by the contemplation of vast distances. “I — you don’t know — I — you — cannot . . . Ha! It’s all that man’s doing,” he burst out.

For a time, as if beside himself, he glared at Mrs. Travers, then flung up one arm and strode off toward the gangway, where Hassim and Immada waited for him, interested and patient. With a single word “Come,” he preceded them down into the boat. Not a sound was heard on the yacht’s deck, while these three disappeared one after another below the rail as if they had descended into the sea.

Chapter 5

The afternoon dragged itself out in silence. Mrs. Travers sat pensive and idle with her fan on her knees. D’Alcacer, who thought the incident should have been treated in a conciliatory spirit, attempted to communicate his view to his host, but that gentleman, purposely misunderstanding his motive, overwhelmed him with so many apologies and expressions of regret at the irksome and perhaps inconvenient delay “which you suffer from through your good-natured acceptance of our invitation” that the other was obliged to refrain from pursuing the subject further.

“Even my regard for you, my dear d’Alcacer, could not induce me to submit to such a bare-faced attempt at extortion,” affirmed Mr. Travers with uncompromising virtue. “The man wanted to force his services upon me, and then put in a heavy claim for salvage. That is the whole secret — you may depend on it. I detected him at once, of course.” The eye-glass glittered perspicuously. “He underrated my intelligence; and what a violent scoundrel! The existence of such a man in the time we live in is a scandal.”

D'Alcacer retired, and, full of vague forebodings, tried in vain for hours to interest himself in a book. Mr. Travers walked up and down restlessly, trying to persuade himself that his indignation was based on purely moral grounds. The glaring day, like a mass of white-hot iron withdrawn from the fire, was losing gradually its heat and its glare in a richer deepening of tone. At the usual time two seamen, walking noiselessly aft in their yachting shoes, rolled up in silence the quarter-deck screens; and the coast, the shallows, the dark islets and the snowy sandbanks uncovered thus day after day were seen once more in their aspect of dumb watchfulness. The brig, swung end on in the foreground, her squared yards crossing heavily the soaring symmetry of the rigging, resembled a creature instinct with life, with the power of springing into action lurking in the light grace of its repose.

A pair of stewards in white jackets with brass buttons appeared on deck and began to flit about without a sound, laying the table for dinner on the flat top of the cabin skylight. The sun, drifting away toward other lands, toward other seas, toward other men; the sun, all red in a cloudless sky raked the yacht with a parting salvo of crimson rays that shattered themselves into sparks of fire upon the crystal and silver of the dinner-service, put a short flame into the blades of knives, and spread a rosy tint over the white of plates. A trail of purple, like a smear of blood on a blue shield, lay over the sea.

On sitting down Mr. Travers alluded in a vexed tone to the necessity of living on preserves, all the stock of fresh provisions for the passage to Batavia having been already consumed. It was distinctly unpleasant.

"I don't travel for my pleasure, however," he added; "and the belief that the sacrifice of my time and comfort will be productive of some good to the world at large would make up for any amount of privations."

Mrs. Travers and d'Alcacer seemed unable to shake off a strong aversion to talk, and the conversation, like an expiring breeze, kept on dying out repeatedly after each languid gust. The large silence of the horizon, the profound repose of all things visible, enveloping the bodies and penetrating the souls with their quieting influence, stilled thought as well as voice. For a long time no one spoke. Behind the taciturnity of the masters the servants hovered without noise.

Suddenly, Mr. Travers, as if concluding a train of thought, muttered aloud:

"I own with regret I did in a measure lose my temper; but then you will admit that the existence of such a man is a disgrace to civilization."

This remark was not taken up and he returned for a time to the nursing of his indignation, at the bottom of which, like a monster in a fog, crept a bizarre feeling of rancour. He waved away an offered dish.

"This coast," he began again, "has been placed under the sole protection of Holland by the Treaty of 1820. The Treaty of 1820 creates special rights and obligations. . . ."

Both his hearers felt vividly the urgent necessity to hear no more. D'Alcacer, uncomfortable on a campstool, sat stiff and stared at the glass stopper of a carafe. Mrs. Travers turned a little sideways and leaning on her elbow rested her head on the palm

of her hand like one thinking about matters of profound import. Mr. Travers talked; he talked inflexibly, in a harsh blank voice, as if reading a proclamation. The other two, as if in a state of incomplete trance, had their ears assailed by fragments of official verbiage.

“An international understanding — the duty to civilize — failed to carry out — compact — Canning — ” D’Alcacer became attentive for a moment. “ — not that this attempt, almost amusing in its impudence, influences my opinion. I won’t admit the possibility of any violence being offered to people of our position. It is the social aspect of such an incident I am desirous of criticising.”

Here d’Alcacer lost himself again in the recollection of Mrs. Travers and Immada looking at each other — the beginning and the end, the flower and the leaf, the phrase and the cry. Mr. Travers’ voice went on dogmatic and obstinate for a long time. The end came with a certain vehemence.

“And if the inferior race must perish, it is a gain, a step toward the perfecting of society which is the aim of progress.”

He ceased. The sparks of sunset in crystal and silver had gone out, and around the yacht the expanse of coast and Shallows seemed to await, unmoved, the coming of utter darkness. The dinner was over a long time ago and the patient stewards had been waiting, stoical in the downpour of words like sentries under a shower.

Mrs. Travers rose nervously and going aft began to gaze at the coast. Behind her the sun, sunk already, seemed to force through the mass of waters the glow of an unextinguishable fire, and below her feet, on each side of the yacht, the lustrous sea, as if reflecting the colour of her eyes, was tinged a sombre violet hue.

D’Alcacer came up to her with quiet footsteps and for some time they leaned side by side over the rail in silence. Then he said — “How quiet it is!” and she seemed to perceive that the quietness of that evening was more profound and more significant than ever before. Almost without knowing it she murmured — “It’s like a dream.” Another long silence ensued; the tranquillity of the universe had such an August ampleness that the sounds remained on the lips as if checked by the fear of profanation. The sky was limpid like a diamond, and under the last gleams of sunset the night was spreading its veil over the earth. There was something precious and soothing in the beautifully serene end of that expiring day, of the day vibrating, glittering and ardent, and dying now in infinite peace, without a stir, without a tremor, without a sigh — in the certitude of resurrection.

Then all at once the shadow deepened swiftly, the stars came out in a crowd, scattering a rain of pale sparks upon the blackness of the water, while the coast stretched low down, a dark belt without a gleam. Above it the top-hamper of the brig loomed indistinct and high.

Mrs. Travers spoke first.

“How unnaturally quiet! It is like a desert of land and water without a living soul.”

“One man at least dwells in it,” said d’Alcacer, lightly, “and if he is to be believed there are other men, full of evil intentions.”

“Do you think it is true?” Mrs. Travers asked.

Before answering d’Alcacer tried to see the expression of her face but the obscurity was too profound already.

“How can one see a dark truth on such a dark night?” he said, evasively. “But it is easy to believe in evil, here or anywhere else.”

She seemed to be lost in thought for a while.

“And that man himself?” she asked.

After some time d’Alcacer began to speak slowly. “Rough, uncommon, decidedly uncommon of his kind. Not at all what Don Martin thinks him to be. For the rest — mysterious to me. He is your countryman after all — ”

She seemed quite surprised by that view.

“Yes,” she said, slowly. “But you know, I can not — what shall I say? — imagine him at all. He has nothing in common with the mankind I know. There is nothing to begin upon. How does such a man live? What are his thoughts? His actions? His affections? His — ”

“His conventions,” suggested d’Alcacer. “That would include everything.”

Mr. Travers appeared suddenly behind them with a glowing cigar in his teeth. He took it between his fingers to declare with persistent acrimony that no amount of “scoundrelly intimidation” would prevent him from having his usual walk. There was about three hundred yards to the southward of the yacht a sandbank nearly a mile long, gleaming a silvery white in the darkness, plummeted in the centre with a thicket of dry bushes that rustled very loud in the slightest stir of the heavy night air. The day after the stranding they had landed on it “to stretch their legs a bit,” as the sailing-master defined it, and every evening since, as if exercising a privilege or performing a duty, the three paced there for an hour backward and forward lost in dusky immensity, threading at the edge of water the belt of damp sand, smooth, level, elastic to the touch like living flesh and sweating a little under the pressure of their feet.

This time d’Alcacer alone followed Mr. Travers. Mrs. Travers heard them get into the yacht’s smallest boat, and the night-watchman, tugging at a pair of sculls, pulled them off to the nearest point. Then the man returned. He came up the ladder and she heard him say to someone on deck:

“Orders to go back in an hour.”

His footsteps died out forward, and a somnolent, unbreathing repose took possession of the stranded yacht.

Chapter 6

After a time this absolute silence which she almost could feel pressing upon her on all sides induced in Mrs. Travers a state of hallucination. She saw herself standing alone, at the end of time, on the brink of days. All was unmoving as if the dawn would never come, the stars would never fade, the sun would never rise any more; all was mute,

still, dead — as if the shadow of the outer darkness, the shadow of the uninterrupted, of the everlasting night that fills the universe, the shadow of the night so profound and so vast that the blazing suns lost in it are only like sparks, like pin-points of fire, the restless shadow that like a suspicion of an evil truth darkens everything upon the earth on its passage, had enveloped her, had stood arrested as if to remain with her forever.

And there was such a finality in that illusion, such an accord with the trend of her thought that when she murmured into the darkness a faint “so be it” she seemed to have spoken one of those sentences that resume and close a life.

As a young girl, often reproved for her romantic ideas, she had dreams where the sincerity of a great passion appeared like the ideal fulfilment and the only truth of life. Entering the world she discovered that ideal to be unattainable because the world is too prudent to be sincere. Then she hoped that she could find the truth of life an ambition which she understood as a lifelong devotion to some unselfish ideal. Mr. Travers’ name was on men’s lips; he seemed capable of enthusiasm and of devotion; he impressed her imagination by his impenetrability. She married him, found him enthusiastically devoted to the nursing of his own career, and had nothing to hope for now.

That her husband should be bewildered by the curious misunderstanding which had taken place and also permanently grieved by her disloyalty to his respectable ideals was only natural. He was, however, perfectly satisfied with her beauty, her brilliance, and her useful connections. She was admired, she was envied; she was surrounded by splendour and adulation; the days went on rapid, brilliant, uniform, without a glimpse of sincerity or true passion, without a single true emotion — not even that of a great sorrow. And swiftly and stealthily they had led her on and on, to this evening, to this coast, to this sea, to this moment of time and to this spot on the earth’s surface where she felt unerringly that the moving shadow of the unbroken night had stood still to remain with her forever.

“So be it!” she murmured, resigned and defiant, at the mute and smooth obscurity that hung before her eyes in a black curtain without a fold; and as if in answer to that whisper a lantern was run up to the foreyard-arm of the brig. She saw it ascend swinging for a short space, and suddenly remain motionless in the air, piercing the dense night between the two vessels by its glance of flame that strong and steady seemed, from afar, to fall upon her alone.

Her thoughts, like a fascinated moth, went fluttering toward that light — that man — that girl, who had known war, danger, seen death near, had obtained evidently the devotion of that man. The occurrences of the afternoon had been strange in themselves, but what struck her artistic sense was the vigour of their presentation. They outlined themselves before her memory with the clear simplicity of some immortal legend. They were mysterious, but she felt certain they were absolutely true. They embodied artless and masterful feelings; such, no doubt, as had swayed mankind in the simplicity of its youth. She envied, for a moment, the lot of that humble and obscure sister. Nothing stood between that girl and the truth of her sensations. She could be sincerely

courageous, and tender and passionate and — well — ferocious. Why not ferocious? She could know the truth of terror — and of affection, absolutely, without artificial trammels, without the pain of restraint.

Thinking of what such life could be Mrs. Travers felt invaded by that inexplicable exaltation which the consciousness of their physical capacities so often gives to intellectual beings. She glowed with a sudden persuasion that she also could be equal to such an existence; and her heart was dilated with a momentary longing to know the naked truth of things; the naked truth of life and passion buried under the growth of centuries.

She glowed and, suddenly, she quivered with the shock of coming to herself as if she had fallen down from a star. There was a sound of rippling water and a shapeless mass glided out of the dark void she confronted. A voice below her feet said:

“I made out your shape — on the sky.” A cry of surprise expired on her lips and she could only peer downward. Lingard, alone in the brig’s dinghy, with another stroke sent the light boat nearly under the yacht’s counter, laid his sculls in, and rose from the thwart. His head and shoulders loomed up alongside and he had the appearance of standing upon the sea. Involuntarily Mrs. Travers made a movement of retreat.

“Stop,” he said, anxiously, “don’t speak loud. No one must know. Where do your people think themselves, I wonder? In a dock at home? And you — ”

“My husband is not on board,” she interrupted, hurriedly.

“I know.”

She bent a little more over the rail.

“Then you are having us watched. Why?”

“Somebody must watch. Your people keep such a good look-out — don’t they? Yes. Ever since dark one of my boats has been dodging astern here, in the deep water. I swore to myself I would never see one of you, never speak to one of you here, that I would be dumb, blind, deaf. And — here I am!”

Mrs. Travers’ alarm and mistrust were replaced by an immense curiosity, burning, yet quiet, too, as if before the inevitable work of destiny. She looked downward at Lingard. His head was bared, and, with one hand upon the ship’s side, he seemed to be thinking deeply.

“Because you had something more to tell us,” Mrs. Travers suggested, gently.

“Yes,” he said in a low tone and without moving in the least.

“Will you come on board and wait?” she asked.

“Who? I!” He lifted his head so quickly as to startle her. “I have nothing to say to him; and I’ll never put my foot on board this craft. I’ve been told to go. That’s enough.”

“He is accustomed to be addressed deferentially,” she said after a pause, “and you — ”

“Who is he?” asked Lingard, simply.

These three words seemed to her to scatter her past in the air — like smoke. They robbed all the multitude of mankind of every vestige of importance. She was amazed

to find that on this night, in this place, there could be no adequate answer to the searching naiveness of that question.

"I didn't ask for much," Lingard began again. "Did I? Only that you all should come on board my brig for five days. That's all. . . . Do I look like a liar? There are things I could not tell him. I couldn't explain — I couldn't — not to him — to no man — to no man in the world — "

His voice dropped.

"Not to myself," he ended as if in a dream.

"We have remained unmolested so long here," began Mrs. Travers a little unsteadily, "that it makes it very difficult to believe in danger, now. We saw no one all these days except those two people who came for you. If you may not explain — "

"Of course, you can't be expected to see through a wall," broke in Lingard. "This coast's like a wall, but I know what's on the other side. . . . A yacht here, of all things that float! When I set eyes on her I could fancy she hadn't been more than an hour from home. Nothing but the look of her spars made me think of old times. And then the faces of the chaps on board. I seemed to know them all. It was like home coming to me when I wasn't thinking of it. And I hated the sight of you all."

"If we are exposed to any peril," she said after a pause during which she tried to penetrate the secret of passion hidden behind that man's words, "it need not affect you. Our other boat is gone to the Straits and effective help is sure to come very soon."

"Affect me! Is that precious watchman of yours coming aft? I don't want anybody to know I came here again begging, even of you. Is he coming aft? . . . Listen! I've stopped your other boat."

His head and shoulders disappeared as though he had dived into a denser layer of obscurity floating on the water. The watchman, who had the intention to stretch himself in one of the deck chairs, catching sight of the owner's wife, walked straight to the lamp that hung under the ridge pole of the awning, and after fumbling with it for a time went away forward with an indolent gait.

"You dared!" Mrs. Travers whispered down in an intense tone; and directly, Lingard's head emerged again below her with an upturned face.

"It was dare — or give up. The help from the Straits would have been too late anyhow if I hadn't the power to keep you safe; and if I had the power I could see you through it — alone. I expected to find a reasonable man to talk to. I ought to have known better. You come from too far to understand these things. Well, I dared; I've sent after your other boat a fellow who, with me at his back, would try to stop the governor of the Straits himself. He will do it. Perhaps it's done already. You have nothing to hope for. But I am here. You said you believed I meant well — "

"Yes," she murmured.

"That's why I thought I would tell you everything. I had to begin with this business about the boat. And what do you think of me now? I've cut you off from the rest of the earth. You people would disappear like a stone in the water. You left one foreign port

for another. Who's there to trouble about what became of you? Who would know? Who could guess? It would be months before they began to stir."

"I understand," she said, steadily, "we are helpless."

"And alone," he added.

After a pause she said in a deliberate, restrained voice:

"What does this mean? Plunder, captivity?"

"It would have meant death if I hadn't been here," he answered.

"But you have the power to — "

"Why, do you think, you are alive yet?" he cried. "Jorgenson has been arguing with them on shore," he went on, more calmly, with a swing of his arm toward where the night seemed darkest. "Do you think he would have kept them back if they hadn't expected me every day? His words would have been nothing without my fist."

She heard a dull blow struck on the side of the yacht and concealed in the same darkness that wrapped the unconcern of the earth and sea, the fury and the pain of hearts; she smiled above his head, fascinated by the simplicity of images and expressions.

Lingard made a brusque movement, the lively little boat being unsteady under his feet, and she spoke slowly, absently, as if her thought had been lost in the vagueness of her sensations.

"And this — this — Jorgenson, you said? Who is he?"

"A man," he answered, "a man like myself."

"Like yourself?"

"Just like myself," he said with strange reluctance, as if admitting a painful truth. "More sense, perhaps, but less luck. Though, since your yacht has turned up here, I begin to think that my luck is nothing much to boast of either."

"Is our presence here so fatal?"

"It may be death to some. It may be worse than death to me. And it rests with you in a way. Think of that! I can never find such another chance again. But that's nothing! A man who has saved my life once and that I passed my word to would think I had thrown him over. But that's nothing! Listen! As true as I stand here in my boat talking to you, I believe the girl would die of grief."

"You love her," she said, softly.

"Like my own daughter," he cried, low.

Mrs. Travers said, "Oh!" faintly, and for a moment there was a silence, then he began again:

"Look here. When I was a boy in a trawler, and looked at you yacht people, in the Channel ports, you were as strange to me as the Malays here are strange to you. I left home sixteen years ago and fought my way all round the earth. I had the time to forget where I began. What are you to me against these two? If I was to die here on the spot would you care? No one would care at home. No one in the whole world — but these two."

"What can I do?" she asked, and waited, leaning over.

He seemed to reflect, then lifting his head, spoke gently:

"Do you understand the danger you are in? Are you afraid?"

"I understand the expression you used, of course. Understand the danger?" she went on. "No — decidedly no. And — honestly — I am not afraid."

"Aren't you?" he said in a disappointed voice. "Perhaps you don't believe me? I believed you, though, when you said you were sure I meant well. I trusted you enough to come here asking for your help — telling you what no one knows."

"You mistake me," she said with impulsive earnestness. "This is so extraordinarily unusual — sudden — outside my experience."

"Aye!" he murmured, "what would you know of danger and trouble? You! But perhaps by thinking it over — "

"You want me to think myself into a fright!" Mrs. Travers laughed lightly, and in the gloom of his thought this flash of joyous sound was incongruous and almost terrible. Next moment the night appeared brilliant as day, warm as sunshine; but when she ceased the returning darkness gave him pain as if it had struck heavily against his breast. "I don't think I could do that," she finished in a serious tone.

"Couldn't you?" He hesitated, perplexed. "Things are bad enough to make it no shame. I tell you," he said, rapidly, "and I am not a timid man, I may not be able to do much if you people don't help me."

"You want me to pretend I am alarmed?" she asked, quickly.

"Aye, to pretend — as well you may. It's a lot to ask of you — who perhaps never had to make-believe a thing in your life — isn't it?"

"It is," she said after a time.

The unexpected bitterness of her tone struck Lingard with dismay.

"Don't be offended," he entreated. "I've got to plan a way out of this mess. It's no play either. Could you pretend?"

"Perhaps, if I tried very hard. But to what end?"

"You must all shift aboard the brig," he began, speaking quickly, "and then we may get over this trouble without coming to blows. Now, if you were to say that you wish it; that you feel unsafe in the yacht — don't you see?"

"I see," she pronounced, thoughtfully.

"The brig is small but the cuddy is fit for a lady," went on Lingard with animation.

"Has it not already sheltered a princess?" she commented, coolly.

"And I shall not intrude."

"This is an inducement."

"Nobody will dare to intrude. You needn't even see me."

"This is almost decisive, only — "

"I know my place."

"Only, I might not have the influence," she finished.

"That I can not believe," he said, roughly. "The long and the short of it is you don't trust me because you think that only people of your own condition speak the truth always."

"Evidently," she murmured.

“You say to yourself — here’s a fellow deep in with pirates, thieves, niggers — ”

“To be sure — ”

“A man I never saw the like before,” went on Lingard, headlong, “a — ruffian.”

He checked himself, full of confusion. After a time he heard her saying, calmly:

“You are like other men in this, that you get angry when you can not have your way at once.”

“I angry!” he exclaimed in deadened voice. “You do not understand. I am thinking of you also — it is hard on me — ”

“I mistrust not you, but my own power. You have produced an unfortunate impression on Mr. Travers.”

“Unfortunate impression! He treated me as if I had been a long-shore loafer. Never mind that. He is your husband. Fear in those you care for is hard to bear for any man. And so, he — ”

“What Machiavellism!”

“Eh, what did you say?”

“I only wondered where you had observed that. On the sea?”

“Observed what?” he said, absently. Then pursuing his idea — “One word from you ought to be enough.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it. Why, even I, myself — ”

“Of course,” she interrupted. “But don’t you think that after parting with you on such — such — inimical terms, there would be a difficulty in resuming relations?”

“A man like me would do anything for money — don’t you see?”

After a pause she asked:

“And would you care for that argument to be used?”

“As long as you know better!”

His voice vibrated — she drew back disturbed, as if unexpectedly he had touched her.

“What can there be at stake?” she began, wonderingly.

“A kingdom,” said Lingard.

Mrs. Travers leaned far over the rail, staring, and their faces, one above the other, came very close together.

“Not for yourself?” she whispered.

He felt the touch of her breath on his forehead and remained still for a moment, perfectly still as if he did not intend to move or speak any more.

“Those things,” he began, suddenly, “come in your way, when you don’t think, and they get all round you before you know what you mean to do. When I went into that bay in New Guinea I never guessed where that course would take me to. I could tell you a story. You would understand! You! You!”

He stammered, hesitated, and suddenly spoke, liberating the visions of two years into the night where Mrs. Travers could follow them as if outlined in words of fire.

Chapter 7

His tale was as startling as the discovery of a new world. She was being taken along the boundary of an exciting existence, and she looked into it through the guileless enthusiasm of the narrator. The heroic quality of the feelings concealed what was disproportionate and absurd in that gratitude, in that friendship, in that inexplicable devotion. The headlong fierceness of purpose invested his obscure design of conquest with the proportions of a great enterprise. It was clear that no vision of a subjugated world could have been more inspiring to the most famous adventurer of history.

From time to time he interrupted himself to ask, confidently, as if he had been speaking to an old friend, "What would you have done?" and hurried on without pausing for approval.

It struck her that there was a great passion in all this, the beauty of an implanted faculty of affection that had found itself, its immediate need of an object and the way of expansion; a tenderness expressed violently; a tenderness that could only be satisfied by backing human beings against their own destiny. Perhaps her hatred of convention, trammelling the frankness of her own impulses, had rendered her more alert to perceive what is intrinsically great and profound within the forms of human folly, so simple and so infinitely varied according to the region of the earth and to the moment of time.

What of it that the narrator was only a roving seaman; the kingdom of the jungle, the men of the forest, the lives obscure! That simple soul was possessed by the greatness of the idea; there was nothing sordid in its flaming impulses. When she once understood that, the story appealed to the audacity of her thoughts, and she became so charmed with what she heard that she forgot where she was. She forgot that she was personally close to that tale which she saw detached, far away from her, truth or fiction, presented in picturesque speech, real only by the response of her emotion.

Lingard paused. In the cessation of the impassioned murmur she began to reflect. And at first it was only an oppressive notion of there being some significance that really mattered in this man's story. That mattered to her. For the first time the shadow of danger and death crossed her mind. Was that the significance? Suddenly, in a flash of acute discernment, she saw herself involved helplessly in that story, as one is involved in a natural cataclysm.

He was speaking again. He had not been silent more than a minute. It seemed to Mrs. Travers that years had elapsed, so different now was the effect of his words. Her mind was agitated as if his coming to speak and confide in her had been a tremendous occurrence. It was a fact of her own existence; it was part of the story also. This was the disturbing thought. She heard him pronounce several names: Belarab, Daman, Tengga, Ningrat. These belonged now to her life and she was appalled to find she was unable to connect these names with any human appearance. They stood out alone, as if written on the night; they took on a symbolic shape; they imposed themselves upon her senses. She whispered as if pondering: "Belarab, Daman, Ningrat," and these

barbarous sounds seemed to possess an exceptional energy, a fatal aspect, the savour of madness.

“Not one of them but has a heavy score to settle with the whites. What’s that to me! I had somehow to get men who would fight. I risked my life to get that lot. I made them promises which I shall keep — or — ! Can you see now why I dared to stop your boat? I am in so deep that I care for no Sir John in the world. When I look at the work ahead I care for nothing. I gave you one chance — one good chance. That I had to do. No! I suppose I didn’t look enough of a gentleman. Yes! Yes! That’s it. Yet I know what a gentleman is. I lived with them for years. I chummed with them — yes — on gold-fields and in other places where a man has got to show the stuff that’s in him. Some of them write from home to me here — such as you see me, because I — never mind! And I know what a gentleman would do. Come! Wouldn’t he treat a stranger fairly? Wouldn’t he remember that no man is a liar till you prove him so? Wouldn’t he keep his word wherever given? Well, I am going to do that. Not a hair of your head shall be touched as long as I live!”

She had regained much of her composure but at these words she felt that staggering sense of utter insecurity which is given one by the first tremor of an earthquake. It was followed by an expectant stillness of sensations. She remained silent. He thought she did not believe him.

“Come! What on earth do you think brought me here — to — to — talk like this to you? There was Hassim — Rajah Tulla, I should say — who was asking me this afternoon: ‘What will you do now with these, your people?’ I believe he thinks yet I fetched you here for some reason. You can’t tell what crooked notion they will get into their thick heads. It’s enough to make one swear.” He swore. “My people! Are you? How much? Say — how much? You’re no more mine than I am yours. Would any of you fine folks at home face black ruin to save a fishing smack’s crew from getting drowned?”

Notwithstanding that sense of insecurity which lingered faintly in her mind she had no image of death before her. She felt intensely alive. She felt alive in a flush of strength, with an impression of novelty as though life had been the gift of this very moment. The danger hidden in the night gave no sign to awaken her terror, but the workings of a human soul, simple and violent, were laid bare before her and had the disturbing charm of an unheard-of experience. She was listening to a man who concealed nothing. She said, interrogatively:

“And yet you have come?”

“Yes,” he answered, “to you — and for you only.”

The flood tide running strong over the banks made a placid trickling sound about the yacht’s rudder.

“I would not be saved alone.”

“Then you must bring them over yourself,” he said in a sombre tone. “There’s the brig. You have me — my men — my guns. You know what to do.

“I will try,” she said.

“Very well. I am sorry for the poor devils forward there if you fail. But of course you won’t. Watch that light on the brig. I had it hoisted on purpose. The trouble may be nearer than we think. Two of my boats are gone scouting and if the news they bring me is bad the light will be lowered. Think what that means. And I’ve told you what I have told nobody. Think of my feelings also. I told you because I — because I had to.”

He gave a shove against the yacht’s side and glided away from under her eyes. A rippling sound died out.

She walked away from the rail. The lamp and the skylights shone faintly along the dark stretch of the decks. This evening was like the last — like all the evenings before.

“Is all this I have heard possible?” she asked herself. “No — but it is true.”

She sat down in a deck chair to think and found she could only remember. She jumped up. She was sure somebody was hailing the yacht faintly. Was that man hailing? She listened, and hearing nothing was annoyed with herself for being haunted by a voice.

“He said he could trust me. Now, what is this danger? What is danger?” she meditated.

Footsteps were coming from forward. The figure of the watchman flitted vaguely over the gangway. He was whistling softly and vanished. Hollow sounds in the boat were succeeded by a splash of oars. The night swallowed these slight noises. Mrs. Travers sat down again and found herself much calmer.

She had the faculty of being able to think her own thoughts — and the courage. She could take no action of any kind till her husband’s return. Lingard’s warnings were not what had impressed her most. This man had presented his innermost self unclothed by any subterfuge. There were in plain sight his desires, his perplexities, affections, doubts, his violence, his folly; and the existence they made up was lawless but not vile. She had too much elevation of mind to look upon him from any other but a strictly human standpoint. If he trusted her (how strange; why should he? Was he wrong?) she accepted the trust with scrupulous fairness. And when it dawned upon her that of all the men in the world this unquestionably was the one she knew best, she had a moment of wonder followed by an impression of profound sadness. It seemed an unfortunate matter that concerned her alone.

Her thought was suspended while she listened attentively for the return of the yacht’s boat. She was dismayed at the task before her. Not a sound broke the stillness and she felt as if she were lost in empty space. Then suddenly someone amidships yawned immensely and said: “Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” A voice asked: “Ain’t they back yet?” A negative grunt answered.

Mrs. Travers found that Lingard was touching, because he could be understood. How simple was life, she reflected. She was frank with herself. She considered him apart from social organization. She discovered he had no place in it. How delightful! Here was a human being and the naked truth of things was not so very far from her notwithstanding the growth of centuries. Then it occurred to her that this man by his action stripped her at once of her position, of her wealth, of her rank, of her past. “I

am helpless. What remains?" she asked herself. Nothing! Anybody there might have suggested: "Your presence." She was too artificial yet to think of her beauty; and yet the power of personality is part of the naked truth of things.

She looked over her shoulder, and saw the light at the brig's foreyard-arm burning with a strong, calm flame in the dust of starlight suspended above the coast. She heard the heavy bump as of a boat run headlong against the ladder. They were back! She rose in sudden and extreme agitation. What should she say? How much? How to begin? Why say anything? It would be absurd, like talking seriously about a dream. She would not dare! In a moment she was driven into a state of mind bordering on distraction. She heard somebody run up the gangway steps. With the idea of gaining time she walked rapidly aft to the taffrail. The light of the brig faced her without a flicker, enormous amongst the suns scattered in the immensity of the night.

She fixed her eyes on it. She thought: "I shan't tell him anything. Impossible. No! I shall tell everything." She expected every moment to hear her husband's voice and the suspense was intolerable because she felt that then she must decide. Somebody on deck was babbling excitedly. She devoutly hoped d'Alcacer would speak first and thus put off the fatal moment. A voice said roughly: "What's that?" And in the midst of her distress she recognized Carter's voice, having noticed that young man who was of a different stamp from the rest of the crew. She came to the conclusion that the matter could be related jocularly, or — why not pretend fear? At that moment the brig's yard-arm light she was looking at trembled distinctly, and she was dumfounded as if she had seen a commotion in the firmament. With her lips open for a cry she saw it fall straight down several feet, flicker, and go out. All perplexity passed from her mind. This first fact of the danger gave her a thrill of quite a new emotion. Something had to be done at once. For some remote reason she felt ashamed of her hesitations.

She moved swiftly forward and under the lamp came face to face with Carter who was coming aft. Both stopped, staring, the light fell on their faces, and both were struck by each other's expression. The four eyes shone wide.

"You have seen?" she asked, beginning to tremble.

"How do you know?" he said, at the same time, evidently surprised.

Suddenly she saw that everybody was on deck.

"The light is down," she stammered.

"The gentlemen are lost," said Carter. Then he perceived she did not seem to understand. "Kidnapped off the sandbank," he continued, looking at her fixedly to see how she would take it. She seemed calm. "Kidnapped like a pair of lambs! Not a squeak," he burst out with indignation. "But the sandbank is long and they might have been at the other end. You were on deck, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes," she murmured. "In the chair here."

"We were all down below. I had to rest a little. When I came up the watchman was asleep. He swears he wasn't, but I know better. Nobody heard any noise, unless you did. But perhaps you were asleep?" he asked, deferentially.

"Yes — no — I must have been," she said, faintly.

Chapter 8

Lingard's soul was exalted by his talk with Mrs. Travers, by the strain of incertitude and by extreme fatigue. On returning on board he asked after Hassim and was told that the Rajah and his sister had gone off in their canoe promising to return before midnight. The boats sent to scout between the islets north and south of the anchorage had not come back yet. He went into his cabin and throwing himself on the couch closed his eyes thinking: "I must sleep or I shall go mad."

At times he felt an unshaken confidence in Mrs. Travers — then he remembered her face. Next moment the face would fade, he would make an effort to hold on to the image, fail — and then become convinced without the shadow of a doubt that he was utterly lost, unless he let all these people be wiped off the face of the earth.

"They all heard that man order me out of his ship," he thought, and thereupon for a second or so he contemplated without flinching the lurid image of a massacre. "And yet I had to tell her that not a hair of her head shall be touched. Not a hair."

And irrationally at the recollection of these words there seemed to be no trouble of any kind left in the world. Now and then, however, there were black instants when from sheer weariness he thought of nothing at all; and during one of these he fell asleep, losing the consciousness of external things as suddenly as if he had been felled by a blow on the head.

When he sat up, almost before he was properly awake, his first alarmed conviction was that he had slept the night through. There was a light in the cuddy and through the open door of his cabin he saw distinctly Mrs. Travers pass out of view across the lighted space.

"They did come on board after all," he thought — "how is it I haven't been called!"

He darted into the cuddy. Nobody! Looking up at the clock in the skylight he was vexed to see it had stopped till his ear caught the faint beat of the mechanism. It was going then! He could not have been asleep more than ten minutes. He had not been on board more than twenty!

So it was only a deception; he had seen no one. And yet he remembered the turn of the head, the line of the neck, the colour of the hair, the movement of the passing figure. He returned spiritlessly to his state-room muttering, "No more sleep for me to-night," and came out directly, holding a few sheets of paper covered with a high, angular handwriting.

This was Jorgenson's letter written three days before and entrusted to Hassim. Lingard had read it already twice, but he turned up the lamp a little higher and sat down to read it again. On the red shield above his head the gilt sheaf of thunderbolts darting between the initials of his name seemed to be aimed straight at the nape of his neck as he sat with bared elbows spread on the table, poring over the crumpled sheets. The letter began:

Hassim and Immada are going out to-night to look for you. You are behind your time and every passing day makes things worse.

Ten days ago three of Belarab's men, who had been collecting turtles' eggs on the islets, came flying back with a story of a ship stranded on the outer mudflats. Belarab at once forbade any boat from leaving the lagoon. So far good. There was a great excitement in the village. I judge it must be a schooner — probably some fool of a trader. However, you will know all about her when you read this. You may say I might have pulled out to sea to have a look for myself. But besides Belarab's orders to the contrary, which I would attend to for the sake of example, all you are worth in this world, Tom, is here in the Emma, under my feet, and I would not leave my charge even for half a day. Hassim attended the council held every evening in the shed outside Belarab's stockade. That holy man Ningrat was for looting that vessel. Hassim reproved him saying that the vessel probably was sent by you because no white men were known to come inside the shoals. Belarab backed up Hassim. Ningrat was very angry and reproached Belarab for keeping him, Ningrat, short of opium to smoke. He began by calling him "O! son," and ended by shouting, "O! you worse than an unbeliever!" There was a hullabaloo. The followers of Tengga were ready to interfere and you know how it is between Tengga and Belarab. Tengga always wanted to oust Belarab, and his chances were getting pretty good before you turned up and armed Belarab's bodyguard with muskets. However, Hassim stopped that row, and no one was hurt that time. Next day, which was Friday, Ningrat after reading the prayers in the mosque talked to the people outside. He bleated and capered like an old goat, prophesying misfortune, ruin, and extermination if these whites were allowed to get away. He is mad but then they think him a saint, and he had been fighting the Dutch for years in his young days. Six of Belarab's guard marched down the village street carrying muskets at full cock and the crowd cleared out. Ningrat was spirited away by Tengga's men into their master's stockade. If it was not for the fear of you turning up any moment there would have been a party-fight that evening. I think it is a pity Tengga is not chief of the land instead of Belarab. A brave and foresighted man, however treacherous at heart, can always be trusted to a certain extent. One can never get anything clear from Belarab. Peace! Peace! You know his fad. And this fad makes him act silly. The peace racket will get him into a row. It may cost him his life in the end. However, Tengga does not feel himself strong enough yet to act with his own followers only and Belarab has, on my advice, disarmed all villagers. His men went into the houses and took away by force all the firearms and as many spears as they could lay hands on. The women screamed abuse of course, but there was no resistance. A few men were seen clearing out into the forest with their arms. Note this, for it means there is another power beside Belarab's in the village: the growing power of Tengga.

One morning — four days ago — I went to see Tengga. I found him by the shore trimming a plank with a small hatchet while a slave held an umbrella over his head. He is amusing himself in building a boat just now. He threw his hatchet down to meet me and led me by the hand to a shady spot. He told me frankly he had sent out two good swimmers to observe the stranded vessel. These men stole down the creek in a canoe and when on the sea coast swam from sandbank to sandbank until they approached

unobserved — I think — to about fifty yards from that schooner. What can that craft be? I can't make it out. The men reported there were three chiefs on board. One with a glittering eye, one a lean man in white, and another without any hair on the face and dressed in a different style. Could it be a woman? I don't know what to think. I wish you were here. After a lot of chatter Tengga said: "Six years ago I was ruler of a country and the Dutch drove me out. The country was small but nothing is too small for them to take. They pretended to give it back to my nephew — may he burn! I ran away or they would have killed me. I am nothing here — but I remember. These white people out there can not run away and they are very few. There is perhaps a little to loot. I would give it to my men who followed me in my calamity because I am their chief and my father was the chief of their fathers." I pointed out the imprudence of this. He said: "The dead do not show the way." To this I remarked that the ignorant do not give information. Tengga kept quiet for a while, then said: "We must not touch them because their skin is like yours and to kill them would be wrong, but at the bidding of you whites we may go and fight with people of our own skin and our own faith — and that is good. I have promised to Tuan Lingard twenty men and a prau to make war in Wajo. The men are good and look at the prau; it is swift and strong." I must say, Tom, the prau is the best craft of the kind I have ever seen. I said you paid him well for the help. "And I also would pay," says he, "if you let me have a few guns and a little powder for my men. You and I shall share the loot of that ship outside, and Tuan Lingard will not know. It is only a little game. You have plenty of guns and powder under your care." He meant in the Emma. On that I spoke out pretty straight and we got rather warm until at last he gave me to understand that as he had about forty followers of his own and I had only nine of Hassim's chaps to defend the Emma with, he could very well go for me and get the lot. "And then," says he, "I would be so strong that everybody would be on my side." I discovered in the course of further talk that there is a notion amongst many people that you have come to grief in some way and won't show up here any more. After this I saw the position was serious and I was in a hurry to get back to the Emma, but pretending I did not care I smiled and thanked Tengga for giving me warning of his intentions about me and the Emma. At this he nearly choked himself with his betel quid and fixing me with his little eyes, muttered: "Even a lizard will give a fly the time to say its prayers." I turned my back on him and was very thankful to get beyond the throw of a spear. I haven't been out of the Emma since.

Chapter 9

The letter went on to enlarge on the intrigues of Tengga, the wavering conduct of Belarab, and the state of the public mind. It noted every gust of opinion and every event, with an earnestness of belief in their importance befitting the chronicle of a crisis in the history of an empire. The shade of Jorgenson had, indeed, stepped back

into the life of men. The old adventurer looked on with a perfect understanding of the value of trifles, using his eyes for that other man whose conscience would have the task to unravel the tangle. Lingard lived through those days in the Settlement and was thankful to Jorgenson; only as he lived not from day to day but from sentence to sentence of the writing, there was an effect of bewildering rapidity in the succession of events that made him grunt with surprise sometimes or growl — "What?" to himself angrily and turn back several lines or a whole page more than once. Toward the end he had a heavy frown of perplexity and fidgeted as he read:

— and I began to think I could keep things quiet till you came or those wretched white people got their schooner off, when Sherif Daman arrived from the north on the very day he was expected, with two Illanun praus. He looks like an Arab. It was very evident to me he can wind the two Illanun pangerans round his little finger. The two praus are large and armed. They came up the creek, flags and streamers flying, beating drums and gongs, and entered the lagoon with their decks full of armed men brandishing two-handed swords and sounding the war cry. It is a fine force for you, only Belarab who is a perverse devil would not receive Sherif Daman at once. So Daman went to see Tengga who detained him a very long time. Leaving Tengga he came on board the Emma, and I could see directly there was something up.

He began by asking me for the ammunition and weapons they are to get from you, saying he was anxious to sail at once toward Wajo, since it was agreed he was to precede you by a few days. I replied that that was true enough but that I could not think of giving him the powder and muskets till you came. He began to talk about you and hinted that perhaps you will never come. "And no matter," says he, "here is Rajah Hassim and the Lady Immada and we would fight for them if no white man was left in the world. Only we must have something to fight with." He pretended then to forget me altogether and talked with Hassim while I sat listening. He began to boast how well he got along the Bruni coast. No Illanun prau had passed down that coast for years.

Immada wanted me to give the arms he was asking for. The girl is beside herself with fear of something happening that would put a stopper on the Wajo expedition. She has set her mind on getting her country back. Hassim is very reserved but he is very anxious, too. Daman got nothing from me, and that very evening the praus were ordered by Belarab to leave the lagoon. He does not trust the Illanuns — and small blame to him. Sherif Daman went like a lamb. He has no powder for his guns. As the praus passed by the Emma he shouted to me he was going to wait for you outside the creek. Tengga has given him a man who would show him the place. All this looks very queer to me.

Look out outside then. The praus are dodging amongst the islets. Daman visits Tengga. Tengga called on me as a good friend to try and persuade me to give Daman the arms and gunpowder he is so anxious to get. Somehow or other they tried to get around Belarab, who came to see me last night and hinted I had better do so. He is anxious for these Illanuns to leave the neighbourhood. He thinks that if they loot the

schooner they will be off at once. That's all he wants now. Immada has been to see Belarab's women and stopped two nights in the stockade. Belarab's youngest wife — he got married six weeks ago — is on the side of Tengga's party because she thinks Belarab would get a share of the loot and she got into her silly head there are jewels and silks in that schooner. What between Tengga worrying him outside and the women worrying him at home, Belarab had such a lively time of it that he concluded he would go to pray at his father's tomb. So for the last two days he has been away camping in that unhealthy place. When he comes back he will be down with fever as sure as fate and then he will be no good for anything. Tengga lights up smoky fires often. Some signal to Daman. I go ashore with Hassim's men and put them out. This is risking a fight every time — for Tengga's men look very black at us. I don't know what the next move may be. Hassim's as true as steel. Immada is very unhappy. They will tell you many details I have no time to write.

The last page fluttered on the table out of Lingard's fingers. He sat very still for a moment looking straight before him, then went on deck.

"Our boats back yet?" he asked Shaw, whom he saw prowling on the quarter-deck.

"No, sir, I wish they were. I am waiting for them to go and turn in," answered the mate in an aggrieved manner.

"Lower that lantern forward there," cried Lingard, suddenly, in Malay.

"This trade isn't fit for a decent man," muttered Shaw to himself, and he moved away to lean on the rail, looking moodily to seaward. After a while: "There seems to be commotion on board that yacht," he said. "I see a lot of lights moving about her decks. Anything wrong, do you think, sir?"

"No, I know what it is," said Lingard in a tone of elation. She has done it! he thought.

He returned to the cabin, put away Jorgenson's letter and pulled out the drawer of the table. It was full of cartridges. He took a musket down, loaded it, then took another and another. He hammered at the waddings with fierce joyousness. The ramrods rang and jumped. It seemed to him he was doing his share of some work in which that woman was playing her part faithfully. "She has done it," he repeated, mentally. "She will sit in the cuddy. She will sleep in my berth. Well, I'm not ashamed of the brig. By heavens — no! I shall keep away: never come near them as I've promised. Now there's nothing more to say. I've told her everything at once. There's nothing more."

He felt a heaviness in his burning breast, in all his limbs as if the blood in his veins had become molten lead.

"I shall get the yacht off. Three, four days — no, a week."

He found he couldn't do it under a week. It occurred to him he would see her every day till the yacht was afloat. No, he wouldn't intrude, but he was master and owner of the brig after all. He didn't mean to skulk like a whipped cur about his own decks.

"It'll be ten days before the schooner is ready. I'll take every scrap of ballast out of her. I'll strip her — I'll take her lower masts out of her, by heavens! I'll make sure. Then another week to fit out — and — goodbye. Wish I had never seen them. Good-bye — forever. Home's the place for them. Not for me. On another coast she would not have

listened. Ah, but she is a woman — every inch of her. I shall shake hands. Yes. I shall take her hand — just before she goes. Why the devil not? I am master here after all — in this brig — as good as any one — by heavens, better than any one — better than any one on earth.”

He heard Shaw walk smartly forward above his head hailing:

“What’s that — a boat?”

A voice answered indistinctly.

“One of my boats is back,” thought Lingard. “News about Daman perhaps. I don’t care if he kicks. I wish he would. I would soon show her I can fight as well as I can handle the brig. Two praus. Only two praus. I wouldn’t mind if there were twenty. I would sweep ‘em off the sea — I would blow ‘em out of the water — I would make the brig walk over them. ‘Now,’ I’d say to her, ‘you who are not afraid, look how it’s done!’”

He felt light. He had the sensation of being whirled high in the midst of an uproar and as powerless as a feather in a hurricane. He shuddered profoundly. His arms hung down, and he stood before the table staring like a man overcome by some fatal intelligence.

Shaw, going into the waist to receive what he thought was one of the brig’s boats, came against Carter making his way aft hurriedly.

“Hullo! Is it you again?” he said, swiftly, barring the way.

“I come from the yacht,” began Carter with some impatience.

“Where else could you come from?” said Shaw. “And what might you want now?”

“I want to see your skipper.”

“Well, you can’t,” declared Shaw, viciously. “He’s turned in for the night.”

“He expects me,” said Carter, stamping his foot. “I’ve got to tell him what happened.”

“Don’t you fret yourself, young man,” said Shaw in a superior manner; “he knows all about it.”

They stood suddenly silent in the dark. Carter seemed at a loss what to do. Shaw, though surprised by it, enjoyed the effect he had produced.

“Damn me, if I did not think so,” murmured Carter to himself; then drawling coolly asked — “And perhaps you know, too?”

“What do you think? Think I am a dummy here? I ain’t mate of this brig for nothing.”

“No, you are not,” said Carter with a certain bitterness of tone. “People do all kinds of queer things for a living, and I am not particular myself, but I would think twice before taking your billet.”

“What? What do you in-si-nu-ate. My billet? You ain’t fit for it, you yacht-swabbing brass-buttoned imposter.”

“What’s this? Any of our boats back?” asked Lingard from the poop. “Let the seacannie in charge come to me at once.”

“There’s only a message from the yacht,” began Shaw, deliberately.

“Yacht! Get the deck lamps along here in the waist! See the ladder lowered. Bear a hand, serang! Mr. Shaw! Burn the flare up aft. Two of them! Give light to the yacht’s boats that will be coming alongside. Steward! Where’s that steward? Turn him out then.”

Bare feet began to patter all round Carter. Shadows glided swiftly.

“Are these flares coming? Where’s the quartermaster on duty?” shouted Lingard in English and Malay. “This way, come here! Put it on a rocket stick — can’t you? Hold over the side — thus! Stand by with the lines for the boats forward there. Mr. Shaw — we want more light!”

“Aye, aye, sir,” called out Shaw, but he did not move, as if dazed by the vehemence of his commander.

“That’s what we want,” muttered Carter under his breath. “Imposter! What do you call yourself?” he said half aloud to Shaw.

The ruddy glare of the flares disclosed Lingard from head to foot, standing at the break of the poop. His head was bare, his face, crudely lighted, had a fierce and changing expression in the sway of flames.

“What can be his game?” thought Carter, impressed by the powerful and wild aspect of that figure. “He’s changed somehow since I saw him first,” he reflected. It struck him the change was serious, not exactly for the worse, perhaps — and yet. . . . Lingard smiled at him from the poop.

Carter went up the steps and without pausing informed him of what had happened.

“Mrs. Travers told me to go to you at once. She’s very upset as you may guess,” he drawled, looking Lingard hard in the face. Lingard knitted his eyebrows. “The hands, too, are scared,” Carter went on. “They fancy the savages, or whatever they may be who stole the owner, are going to board the yacht every minute. I don’t think so myself but — ”

“Quite right — most unlikely,” muttered Lingard.

“Aye, I daresay you know all about it,” continued Carter, coolly, “the men are startled and no mistake, but I can’t blame them very much. There isn’t enough even of carving knives aboard to go round. One old signal gun! A poor show for better men than they.”

“There’s no mistake I suppose about this affair?” asked Lingard.

“Well, unless the gentlemen are having a lark with us at hide and seek. The man says he waited ten minutes at the point, then pulled slowly along the bank looking out, expecting to see them walking back. He made the trunk of a tree apparently stranded on the sand and as he was sculling past he says a man jumped up from behind that log, flung a stick at him and went off running. He backed water at once and began to shout, ‘Are you there, sir?’ No one answered. He could hear the bushes rustle and some strange noises like whisperings. It was very dark. After calling out several times, and waiting on his oars, he got frightened and pulled back to the yacht. That is clear enough. The only doubt in my mind is if they are alive or not. I didn’t let on to Mrs. Travers. That’s a kind of thing you keep to yourself, of course.”

"I don't think they are dead," said Lingard, slowly, and as if thinking of something else.

"Oh! If you say so it's all right," said Carter with deliberation.

"What?" asked Lingard, absently; "fling a stick, did they? Fling a spear!"

"That's it!" assented Carter, "but I didn't say anything. I only wondered if the same kind of stick hadn't been flung at the owner, that's all. But I suppose you know your business best, Captain."

Lingard, grasping his whole beard, reflected profoundly, erect and with bowed head in the glare of the flares.

"I suppose you think it's my doing?" he asked, sharply, without looking up.

Carter surveyed him with a candidly curious gaze. "Well, Captain, Mrs. Travers did let on a bit to me about our chief-officer's boat. You've stopped it, haven't you? How she got to know God only knows. She was sorry she spoke, too, but it wasn't so much of news to me as she thought. I can put two and two together, sometimes. Those rockets, last night, eh? I wished I had bitten my tongue out before I told you about our first gig. But I was taken unawares. Wasn't I? I put it to you: wasn't I? And so I told her when she asked me what passed between you and me on board this brig, not twenty-four hours ago. Things look different now, all of a sudden. Enough to scare a woman, but she is the best man of them all on board. The others are fairly off the chump because it's a bit dark and something has happened they ain't used to. But she has something on her mind. I can't make her out!" He paused, wriggled his shoulders slightly — "No more than I can make you out," he added.

"That's your trouble, is it?" said Lingard, slowly.

"Aye, Captain. Is it all clear to you? Stopping boats, kidnapping gentlemen. That's fun in a way, only — I am a youngster to you — but is it all clear to you? Old Robinson wasn't particular, you know, and he — "

"Clearer than daylight," cried Lingard, hotly. "I can't give up — "

He checked himself. Carter waited. The flare bearers stood rigid, turning their faces away from the flame, and in the play of gleams at its foot the mast near by, like a lofty column, ascended in the great darkness. A lot of ropes ran up slanting into a dark void and were lost to sight, but high aloft a brace block gleamed white, the end of a yard-arm could be seen suspended in the air and as if glowing with its own light. The sky had clouded over the brig without a breath of wind.

"Give up," repeated Carter with an uneasy shuffle of feet.

"Nobody," finished Lingard. "I can't. It's as clear as daylight. I can't! No! Nothing!"

He stared straight out afar, and after looking at him Carter felt moved by a bit of youthful intuition to murmur, "That's bad," in a tone that almost in spite of himself hinted at the dawning of a befogged compassion.

He had a sense of confusion within him, the sense of mystery without. He had never experienced anything like it all the time when serving with old Robinson in the Ly-e-moon. And yet he had seen and taken part in some queer doings that were not clear to him at the time. They were secret but they suggested something comprehensible.

This affair did not. It had somehow a subtlety that affected him. He was uneasy as if there had been a breath of magic on events and men giving to this complication of a yachting voyage a significance impossible to perceive, but felt in the words, in the gestures, in the events, which made them all strangely, obscurely startling.

He was not one who could keep track of his sensations, and besides he had not the leisure. He had to answer Lingard's questions about the people of the yacht. No, he couldn't say Mrs. Travers was what you may call frightened. She seemed to have something in her mind. Oh, yes! The chaps were in a funk. Would they fight? Anybody would fight when driven to it, funk or no funk. That was his experience. Naturally one liked to have something better than a handspike to do it with. Still — In the pause Carter seemed to weigh with composure the chances of men with handspikes.

"What do you want to fight us for?" he asked, suddenly.

Lingard started.

"I don't," he said; "I wouldn't be asking you."

"There's no saying what you would do, Captain," replied Carter; "it isn't twenty-four hours since you wanted to shoot me."

"I only said I would, rather than let you go raising trouble for me," explained Lingard.

"One night isn't like another," mumbled Carter, "but how am I to know? It seems to me you are making trouble for yourself as fast as you can."

"Well, supposing I am," said Lingard with sudden gloominess. "Would your men fight if I armed them properly?"

"What — for you or for themselves?" asked Carter.

"For the woman," burst out Lingard. "You forget there's a woman on board. I don't care that for their carcasses."

Carter pondered conscientiously.

"Not to-night," he said at last. "There's one or two good men amongst them, but the rest are struck all of a heap. Not to-night. Give them time to get steady a bit if you want them to fight."

He gave facts and opinions with a mixture of loyalty and mistrust. His own state puzzled him exceedingly. He couldn't make out anything, he did not know what to believe and yet he had an impulsive desire, an inspired desire to help the man. At times it appeared a necessity — at others policy; between whiles a great folly, which perhaps did not matter because he suspected himself of being helpless anyway. Then he had moments of anger. In those moments he would feel in his pocket the butt of a loaded pistol. He had provided himself with the weapon, when directed by Mrs. Travers to go on board the brig.

"If he wants to interfere with me, I'll let drive at him and take my chance of getting away," he had explained hurriedly.

He remembered how startled Mrs. Travers looked. Of course, a woman like that — not used to hear such talk. Therefore it was no use listening to her, except for good manners' sake. Once bit twice shy. He had no mind to be kidnapped, not he, nor bullied either.

"I can't let him nab me, too. You will want me now, Mrs. Travers," he had said; "and I promise you not to fire off the old thing unless he jolly well forces me to."

He was youthfully wise in his resolution not to give way to her entreaties, though her extraordinary agitation did stagger him for a moment. When the boat was already on its way to the brig, he remembered her calling out after him:

"You must not! You don't understand."

Her voice coming faintly in the darkness moved him, it resembled so much a cry of distress.

"Give way, boys, give way," he urged his men.

He was wise, resolute, and he was also youthful enough to almost wish it should "come to it." And with foresight he even instructed the boat's crew to keep the gig just abaft the main rigging of the brig.

"When you see me drop into her all of a sudden, shove off and pull for dear life."

Somehow just then he was not so anxious for a shot, but he held on with a determined mental grasp to his fine resolution, lest it should slip away from him and perish in a sea of doubts.

"Hadn't I better get back to the yacht?" he asked, gently.

Getting no answer he went on with deliberation:

"Mrs. Travers ordered me to say that no matter how this came about she is ready to trust you. She is waiting for some kind of answer, I suppose."

"Ready to trust me," repeated Lingard. His eyes lit up fiercely.

Every sway of flares tossed slightly to and fro the massy shadows of the main deck, where here and there the figure of a man could be seen standing very still with a dusky face and glittering eyeballs.

Carter stole his hand warily into his breast pocket:

"Well, Captain," he said. He was not going to be bullied, let the owner's wife trust whom she liked.

"Have you got anything in writing for me there?" asked Lingard, advancing a pace, exultingly.

Carter, alert, stepped back to keep his distance. Shaw stared from the side; his rubicund cheeks quivered, his round eyes seemed starting out of his head, and his mouth was open as though he had been ready to choke with pent-up curiosity, amazement, and indignation.

"No! Not in writing," said Carter, steadily and low.

Lingard had the air of being awakened by a shout. A heavy and darkening frown seemed to fall out of the night upon his forehead and swiftly passed into the night again, and when it departed it left him so calm, his glance so lucid, his mien so composed that it was difficult to believe the man's heart had undergone within the last second the trial of humiliation and of danger. He smiled sadly:

"Well, young man," he asked with a kind of good-humoured resignation, "what is it you have there? A knife or a pistol?"

"A pistol," said Carter. "Are you surprised, Captain?" He spoke with heat because a sense of regret was stealing slowly within him, as stealthily, as irresistibly as the flowing tide. "Who began these tricks?" He withdrew his hand, empty, and raised his voice. "You are up to something I can't make out. You — you are not straight."

The flares held on high streamed right up without swaying, and in that instant of profound calm the shadows on the brig's deck became as still as the men.

"You think not?" said Lingard, thoughtfully.

Carter nodded. He resented the turn of the incident and the growing impulse to surrender to that man.

"Mrs. Travers trusts me though," went on Lingard with gentle triumph as if advancing an unanswerable argument.

"So she says," grunted Carter; "I warned her. She's a baby. They're all as innocent as babies there. And you know it. And I know it. I've heard of your kind. You would dump the lot of us overboard if it served your turn. That's what I think."

"And that's all."

Carter nodded slightly and looked away. There was a silence. Lingard's eyes travelled over the brig. The lighted part of the vessel appeared in bright and wavering detail walled and canopied by the night. He felt a light breath on his face. The air was stirring, but the Shallows, silent and lost in the darkness, gave no sound of life.

This stillness oppressed Lingard. The world of his endeavours and his hopes seemed dead, seemed gone. His desire existed homeless in the obscurity that had devoured his corner of the sea, this stretch of the coast, his certitude of success. And here in the midst of what was the domain of his adventurous soul there was a lost youngster ready to shoot him on suspicion of some extravagant treachery. Came ready to shoot! That's good, too! He was too weary to laugh — and perhaps too sad. Also the danger of the pistol-shot, which he believed real — the young are rash — irritated him. The night and the spot were full of contradictions. It was impossible to say who in this shadowy warfare was to be an enemy, and who were the allies. So close were the contacts issuing from this complication of a yachting voyage, that he seemed to have them all within his breast.

"Shoot me! He is quite up to that trick — damn him. Yet I would trust him sooner than any man in that yacht."

Such were his thoughts while he looked at Carter, who was biting his lips, in the vexation of the long silence. When they spoke again to each other they talked soberly, with a sense of relief, as if they had come into cool air from an overheated room and when Carter, dismissed, went into his boat, he had practically agreed to the line of action traced by Lingard for the crew of the yacht. He had agreed as if in implicit confidence. It was one of the absurdities of the situation which had to be accepted and could never be understood.

"Do I talk straight now?" had asked Lingard.

"It seems straight enough," assented Carter with an air of reserve; "I will work with you so far anyhow."

"Mrs. Travers trusts me," remarked Lingard again.

"By the Lord Harry!" cried Carter, giving way suddenly to some latent conviction. "I was warning her against you. Say, Captain, you are a devil of a man. How did you manage it?"

"I trusted her," said Lingard.

"Did you?" cried the amazed Carter. "When? How? Where — "

"You know too much already," retorted Lingard, quietly. "Waste no time. I will be after you."

Carter whistled low.

"There's a pair of you I can't make out," he called back, hurrying over the side.

Shaw took this opportunity to approach. Beginning with hesitation: "A word with you, sir," the mate went on to say he was a respectable man. He delivered himself in a ringing, unsteady voice. He was married, he had children, he abhorred illegality. The light played about his obese figure, he had flung his mushroom hat on the deck, he was not afraid to speak the truth. The grey moustache stood out aggressively, his glances were uneasy; he pressed his hands to his stomach convulsively, opened his thick, short arms wide, wished it to be understood he had been chief-officer of home ships, with a spotless character and he hoped "quite up to his work." He was a peaceable man, none more; disposed to stretch a point when it "came to a difference with niggers of some kind — they had to be taught manners and reason" and he was not averse at a pinch to — but here were white people — gentlemen, ladies, not to speak of the crew. He had never spoken to a superior like this before, and this was prudence, his conviction, a point of view, a point of principle, a conscious superiority and a burst of resentment hoarded through years against all the successive and unsatisfactory captains of his existence. There never had been such an opportunity to show he could not be put upon. He had one of them on a string and he was going to lead him a dance. There was courage, too, in it, since he believed himself fallen unawares into the clutches of a particularly desperate man and beyond the reach of law.

A certain small amount of calculation entered the audacity of his remonstrance. Perhaps — it flashed upon him — the yacht's gentry will hear I stood up for them. This could conceivably be of advantage to a man who wanted a lift in the world. "Owner of a yacht — badly scared — a gentleman — money nothing to him." Thereupon Shaw declared with heat that he couldn't be an accessory either after or before the fact. Those that never went home — who had nothing to go to perhaps — he interjected, hurriedly, could do as they liked. He couldn't. He had a wife, a family, a little house — paid for — with difficulty. He followed the sea respectably out and home, all regular, not vagabonding here and there, chumming with the first nigger that came along and laying traps for his betters.

One of the two flare bearers sighed at his elbow, and shifted his weight to the other foot.

These two had been keeping so perfectly still that the movement was as startling as if a statue had changed its pose. After looking at the offender with cold malevolence,

Shaw went on to speak of law-courts, of trials, and of the liberty of the subject; then he pointed out the certitude and the inconvenience of being found out, affecting for the moment the dispassionateness of wisdom.

“There will be fifteen years in gaol at the end of this job for everybody,” said Shaw, “and I have a boy that don’t know his father yet. Fine things for him to learn when he grows up. The innocent are dead certain here to catch it along with you. The missus will break her heart unless she starves first. Home sold up.”

He saw a mysterious iniquity in a dangerous relation to himself and began to lose his head. What he really wanted was to have his existence left intact, for his own cherishing and pride. It was a moral aspiration, but in his alarm the native grossness of his nature came clattering out like a devil out of a trap. He would blow the gaff, split, give away the whole show, he would back up honest people, kiss the book, say what he thought, let all the world know . . . and when he paused to draw breath, all around him was silent and still. Before the impetus of that respectable passion his words were scattered like chaff driven by a gale and rushed headlong into the night of the Shallows. And in the great obscurity, imperturbable, it heard him say he “washed his hands of everything.”

“And the brig?” asked Lingard, suddenly.

Shaw was checked. For a second the seaman in him instinctively admitted the claim of the ship.

“The brig. The brig. She’s right enough,” he mumbled. He had nothing to say against the brig — not he. She wasn’t like the big ships he was used to, but of her kind the best craft he ever. . . . And with a brusque return upon himself, he protested that he had been decoyed on board under false pretences. It was as bad as being shanghai’d when in liquor. It was — upon his soul. And into a craft next thing to a pirate! That was the name for it or his own name was not Shaw. He said this glaring owlishly. Lingard, perfectly still and mute, bore the blows without a sign.

The silly fuss of that man seared his very soul. There was no end to this plague of fools coming to him from the forgotten ends of the earth. A fellow like that could not be told. No one could be told. Blind they came and blind they would go out. He admitted reluctantly, but without doubt, that as if pushed by a force from outside he would have to try and save two of them. To this end he foresaw the probable need of leaving his brig for a time. He would have to leave her with that man. The mate. He had engaged him himself — to make his insurance valid — to be able sometimes to speak — to have near him. Who would have believed such a fool-man could exist on the face of the sea! Who? Leave the brig with him. The brig!

Ever since sunset, the breeze kept off by the heat of the day had been trying to re-establish in the darkness its sway over the Shoals. Its approaches had been heard in the night, its patient murmurs, its foiled sighs; but now a surprisingly heavy puff came in a free rush as if, far away there to the northward, the last defence of the calm had been victoriously carried. The flames borne down streamed bluishly, horizontal and noisy at the end of tall sticks, like fluttering pennants; and behold, the shadows on the

deck went mad and jostled each other as if trying to escape from a doomed craft, the darkness, held up dome-like by the brilliant glare, seemed to tumble headlong upon the brig in an overwhelming downfall, the men stood swaying as if ready to fall under the ruins of a black and noiseless disaster. The blurred outlines of the brig, the masts, the rigging, seemed to shudder in the terror of coming extinction — and then the darkness leaped upward again, the shadows returned to their places, the men were seen distinct, swarthy, with calm faces, with glittering eyeballs. The destruction in the breath had passed, was gone.

A discord of three voices raised together in a drawling wail trailed on the sudden immobility of the air.

“Brig ahoy! Give us a rope!”

The first boat-load from the yacht emerged floating slowly into the pool of purple light wavering round the brig on the black water. Two men squeezed in the bows pulled uncomfortably; in the middle, on a heap of seamen’s canvas bags, another sat, insecure, propped with both arms, stiff-legged, angularly helpless. The light from the poop brought everything out in lurid detail, and the boat floating slowly toward the brig had a suspicious and pitiful aspect. The shabby load lumbering her looked somehow as if it had been stolen by those men who resembled castaways. In the sternsheets Carter, standing up, steered with his leg. He had a smile of youthful sarcasm.

“Here they are!” he cried to Lingard. “You’ve got your own way, Captain. I thought I had better come myself with the first precious lot — ”

“Pull around the stern. The brig’s on the swing,” interrupted Lingard.

“Aye, aye! We’ll try not to smash the brig. We would be lost indeed if — fend off there, John; fend off, old reliable, if you care a pin for your salty hide. I like the old chap,” he said, when he stood by Lingard’s side looking down at the boat which was being rapidly cleared by whites and Malays working shoulder to shoulder in silence. “I like him. He don’t belong to that yachting lot either. They picked him up on the road somewhere. Look at the old dog — carved out of a ship’s timber — as talkative as a fish — grim as a gutted wreck. That’s the man for me. All the others there are married, or going to be, or ought to be, or sorry they ain’t. Every man jack of them has a petticoat in tow — dash me! Never heard in all my travels such a jabber about wives and kids. Hurry up with your dunnage — below there! Aye! I had no difficulty in getting them to clear out from the yacht. They never saw a pair of gents stolen before — you understand. It upset all their little notions of what a stranding means, hereabouts. Not that mine aren’t mixed a bit, too — and yet I’ve seen a thing or two.”

His excitement was revealed in this boyish impulse to talk.

“Look,” he said, pointing at the growing pile of bags and bedding on the brig’s quarter-deck. “Look. Don’t they mean to sleep soft — and dream of home — maybe. Home. Think of that, Captain. These chaps can’t get clear away from it. It isn’t like you and me — ”

Lingard made a movement.

“I ran away myself when so high. My old man’s a Trinity pilot. That’s a job worth staying at home for. Mother writes sometimes, but they can’t miss me much. There’s fourteen of us altogether — eight at home yet. No fear of the old country ever getting undermanned — let die who must. Only let it be a fair game, Captain. Let’s have a fair show.”

Lingard assured him briefly he should have it. That was the very reason he wanted the yacht’s crew in the brig, he added. Then quiet and grave he inquired whether that pistol was still in Carter’s pocket.

“Never mind that,” said the young man, hurriedly. “Remember who began. To be shot at wouldn’t rile me so much — it’s being threatened, don’t you see, that was heavy on my chest. Last night is very far off though — and I will be hanged if I know what I meant exactly when I took the old thing from its nail. There. More I can’t say till all’s settled one way or another. Will that do?”

Flushing brick red, he suspended his judgment and stayed his hand with the generosity of youth.

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Apparently it suited Lingard to be reprieved in that form. He bowed his head slowly. It would do. To leave his life to that youngster’s ignorance seemed to redress the balance of his mind against a lot of secret intentions. It was distasteful and bitter as an expiation should be. He also held a life in his hand; a life, and many deaths besides, but these were like one single feather in the scales of his conscience. That he should feel so was unavoidable because his strength would at no price permit itself to be wasted. It would not be — and there was an end of it. All he could do was to throw in another risk into the sea of risks. Thus was he enabled to recognize that a drop of water in the ocean makes a great difference. His very desire, unconquered, but exiled, had left the place where he could constantly hear its voice. He saw it, he saw himself, the past, the future, he saw it all, shifting and indistinct like those shapes the strained eye of a wanderer outlines in darker strokes upon the face of the night.

Chapter 10

When Lingard went to his boat to follow Carter, who had gone back to the yacht, Wasub, mast and sail on shoulder, preceded him down the ladder. The old man leaped in smartly and busied himself in getting the dinghy ready for his commander.

In that little boat Lingard was accustomed to traverse the Shallows alone. She had a short mast and a lug-sail, carried two easily, floated in a few inches of water. In her he was independent of a crew, and, if the wind failed, could make his way with a pair of sculls taking short cuts over shoal places. There were so many islets and sandbanks that in case of sudden bad weather there was always a lee to be found, and when he wished to land he could pull her up a beach, striding ahead, painter in hand, like a giant child dragging a toy boat. When the brig was anchored within the Shallows it

was in her that he visited the lagoon. Once, when caught by a sudden freshening of the sea-breeze, he had waded up a shelving bank carrying her on his head and for two days they had rested together on the sand, while around them the shallow waters raged lividly, and across three miles of foam the brig would time after time dissolve in the mist and re-appear distinct, nodding her tall spars that seemed to touch a weeping sky of lamentable greyness.

Whenever he came into the lagoon tugging with bare arms, Jorgenson, who would be watching the entrance of the creek ever since a muffled detonation of a gun to seaward had warned him of the brig's arrival on the Shore of Refuge, would mutter to himself — "Here's Tom coming in his nutshell." And indeed she was in shape somewhat like half a nutshell and also in the colour of her dark varnished planks. The man's shoulders and head rose high above her gunwales; loaded with Lingard's heavy frame she would climb sturdily the steep ridges, slide squatting into the hollows of the sea, or, now and then, take a sedate leap over a short wave. Her behaviour had a stout trustworthiness about it, and she reminded one of a surefooted mountain-pony carrying over difficult ground a rider much bigger than himself.

Wasub wiped the thwarts, ranged the mast and sail along the side, shipped the rowlocks. Lingard looked down at his old servant's spare shoulders upon which the light from above fell unsteady but vivid. Wasub worked for the comfort of his commander and his singleminded absorption in that task flashed upon Lingard the consolation of an act of friendliness. The elderly Malay at last lifted his head with a deferential murmur; his wrinkled old face with half a dozen wiry hairs pendulous at each corner of the dark lips expressed a kind of weary satisfaction, and the slightly oblique worn eyes stole a discreet upward glance containing a hint of some remote meaning. Lingard found himself compelled by the justice of that obscure claim to murmur as he stepped into the boat:

"These are times of danger."

He sat down and took up the sculls. Wasub held on to the gunwale as to a last hope of a further confidence. He had served in the brig five years. Lingard remembered that very well. This aged figure had been intimately associated with the brig's life and with his own, appearing silently ready for every incident and emergency in an unquestioning expectation of orders; symbolic of blind trust in his strength, of an unlimited obedience to his will. Was it unlimited?

"We shall require courage and fidelity," added Lingard, in a tentative tone.

"There are those who know me," snapped the old man, readily, as if the words had been waiting for a long time. "Observe, Tuan. I have filled with fresh water the little breaker in the bows."

"I know you, too," said Lingard.

"And the wind — and the sea," ejaculated the serang, jerkily. "These also are faithful to the strong. By Allah! I who am a pilgrim and have listened to words of wisdom in many places, I tell you, Tuan, there is strength in the knowledge of what is hidden in things without life, as well as in the living men. Will Tuan be gone long?"

"I come back in a short time — together with the rest of the whites from over there. This is the beginning of many stratagems. Wasub! Daman, the son of a dog, has suddenly made prisoners two of my own people. My face is made black."

"Tse! Tse! What ferocity is that! One should not offer shame to a friend or to a friend's brother lest revenge come sweeping like a flood. Yet can an Illanun chief be other than tyrannical? My old eyes have seen much but they never saw a tiger change its stripes. Ya-wa! The tiger can not. This is the wisdom of us ignorant Malay men. The wisdom of white Tuans is great. They think that by the power of many speeches the tiger may — " He broke off and in a crisp, busy tone said: "The rudder dwells safely under the aftermost seat should Tuan be pleased to sail the boat. This breeze will not die away before sunrise." Again his voice changed as if two different souls had been flitting in and out of his body. "No, no, kill the tiger and then the stripes may be counted without fear — one by one, thus."

He pointed a frail brown finger and, abruptly, made a mirthless dry sound as if a rattle had been sprung in his throat.

"The wretches are many," said Lingard.

"Nay, Tuan. They follow their great men even as we in the brig follow you. That is right."

Lingard reflected for a moment.

"My men will follow me then," he said.

"They are poor calashes without sense," commented Wasub with pitying superiority. "Some with no more comprehension than men of the bush freshly caught. There is Sali, the foolish son of my sister and by your great favour appointed to mind the tiller of this ship. His stupidity is extreme, but his eyes are good — nearly as good as mine that by praying and much exercise can see far into the night."

Lingard laughed low and then looked earnestly at the serang. Above their heads a man shook a flare over the side and a thin shower of sparks floated downward and expired before touching the water.

"So you can see in the night, O serang! Well, then, look and speak. Speak! Fight — or no fight? Weapons or words? Which folly? Well, what do you see?"

"A darkness, a darkness," whispered Wasub at last in a frightened tone. "There are nights — " He shook his head and muttered. "Look. The tide has turned. Ya, Tuan. The tide has turned."

Lingard looked downward where the water could be seen, gliding past the ship's side, moving smoothly, streaked with lines of froth, across the illumined circle thrown round the brig by the lights on her poop. Air bubbles sparkled, lines of darkness, ripples of glitter appeared, glided, went astern without a splash, without a trickle, without a plaint, without a break. The unchecked gentleness of the flow captured the eye by a subtle spell, fastened insidiously upon the mind a disturbing sense of the irretrievable. The ebbing of the sea athwart the lonely sheen of flames resembled the eternal ebb-tide of time; and when at last Lingard looked up, the knowledge of that noiseless passage of the waters produced on his mind a bewildering effect. For a moment the speck of light

lost in vast obscurity the brig, the boat, the hidden coast, the Shallows, the very walls and roof of darkness — the seen and the unseen alike seemed to be gliding smoothly onward through the enormous gloom of space. Then, with a great mental effort, he brought everything to a sudden standstill; and only the froth and bubbles went on streaming past ceaselessly, unchecked by the power of his will.

“The tide has turned — you say, *serang*? Has it — ? Well, perhaps it has, perhaps it has,” he finished, muttering to himself.

“Truly it has. Can not Tuan see it run under his own eyes?” said Wasub with an alarmed earnestness. “Look. Now it is in my mind that a prau coming from amongst the southern islands, if steered cunningly in the free set of the current, would approach the bows of this, our brig, drifting silently as a shape without a substance.”

“And board suddenly — is that it?” said Lingard.

“Daman is crafty and the Illanuns are very bloodthirsty. Night is nothing to them. They are certainly valorous. Are they not born in the midst of fighting and are they not inspired by the evil of their hearts even before they can speak? And their chiefs would be leading them while you, Tuan, are going from us even now — ”

“You don’t want me to go?” asked Lingard.

For a time Wasub listened attentively to the profound silence.

“Can we fight without a leader?” he began again. “It is the belief in victory that gives courage. And what would poor calashes do, sons of peasants and fishermen, freshly caught — without knowledge? They believe in your strength — and in your power — or else — Will those whites that came so suddenly avenge you? They are here like fish within the stakes. Ya-wa! Who will bring the news and who will come to find the truth and perchance to carry off your body? You go alone, Tuan!”

“There must be no fighting. It would be a calamity,” insisted Lingard. “There is blood that must not be spilt.”

“Hear, Tuan!” exclaimed Wasub with heat. “The waters are running out now.” He punctuated his speech by slight jerks at the dinghy. “The waters go and at the appointed time they shall return. And if between their going and coming the blood of all the men in the world were poured into it, the sea would not rise higher at the full by the breadth of my finger nail.”

“But the world would not be the same. You do not see that, *serang*. Give the boat a good shove.”

“Directly,” said the old Malay and his face became impassive. “Tuan knows when it is best to go, and death sometimes retreats before a firm tread like a startled snake. Tuan should take a follower with him, not a silly youth, but one who has lived — who has a steady heart — who would walk close behind watchfully — and quietly. Yes. Quietly and with quick eyes — like mine — perhaps with a weapon — I know how to strike.”

Lingard looked at the wrinkled visage very near his own and into the peering old eyes. They shone strangely. A tense eagerness was expressed in the squatting figure leaning out toward him. On the other side, within reach of his arm, the night stood like

a wall -discouraging — opaque — impenetrable. No help would avail. The darkness he had to combat was too impalpable to be cleft by a blow — too dense to be pierced by the eye; yet as if by some enchantment in the words that made this vain offer of fidelity, it became less overpowering to his sight, less crushing to his thought. He had a moment of pride which soothed his heart for the space of two beats. His unreasonable and misjudged heart, shrinking before the menace of failure, expanded freely with a sense of generous gratitude. In the threatening dimness of his emotions this man's offer made a point of clearness, the glimmer of a torch held aloft in the night. It was priceless, no doubt, but ineffectual; too small, too far, too solitary. It did not dispel the mysterious obscurity that had descended upon his fortunes so that his eyes could no longer see the work of his hands. The sadness of defeat pervaded the world.

“And what could you do, O Wasub?” he said.

“I could always call out — 'Take care, Tuan.'”

“And then for these charm-words of mine. Hey? Turn danger aside? What? But perchance you would die all the same. Treachery is a strong magic, too — as you said.”

“Yes, indeed! The order might come to your servant. But I — Wasub — the son of a free man, a follower of Rajahs, a fugitive, a slave, a pilgrim — diver for pearls, serang of white men's ships, I have had too many masters. Too many. You are the last.” After a silence he said in an almost indifferent voice: “If you go, Tuan, let us go together.”

For a time Lingard made no sound.

“No use,” he said at last. “No use, serang. One life is enough to pay for a man's folly — and you have a household.”

“I have two — Tuan; but it is a long time since I sat on the ladder of a house to talk at ease with neighbours. Yes. Two households; one in — ” Lingard smiled faintly. “Tuan, let me follow you.”

“No. You have said it, serang — I am alone. That is true, and alone I shall go on this very night. But first I must bring all the white people here. Push.”

“Ready, Tuan? Look out!”

Wasub's body swung over the sea with extended arms. Lingard caught up the sculls, and as the dinghy darted away from the brig's side he had a complete view of the lighted poop — Shaw leaning massively over the taffrail in sulky dejection, the flare bearers erect and rigid, the heads along the rail, the eyes staring after him above the bulwarks. The fore-end of the brig was wrapped in a lurid and sombre mistiness; the sullen mingling of darkness and of light; her masts pointing straight up could be tracked by torn gleams and vanished above as if the trucks had been tall enough to pierce the heavy mass of vapours motionless overhead. She was beautifully precious. His loving eyes saw her floating at rest in a wavering halo, between an invisible sky and an invisible sea, like a miraculous craft suspended in the air. He turned his head away as if the sight had been too much for him at the moment of separation, and, as soon as his little boat had passed beyond the limit of the light thrown upon the water, he perceived very low in the black void of the west the stern lantern of the yacht shining

feebly like a star about to set, unattainable, infinitely remote — belonging to another universe.

Part 4 — The Gift of the Shallows

Chapter 1

Lingard brought Mrs. Travers away from the yacht, going alone with her in the little boat. During the bustle of the embarkment, and till the last of the crew had left the schooner, he had remained towering and silent by her side. It was only when the murmuring and uneasy voices of the sailors going away in the boats had been completely lost in the distance that his voice was heard, grave in the silence, pronouncing the words — "Follow me." She followed him; their footsteps rang hollow and loud on the empty deck. At the bottom of the steps he turned round and said very low:

"Take care."

He got into the boat and held on. It seemed to him that she was intimidated by the darkness. She felt her arm gripped firmly — "I've got you," he said. She stepped in, headlong, trusting herself blindly to his grip, and sank on the stern seat catching her breath a little. She heard a slight splash, and the indistinct side of the deserted yacht melted suddenly into the body of the night.

Rowing, he faced her, a hooded and cloaked shape, and above her head he had before his eyes the gleam of the stern lantern expiring slowly on the abandoned vessel. When it went out without a warning flicker he could see nothing of the stranded yacht's outline. She had vanished utterly like a dream; and the occurrences of the last twenty-four hours seemed also to be a part of a vanished dream. The hooded and cloaked figure was part of it, too. It spoke not; it moved not; it would vanish presently. Lingard tried to remember Mrs. Travers' features, even as she sat within two feet of him in the boat. He seemed to have taken from that vanished schooner not a woman but a memory — the tormenting recollection of a human being he would see no more.

At every stroke of the short sculls Mrs. Travers felt the boat leap forward with her. Lingard, to keep his direction, had to look over his shoulder frequently — "You will be safe in the brig," he said. She was silent. A dream! A dream! He lay back vigorously; the water slapped loudly against the blunt bows. The ruddy glow thrown afar by the flares was reflected deep within the hood. The dream had a pale visage, the memory had living eyes.

"I had to come for you myself," he said.

"I expected it of you." These were the first words he had heard her say since they had met for the third time.

“And I swore — before you, too — that I would never put my foot on board your craft.”

“It was good of you to — ” she began.

“I forgot somehow,” he said, simply.

“I expected it of you,” she repeated. He gave three quick strokes before he asked very gently:

“What more do you expect?”

“Everything,” she said. He was rounding then the stern of the brig and had to look away. Then he turned to her.

“And you trust me to — ” he exclaimed.

“I would like to trust you,” she interrupted, “because — ”

Above them a startled voice cried in Malay, “Captain coming.” The strange sound silenced her. Lingard laid in his sculls and she saw herself gliding under the high side of the brig. A dark, staring face appeared very near her eyes, black fingers caught the gunwale of the boat. She stood up swaying. “Take care,” said Lingard again, but this time, in the light, did not offer to help her. She went up alone and he followed her over the rail.

The quarter-deck was thronged by men of two races. Lingard and Mrs. Travers crossed it rapidly between the groups that moved out of the way on their passage. Lingard threw open the cabin door for her, but remained on deck to inquire about his boats. They had returned while he was on board the yacht, and the two men in charge of them came aft to make their reports. The boat sent north had seen nothing. The boat which had been directed to explore the banks and islets to the south had actually been in sight of Daman’s praus. The man in charge reported that several fires were burning on the shore, the crews of the two praus being encamped on a sandbank. Cooking was going on. They had been near enough to hear the voices. There was a man keeping watch on the ridge; they knew this because they heard him shouting to the people below, by the fires. Lingard wanted to know how they had managed to remain unseen. “The night was our hiding place,” answered the man in his deep growling voice. He knew nothing of any white men being in Daman’s camp. Why should there be? Rajah Hassim and the Lady, his sister, appeared unexpectedly near his boat in their canoe. Rajah Hassim had ordered him then in whispers to go back to the brig at once, and tell Tuan what he had observed. Rajah Hassim said also that he would return to the brig with more news very soon. He obeyed because the Rajah was to him a person of authority, “having the perfect knowledge of Tuan’s mind as we all know.” — “Enough,” cried Lingard, suddenly.

The man looked up heavily for a moment, and retreated forward without another word. Lingard followed him with irritated eyes. A new power had come into the world, had possessed itself of human speech, had imparted to it a sinister irony of allusion. To be told that someone had “a perfect knowledge of his mind” startled him and made him wince. It made him aware that now he did not know his mind himself — that it seemed impossible for him ever to regain that knowledge. And the new power not only

had cast its spell upon the words he had to hear, but also upon the facts that assailed him, upon the people he saw, upon the thoughts he had to guide, upon the feelings he had to bear. They remained what they had ever been — the visible surface of life open in the sun to the conquering tread of an unfettered will. Yesterday they could have been discerned clearly, mastered and despised; but now another power had come into the world, and had cast over them all the wavering gloom of a dark and inscrutable purpose.

Chapter 2

Recovering himself with a slight start Lingard gave the order to extinguish all the lights in the brig. Now the transfer of the crew from the yacht had been effected there was every advantage in the darkness. He gave the order from instinct, it being the right thing to do in the circumstances. His thoughts were in the cabin of his brig, where there was a woman waiting. He put his hand over his eyes, collecting himself as if before a great mental effort. He could hear about him the excited murmurs of the white men whom in the morning he had so ardently desired to have safe in his keeping. He had them there now; but accident, ill-luck, a cursed folly, had tricked him out of the success of his plan. He would have to go in and talk to Mrs. Travers. The idea dismayed him. Of necessity he was not one of those men who have the mastery of expression. To liberate his soul was for him a gigantic undertaking, a matter of desperate effort, of doubtful success. "I must have it out with her," he murmured to himself as though at the prospect of a struggle. He was uncertain of himself, of her; he was uncertain of everything and everybody; but he was very certain he wanted to look at her.

At the moment he turned to the door of the cabin both flares went out together and the black vault of the night upheld above the brig by the fierce flames fell behind him and buried the deck in sudden darkness. The buzz of strange voices instantly hummed louder with a startled note. "Hallo!" — "Can't see a mortal thing" — "Well, what next?" — insisted a voice — "I want to know what next?"

Lingard checked himself ready to open the door and waited absurdly for the answer as though in the hope of some suggestion. "What's up with you? Think yourself lucky," said somebody. — "It's all very well — for to-night," began the voice. — "What are you fashing yourself for?" remonstrated the other, reasonably, "we'll get home right enough." — "I am not so sure; the second mate he says —" "Never mind what he says; that 'ere man who has got this brig will see us through. The owner's wife will talk to him — she will. Money can do a lot." The two voices came nearer, and spoke more distinctly, close behind Lingard. "Suppose them blooming savages set fire to the yacht. What's to prevent them?" — "And suppose they do. This 'ere brig's good enough to get away in. Ain't she? Guns and all. We'll get home yet all right. What do you say, John?"

"I say nothing and care less," said a third voice, peaceful and faint.

"D'you mean to say, John, you would go to the bottom as soon as you would go home? Come now!" — "To the bottom," repeated the wan voice, composedly. "Aye! That's where we all are going to, in one way or another. The way don't matter."

"Ough! You would give the blues to the funny man of a blooming circus. What would my missus say if I wasn't to turn up never at all?" — "She would get another man; there's always plenty of fools about." A quiet and mirthless chuckle was heard in the pause of shocked silence. Lingard, with his hand on the door, remained still. Further off a growl burst out: "I do hate to be chucked in the dark aboard a strange ship. I wonder where they keep their fresh water. Can't get any sense out of them silly niggers. We don't seem to be more account here than a lot of cattle. Likely as not we'll have to berth on this blooming quarter-deck for God knows how long." Then again very near Lingard the first voice said, deadened discreetly — "There's something curious about this here brig turning up sudden-like, ain't there? And that skipper of her — now? What kind of a man is he — anyhow?"

"Oh, he's one of them skippers going about loose. The brig's his own, I am thinking. He just goes about in her looking for what he may pick up honest or dishonest. My brother-in-law has served two commissions in these seas, and was telling me awful yarns about what's going on in them God-forsaken parts. Likely he lied, though. Them man-of-war's men are a holy terror for yarns. Bless you, what do I care who this skipper is? Let him do his best and don't trouble your head. You won't see him again in your life once we get clear."

"And can he do anything for the owner?" asked the first voice again. — "Can he! We can do nothing — that's one thing certain. The owner may be lying clubbed to death this very minute for all we know. By all accounts these savages here are a crool murdering lot. Mind you, I am sorry for him as much as anybody." — "Aye, aye," muttered the other, approvingly. — "He may not have been ready, poor man," began again the reasonable voice. Lingard heard a deep sigh. — "If there's anything as can be done for him, the owner's wife she's got to fix it up with this 'ere skipper. Under Providence he may serve her turn."

Lingard flung open the cabin door, entered, and, with a slam, shut the darkness out.

"I am, under Providence, to serve your turn," he said after standing very still for a while, with his eyes upon Mrs. Travers. The brig's swing-lamp lighted the cabin with an extraordinary brilliance. Mrs. Travers had thrown back her hood. The radiant brightness of the little place enfolded her so close, clung to her with such force that it might have been part of her very essence. There were no shadows on her face; it was fiercely lighted, hermetically closed, of impenetrable fairness.

Lingard looked in unconscious ecstasy at this vision, so amazing that it seemed to have strayed into his existence from beyond the limits of the conceivable. It was impossible to guess her thoughts, to know her feelings, to understand her grief or her joy. But she knew all that was at the bottom of his heart. He had told her himself,

impelled by a sudden thought, going to her in darkness, in desperation, in absurd hope, in incredible trust. He had told her what he had told no one on earth, except perhaps, at times, himself, but without words — less clearly. He had told her and she had listened in silence. She had listened leaning over the rail till at last her breath was on his forehead. He remembered this and had a moment of soaring pride and of unutterable dismay. He spoke, with an effort.

“You’ve heard what I said just now? Here I am.”

“Do you expect me to say something?” she asked. “Is it necessary? Is it possible?”

“No,” he answered. “It is said already. I know what you expect from me. Everything.”

“Everything,” she repeated, paused, and added much lower, “It is the very least.” He seemed to lose himself in thought.

“It is extraordinary,” he reflected half aloud, “how I dislike that man.” She leaned forward a little.

“Remember those two men are innocent,” she began.

“So am I — innocent. So is everybody in the world. Have you ever met a man or a woman that was not? They’ve got to take their chances all the same.”

“I expect you to be generous,” she said.

“To you?”

“Well — to me. Yes — if you like to me alone.”

“To you alone! And you know everything!” His voice dropped. “You want your happiness.”

She made an impatient movement and he saw her clench the hand that was lying on the table.

“I want my husband back,” she said, sharply.

“Yes. Yes. It’s what I was saying. Same thing,” he muttered with strange placidity. She looked at him searchingly. He had a large simplicity that filled one’s vision. She found herself slowly invaded by this masterful figure. He was not mediocre. Whatever he might have been he was not mediocre. The glamour of a lawless life stretched over him like the sky over the sea down on all sides to an unbroken horizon. Within, he moved very lonely, dangerous and romantic. There was in him crime, sacrifice, tenderness, devotion, and the madness of a fixed idea. She thought with wonder that of all the men in the world he was indeed the one she knew the best and yet she could not foresee the speech or the act of the next minute. She said distinctly:

“You’ve given me your confidence. Now I want you to give me the life of these two men. The life of two men whom you do not know, whom to-morrow you will forget. It can be done. It must be done. You cannot refuse them to me.” She waited.

“Why can’t I refuse?” he whispered, gloomily, without looking up.

“You ask!” she exclaimed. He made no sign. He seemed at a loss for words.

“You ask . . . Ah!” she cried. “Don’t you see that I have no kingdoms to conquer?”

Chapter 3

A slight change of expression which passed away almost directly showed that Lingard heard the passionate cry wrung from her by the distress of her mind. He made no sign. She perceived clearly the extreme difficulty of her position. The situation was dangerous; not so much the facts of it as the feeling of it. At times it appeared no more actual than a tradition; and she thought of herself as of some woman in a ballad, who has to beg for the lives of innocent captives. To save the lives of Mr. Travers and Mr. d'Alcacer was more than a duty. It was a necessity, it was an imperative need, it was an irresistible mission. Yet she had to reflect upon the horrors of a cruel and obscure death before she could feel for them the pity they deserved. It was when she looked at Lingard that her heart was wrung by an extremity of compassion. The others were pitiful, but he, the victim of his own extravagant impulses, appeared tragic, fascinating, and culpable. Lingard lifted his head. Whispers were heard at the door and Hassim followed by Immada entered the cabin.

Mrs. Travers looked at Lingard, because of all the faces in the cabin his was the only one that was intelligible to her. Hassim began to speak at once, and when he ceased Immada's deep sigh was heard in the sudden silence. Then Lingard looked at Mrs. Travers and said:

"The gentlemen are alive. Rajah Hassim here has seen them less than two hours ago, and so has the girl. They are alive and unharmed, so far. And now. . . ."

He paused. Mrs. Travers, leaning on her elbow, shaded her eyes under the glint of suspended thunderbolts.

"You must hate us," she murmured.

"Hate you," he repeated with, as she fancied, a tinge of disdain in his tone. "No. I hate myself."

"Why yourself?" she asked, very low.

"For not knowing my mind," he answered. "For not knowing my mind. For not knowing what it is that's got hold of me since — since this morning. I was angry then. . . . Nothing but very angry. . . ."

"And now?" she murmured.

"I am . . . unhappy," he said. After a moment of silence which gave to Mrs. Travers the time to wonder how it was that this man had succeeded in penetrating into the very depths of her compassion, he hit the table such a blow that all the heavy muskets seemed to jump a little.

Mrs. Travers heard Hassim pronounce a few words earnestly, and a moan of distress from Immada.

"I believed in you before you . . . before you gave me your confidence," she began. "You could see that. Could you not?"

He looked at her fixedly. "You are not the first that believed in me," he said.

Hassim, lounging with his back against the closed door, kept his eye on him watchfully and Immada's dark and sorrowful eyes rested on the face of the white woman.

Mrs. Travers felt as though she were engaged in a contest with them; in a struggle for the possession of that man's strength and of that man's devotion. When she looked up at Lingard she saw on his face — which should have been impassive or exalted, the face of a stern leader or the face of a pitiless dreamer — an expression of utter forgetfulness. He seemed to be tasting the delight of some profound and amazing sensation. And suddenly in the midst of her appeal to his generosity, in the middle of a phrase, Mrs. Travers faltered, becoming aware that she was the object of his contemplation.

“Do not! Do not look at that woman!” cried Immada. “O! Master — look away. . . .” Hassim threw one arm round the girl's neck. Her voice sank. “O! Master — look at us.” Hassim, drawing her to himself, covered her lips with his hand. She struggled a little like a snared bird and submitted, hiding her face on his shoulder, very quiet, sobbing without noise.

“What do they say to you?” asked Mrs. Travers with a faint and pained smile. “What can they say? It is intolerable to think that their words which have no meaning for me may go straight to your heart. . . .”

“Look away,” whispered Lingard without making the slightest movement.

Mrs. Travers sighed.

“Yes, it is very hard to think that I who want to touch you cannot make myself understood as well as they. And yet I speak the language of your childhood, the language of the man for whom there is no hope but in your generosity.”

He shook his head. She gazed at him anxiously for a moment. “In your memories then,” she said and was surprised by the expression of profound sadness that over-spread his attentive face.

“Do you know what I remember?” he said. “Do you want to know?” She listened with slightly parted lips. “I will tell you. Poverty, hard work — and death,” he went on, very quietly. “And now I've told you, and you don't know. That's how it is between us. You talk to me — I talk to you — and we don't know.”

Her eyelids dropped.

“What can I find to say?” she went on. “What can I do? I mustn't give in. Think! Amongst your memories there must be some face — some voice — some name, if nothing more. I can not believe that there is nothing but bitterness.”

“There's no bitterness,” he murmured.

“O! Brother, my heart is faint with fear,” whispered Immada. Lingard turned swiftly to that whisper.

“Then, they are to be saved,” exclaimed Mrs. Travers. “Ah, I knew. . . .”

“Bear thy fear in patience,” said Hassim, rapidly, to his sister.

“They are to be saved. You have said it,” Lingard pronounced aloud, suddenly. He felt like a swimmer who, in the midst of superhuman efforts to reach the shore, perceives that the undertow is taking him to sea. He would go with the mysterious current; he would go swiftly — and see the end, the fulfilment both blissful and terrible.

With this state of exaltation in which he saw himself in some incomprehensible way always victorious, whatever might befall, there was mingled a tenacity of purpose. He

could not sacrifice his intention, the intention of years, the intention of his life; he could no more part with it and exist than he could cut out his heart and live. The adventurer held fast to his adventure which made him in his own sight exactly what he was.

He considered the problem with cool audacity, backed by a belief in his own power. It was not these two men he had to save; he had to save himself! And looked upon in this way the situation appeared familiar.

Hassim had told him the two white men had been taken by their captors to Daman's camp. The young Rajah, leaving his sister in the canoe, had landed on the sand and had crept to the very edge of light thrown by the fires by which the Illanuns were cooking. Daman was sitting apart by a larger blaze. Two praus rode in shallow water near the sandbank; on the ridge, a sentry walked watching the lights of the brig; the camp was full of quiet whispers. Hassim returned to his canoe, then he and his sister, paddling cautiously round the anchored praus, in which women's voices could be heard, approached the other end of the camp. The light of the big blaze there fell on the water and the canoe skirted it without a splash, keeping in the night. Hassim, landing for the second time, crept again close to the fires. Each prau had, according to the customs of the Illanun rovers when on a raiding expedition, a smaller war-boat and these being light and manageable were hauled up on the sand not far from the big blaze; they sat high on the shelving shore throwing heavy shadows. Hassim crept up toward the largest of them and then standing on tiptoe could look at the camp across the gunwales. The confused talking of the men was like the buzz of insects in a forest. A child wailed on board one of the praus and a woman hailed the shore shrilly. Hassim unsheathed his kris and held it in his hand.

Very soon — he said — he saw the two white men walking amongst the fires. They waved their arms and talked together, stopping from time to time; they approached Daman; and the short man with the hair on his face addressed him earnestly and at great length. Daman sat cross-legged upon a little carpet with an open Koran on his knees and chanted the versets swaying to and fro with his eyes shut.

The Illanun chiefs reclining wrapped in cloaks on the ground raised themselves on their elbows to look at the whites. When the short white man finished speaking he gazed down at them for a while, then stamped his foot. He looked angry because no one understood him. Then suddenly he looked very sad; he covered his face with his hands; the tall man put his hand on the short man's shoulder and whispered into his ear. The dry wood of the fires crackled, the Illanuns slept, cooked, talked, but with their weapons at hand. An armed man or two came up to stare at the prisoners and then returned to their fire. The two whites sank down in the sand in front of Daman. Their clothes were soiled, there was sand in their hair. The tall man had lost his hat; the glass in the eye of the short man glittered very much; his back was muddy and one sleeve of his coat torn up to the elbow.

All this Hassim saw and then retreated undetected to that part of the shore where Immada waited for him, keeping the canoe afloat. The Illanuns, trusting to the sea, kept very bad watch on their prisoners, and had he been able to speak with them Hassim

thought an escape could have been effected. But they could not have understood his signs and still less his words. He consulted with his sister. Immada murmured sadly; at their feet the ripple broke with a mournful sound no louder than their voices.

Hassim's loyalty was unshaken, but now it led him on not in the bright light of hopes but in the deepened shadow of doubt. He wanted to obtain information for his friend who was so powerful and who perhaps would know how to be constant. When followed by Immada he approached the camp again — this time openly — their appearance did not excite much surprise. It was well known to the Chiefs of the Illanuns that the Rajah for whom they were to fight — if God so willed — was upon the shoals looking out for the coming of the white man who had much wealth and a store of weapons and who was his servant. Daman, who alone understood the exact relation, welcomed them with impenetrable gravity. Hassim took his seat on the carpet at his right hand. A consultation was being held half-aloud in short and apparently careless sentences, with long intervals of silence between. Immada, nestling close to her brother, leaned one arm on his shoulder and listened with serious attention and with outward calm as became a princess of Wajo accustomed to consort with warriors and statesmen in moments of danger and in the hours of deliberation. Her heart was beating rapidly, and facing her the silent white men stared at these two known faces, as if across a gulf. Four Illanun chiefs sat in a row. Their ample cloaks fell from their shoulders, and lay behind them on the sand in which their four long lances were planted upright, each supporting a small oblong shield of wood, carved on the edges and stained a dull purple. Daman stretched out his arm and pointed at the prisoners. The faces of the white men were very quiet. Daman looked at them mutely and ardently, as if consumed by an unspeakable longing.

The Koran, in a silk cover, hung on his breast by a crimson cord. It rested over his heart and, just below, the plain buffalo-horn handle of a kris, stuck into the twist of his sarong, protruded ready to his hand. The clouds thickening over the camp made the darkness press heavily on the glow of scattered fires. "There is blood between me and the whites," he pronounced, violently. The Illanun chiefs remained impassive. There was blood between them and all mankind. Hassim remarked dispassionately that there was one white man with whom it would be wise to remain friendly; and besides, was not Daman his friend already? Daman smiled with half-closed eyes. He was that white man's friend, not his slave. The Illanuns playing with their sword-handles grunted assent. Why, asked Daman, did these strange whites travel so far from their country? The great white man whom they all knew did not want them. No one wanted them. Evil would follow in their footsteps. They were such men as are sent by rulers to examine the aspects of far-off countries and talk of peace and make treaties. Such is the beginning of great sorrows. The Illanuns were far from their country, where no white man dared to come, and therefore they were free to seek their enemies upon the open waters. They had found these two who had come to see. He asked what they had come to see? Was there nothing to look at in their own country?

He talked in an ironic and subdued tone. The scattered heaps of embers glowed a deeper red; the big blaze of the chief's fire sank low and grew dim before he ceased. Straight-limbed figures rose, sank, moved, whispered on the beach. Here and there a spear-blade caught a red gleam above the black shape of a head.

"The Illanuns seek booty on the sea," cried Daman. "Their fathers and the fathers of their fathers have done the same, being fearless like those who embrace death closely."

A low laugh was heard. "We strike and go," said an exulting voice. "We live and die with our weapons in our hands." The Illanuns leaped to their feet. They stamped on the sand, flourishing naked blades over the heads of their prisoners. A tumult arose.

When it subsided Daman stood up in a cloak that wrapped him to his feet and spoke again giving advice.

The white men sat on the sand and turned their eyes from face to face as if trying to understand. It was agreed to send the prisoners into the lagoon where their fate would be decided by the ruler of the land. The Illanuns only wanted to plunder the ship. They did not care what became of the men. "But Daman cares," remarked Hassim to Lingard, when relating what took place. "He cares, O Tuan!"

Hassim had learned also that the Settlement was in a state of unrest as if on the eve of war. Belarab with his followers was encamped by his father's tomb in the hollow beyond the cultivated fields. His stockade was shut up and no one appeared on the verandahs of the houses within. You could tell there were people inside only by the smoke of the cooking fires. Tengga's followers meantime swaggered about the Settlement behaving tyrannically to those who were peaceable. A great madness had descended upon the people, a madness strong as the madness of love, the madness of battle, the desire to spill blood. A strange fear also had made them wild. The big smoke seen that morning above the forests of the coast was some agreed signal from Tengga to Daman but what it meant Hassim had been unable to find out. He feared for Jorgenson's safety. He said that while one of the war-boats was being made ready to take the captives into the lagoon, he and his sister left the camp quietly and got away in their canoe. The flares of the brig, reflected in a faint loom upon the clouds, enabled them to make straight for the vessel across the banks. Before they had gone half way these flames went out and the darkness seemed denser than any he had known before. But it was no greater than the darkness of his mind — he added. He had looked upon the white men sitting unmoved and silent under the edge of swords; he had looked at Daman, he had heard bitter words spoken; he was looking now at his white friend — and the issue of events he could not see. One can see men's faces but their fate, which is written on their foreheads, one cannot see. He had no more to say, and what he had spoken was true in every word.

Chapter 4

Lingard repeated it all to Mrs. Travers. Her courage, her intelligence, the quickness of her apprehension, the colour of her eyes and the intrepidity of her glance evoked in him an admiring enthusiasm. She stood by his side! Every moment that fatal illusion clung closer to his soul — like a garment of light — like an armour of fire.

He was unwilling to face the facts. All his life — till that day — had been a wrestle with events in the daylight of this world, but now he could not bring his mind to the consideration of his position. It was Mrs. Travers who, after waiting awhile, forced on him the pain of thought by wanting to know what bearing Hassim's news had upon the situation.

Lingard had not the slightest doubt Daman wanted him to know what had been done with the prisoners. That is why Daman had welcomed Hassim, and let him hear the decision and had allowed him to leave the camp on the sandbank. There could be only one object in this; to let him, Lingard, know that the prisoners had been put out of his reach as long as he remained in his brig. Now this brig was his strength. To make him leave his brig was like removing his hand from his sword.

“Do you understand what I mean, Mrs. Travers?” he asked. “They are afraid of me because I know how to fight this brig. They fear the brig because when I am on board her, the brig and I are one. An armed man — don't you see? Without the brig I am disarmed, without me she can't strike. So Daman thinks. He does not know everything but he is not far off the truth. He says to himself that if I man the boats to go after these whites into the lagoon then his Illanuns will get the yacht for sure — and perhaps the brig as well. If I stop here with my brig he holds the two white men and can talk as big as he pleases. Belarab believes in me no doubt, but Daman trusts no man on earth. He simply does not know how to trust any one, because he is always plotting himself. He came to help me and as soon as he found I was not there he began to plot with Tengga. Now he has made a move — a clever move; a cleverer move than he thinks. Why? I'll tell you why. Because I, Tom Lingard, haven't a single white man aboard this brig I can trust. Not one. I only just discovered my mate's got the notion I am some kind of pirate. And all your yacht people think the same. It is as though you had brought a curse on me in your yacht. Nobody believes me. Good God! What have I come to! Even those two — look at them — I say look at them! By all the stars they doubt me! Me! . . .”

He pointed at Hassim and Immada. The girl seemed frightened. Hassim looked on calm and intelligent with inexhaustible patience. Lingard's voice fell suddenly.

“And by heavens they may be right. Who knows? You? Do you know? They have waited for years. Look. They are waiting with heavy hearts. Do you think that I don't care? Ought I to have kept it all in — told no one — no one — not even you? Are they waiting for what will never come now?”

Mrs. Travers rose and moved quickly round the table. "Can we give anything to this — this Daman or these other men? We could give them more than they could think of asking. I — my husband. . . ."

"Don't talk to me of your husband," he said, roughly. "You don't know what you are doing." She confronted the sombre anger of his eyes — "But I must," she asserted with heat. — "Must," he mused, noticing that she was only half a head less tall than himself. "Must! Oh, yes. Of course, you must. Must! Yes. But I don't want to hear. Give! What can you give? You may have all the treasures of the world for all I know. No! You can't give anything. . . ."

"I was thinking of your difficulty when I spoke," she interrupted. His eyes wandered downward following the line of her shoulder. — "Of me — of me!" he repeated.

All this was said almost in whispers. The sound of slow footsteps was heard on deck above their heads. Lingard turned his face to the open skylight.

"On deck there! Any wind?"

All was still for a moment. Somebody above answered in a leisurely tone:

"A steady little draught from the northward."

Then after a pause added in a mutter:

"Pitch dark."

"Aye, dark enough," murmured Lingard. He must do something. Now. At once. The world was waiting. The world full of hopes and fear. What should he do? Instead of answering that question he traced the ungleaming coils of her twisted hair and became fascinated by a stray lock at her neck. What should he do? No one to leave his brig to. The voice that had answered his question was Carter's voice. "He is hanging about keeping his eye on me," he said to Mrs. Travers. She shook her head and tried to smile. The man above coughed discreetly. "No," said Lingard, "you must understand that you have nothing to give."

The man on deck who seemed to have lingered by the skylight was heard saying quietly, "I am at hand if you want me, Mrs. Travers." Hassim and Immada looked up. "You see," exclaimed Lingard. "What did I tell you? He's keeping his eye on me! On board my own ship. Am I dreaming? Am I in a fever? Tell him to come down," he said after a pause. Mrs. Travers did so and Lingard thought her voice very commanding and very sweet. "There's nothing in the world I love so much as this brig," he went on. "Nothing in the world. If I lost her I would have no standing room on the earth for my feet. You don't understand this. You can't."

Carter came in and shut the cabin door carefully. He looked with serenity at everyone in turn.

"All quiet?" asked Lingard.

"Quiet enough if you like to call it so," he answered. "But if you only put your head outside the door you'll hear them all on the quarter-deck snoring against each other, as if there were no wives at home and no pirates at sea."

"Look here," said Lingard. "I found out that I can't trust my mate."

“Can’t you?” drawled Carter. “I am not exactly surprised. I must say he does not snore but I believe it is because he is too crazy to sleep. He waylaid me on the poop just now and said something about evil communications corrupting good manners. Seems to me I’ve heard that before. Queer thing to say. He tried to make it out somehow that if he wasn’t corrupt it wasn’t your fault. As if this was any concern of mine. He’s as mad as he’s fat — or else he puts it on.” Carter laughed a little and leaned his shoulders against a bulkhead.

Lingard gazed at the woman who expected so much from him and in the light she seemed to shed he saw himself leading a column of armed boats to the attack of the Settlement. He could burn the whole place to the ground and drive every soul of them into the bush. He could! And there was a surprise, a shock, a vague horror at the thought of the destructive power of his will. He could give her ever so many lives. He had seen her yesterday, and it seemed to him he had been all his life waiting for her to make a sign. She was very still. He pondered a plan of attack. He saw smoke and flame — and next moment he saw himself alone amongst shapeless ruins with the whispers, with the sigh and moan of the Shallows in his ears. He shuddered, and shaking his hand:

“No! I cannot give you all those lives!” he cried.

Then, before Mrs. Travers could guess the meaning of this outburst, he declared that as the two captives must be saved he would go alone into the lagoon. He could not think of using force. “You understand why,” he said to Mrs. Travers and she whispered a faint “Yes.” He would run the risk alone. His hope was in Belarab being able to see where his true interest lay. “If I can only get at him I would soon make him see,” he mused aloud. “Haven’t I kept his power up for these two years past? And he knows it, too. He feels it.” Whether he would be allowed to reach Belarab was another matter. Lingard lost himself in deep thought. “He would not dare,” he burst out. Mrs. Travers listened with parted lips. Carter did not move a muscle of his youthful and self-possessed face; only when Lingard, turning suddenly, came up close to him and asked with a red flash of eyes and in a lowered voice, “Could you fight this brig?” something like a smile made a stir amongst the hairs of his little fair moustache.

“‘Could I?’” he said. “I could try, anyhow.” He paused, and added hardly above his breath, “For the lady — of course.”

Lingard seemed staggered as though he had been hit in the chest. “I was thinking of the brig,” he said, gently.

“Mrs. Travers would be on board,” retorted Carter.

“What! on board. Ah yes; on board. Where else?” stammered Lingard.

Carter looked at him in amazement. “Fight! You ask!” he said, slowly. “You just try me.”

“I shall,” ejaculated Lingard. He left the cabin calling out “serang!” A thin cracked voice was heard immediately answering, “Tuan!” and the door slammed to.

“You trust him, Mrs. Travers?” asked Carter, rapidly.

“You do not — why?” she answered.

"I can't make him out. If he was another kind of man I would say he was drunk," said Carter. "Why is he here at all — he, and this brig of his? Excuse my boldness — but have you promised him anything?"

"I — I promised!" exclaimed Mrs. Travers in a bitter tone which silenced Carter for a moment.

"So much the better," he said at last. "Let him show what he can do first and . . ."

"Here! Take this," said Lingard, who re-entered the cabin fumbling about his neck. Carter mechanically extended his hand.

"What's this for?" he asked, looking at a small brass key attached to a thin chain.

"Powder magazine. Trap door under the table. The man who has this key commands the brig while I am away. The serang understands. You have her very life in your hand there."

Carter looked at the small key lying in his half-open palm.

"I was just telling Mrs. Travers I didn't trust you — not altogether. . . ."

"I know all about it," interrupted Lingard, contemptuously. "You carry a blamed pistol in your pocket to blow my brains out — don't you? What's that to me? I am thinking of the brig. I think I know your sort. You will do."

"Well, perhaps I might," mumbled Carter, modestly.

"Don't be rash," said Lingard, anxiously. "If you've got to fight use your head as well as your hands. If there's a breeze fight under way. If they should try to board in a calm, trust to the small arms to hold them off. Keep your head and — " He looked intensely into Carter's eyes; his lips worked without a sound as though he had been suddenly struck dumb. "Don't think about me. What's that to you who I am? Think of the ship," he burst out. "Don't let her go! — Don't let her go!" The passion in his voice impressed his hearers who for a time preserved a profound silence.

"All right," said Carter at last. "I will stick to your brig as though she were my own; but I would like to see clear through all this. Look here — you are going off somewhere? Alone, you said?"

"Yes. Alone."

"Very well. Mind, then, that you don't come back with a crowd of those brown friends of yours — or by the Heavens above us I won't let you come within hail of your own ship. Am I to keep this key?"

"Captain Lingard," said Mrs. Travers suddenly. "Would it not be better to tell him everything?"

"Tell him everything?" repeated Lingard. "Everything! Yesterday it might have been done. Only yesterday! Yesterday, did I say? Only six hours ago — only six hours ago I had something to tell. You heard it. And now it's gone. Tell him! There's nothing to tell any more." He remained for a time with bowed head, while before him Mrs. Travers, who had begun a gesture of protest, dropped her arms suddenly. In a moment he looked up again.

"Keep the key," he said, calmly, "and when the time comes step forward and take charge. I am satisfied."

"I would like to see clear through all this though," muttered Carter again. "And for how long are you leaving us, Captain?" Lingard made no answer. Carter waited awhile. "Come, sir," he urged. "I ought to have some notion. What is it? Two, three days?" Lingard started.

"Days," he repeated. "Ah, days. What is it you want to know? Two . . . three — what did the old fellow say — perhaps for life." This was spoken so low that no one but Carter heard the last words. — "Do you mean it?" he murmured. Lingard nodded. — "Wait as long as you can — then go," he said in the same hardly audible voice. "Go where?" — "Where you like, nearest port, any port." — "Very good. That's something plain at any rate," commented the young man with imperturbable good humour.

"I go, O Hassim!" began Lingard and the Malay made a slow inclination of the head which he did not raise again till Lingard had ceased speaking. He betrayed neither surprise nor any other emotion while Lingard in a few concise and sharp sentences made him acquainted with his purpose to bring about singlehanded the release of the prisoners. When Lingard had ended with the words: "And you must find a way to help me in the time of trouble, O Rajah Hassim," he looked up and said:

"Good. You never asked me for anything before."

He smiled at his white friend. There was something subtle in the smile and afterward an added firmness in the repose of the lips. Immada moved a step forward. She looked at Lingard with terror in her black and dilated eyes. She exclaimed in a voice whose vibration startled the hearts of all the hearers with an indefinable sense of alarm, "He will perish, Hassim! He will perish alone!"

"No," said Hassim. "Thy fear is as vain to-night as it was at sunrise. He shall not perish alone."

Her eyelids dropped slowly. From her veiled eyes the tears fell, vanishing in the silence. Lingard's forehead became furrowed by folds that seemed to contain an infinity of sombre thoughts. "Remember, O Hassim, that when I promised you to take you back to your country you promised me to be a friend to all white men. A friend to all whites who are of my people, forever."

"My memory is good, O Tuan," said Hassim; "I am not yet back in my country, but is not everyone the ruler of his own heart? Promises made by a man of noble birth live as long as the speaker endures."

"Good-bye," said Lingard to Mrs. Travers. "You will be safe here." He looked all around the cabin. "I leave you," he began again and stopped short. Mrs. Travers' hand, resting lightly on the edge of the table, began to tremble. "It's for you . . . Yes. For you alone . . . and it seems it can't be. . . ."

It seemed to him that he was saying good-bye to all the world, that he was taking a last leave of his own self. Mrs. Travers did not say a word, but Immada threw herself between them and cried:

"You are a cruel woman! You are driving him away from where his strength is. You put madness into his heart, O! Blind — without pity — without shame! . . ."

"Immada," said Hassim's calm voice. Nobody moved.

"What did she say to me?" faltered Mrs. Travers and again repeated in a voice that sounded hard, "What did she say?"

"Forgive her," said Lingard. "Her fears are for me . . ." — "It's about your going?" Mrs. Travers interrupted, swiftly.

"Yes, it is — and you must forgive her." He had turned away his eyes with something that resembled embarrassment but suddenly he was assailed by an irresistible longing to look again at that woman. At the moment of parting he clung to her with his glance as a man holds with his hands a priceless and disputed possession. The faint blush that overspread gradually Mrs. Travers' features gave her face an air of extraordinary and startling animation.

"The danger you run?" she asked, eagerly. He repelled the suggestion by a slighting gesture of the hand. — "Nothing worth looking at twice. Don't give it a thought," he said. "I've been in tighter places." He clapped his hands and waited till he heard the cabin door open behind his back. "Steward, my pistols." The mulatto in slippers, aproned to the chin, glided through the cabin with unseeing eyes as though for him no one there had existed. . . . — "Is it my heart that aches so?" Mrs. Travers asked herself, contemplating Lingard's motionless figure. "How long will this sensation of dull pain last? Will it last forever. . . ." — "How many changes of clothes shall I put up, sir?" asked the steward, while Lingard took the pistols from him and eased the hammers after putting on fresh caps. — "I will take nothing this time, steward." He received in turn from the mulatto's hands a red silk handkerchief, a pocket book, a cigar-case. He knotted the handkerchief loosely round his throat; it was evident he was going through the routine of every departure for the shore; he even opened the cigar-case to see whether it had been filled. — "Hat, sir," murmured the half-caste. Lingard flung it on his head. — "Take your orders from this lady, steward — till I come back. The cabin is hers — do you hear?" He sighed ready to go and seemed unable to lift a foot. — "I am coming with you," declared Mrs. Travers suddenly in a tone of unalterable decision. He did not look at her; he did not even look up; he said nothing, till after Carter had cried: "You can't, Mrs. Travers!" — when without budging he whispered to himself: — "Of course." Mrs. Travers had pulled already the hood of her cloak over her head and her face within the dark cloth had turned an intense and unearthly white, in which the violet of her eyes appeared unfathomably mysterious. Carter started forward. — "You don't know this man," he almost shouted.

"I do know him," she said, and before the reproachfully unbelieving attitude of the other she added, speaking slowly and with emphasis: "There is not, I verily believe, a single thought or act of his life that I don't know." — "It's true — it's true," muttered Lingard to himself. Carter threw up his arms with a groan. "Stand back," said a voice that sounded to him like a growl of thunder, and he felt a grip on his hand which seemed to crush every bone. He jerked it away. — "Mrs. Travers! stay," he cried. They had vanished through the open door and the sound of their footsteps had already died away. Carter turned about bewildered as if looking for help. — "Who is he, steward? Who in the name of all the mad devils is he?" he asked, wildly. He was confounded by

the cold and philosophical tone of the answer: — "Tain't my place to trouble about that, sir — nor yours I guess." — "Isn't it!" shouted Carter. "Why, he has carried the lady off." The steward was looking critically at the lamp and after a while screwed the light down. — "That's better," he mumbled. — "Good God! What is a fellow to do?" continued Carter, looking at Hassim and Immada who were whispering together and gave him only an absent glance. He rushed on deck and was struck blind instantly by the night that seemed to have been lying in wait for him; he stumbled over something soft, kicked something hard, flung himself on the rail. "Come back," he cried. "Come back. Captain! Mrs. Travers! — or let me come, too."

He listened. The breeze blew cool against his cheek. A black bandage seemed to lie over his eyes. "Gone," he groaned, utterly crushed. And suddenly he heard Mrs. Travers' voice remote in the depths of the night. — "Defend the brig," it said, and these words, pronouncing themselves in the immensity of a lightless universe, thrilled every fibre of his body by the commanding sadness of their tone. "Defend, defend the brig." . . . "I am damned if I do," shouted Carter in despair. "Unless you come back! . . . Mrs. Travers!"

". . . as though — I were — on board — myself," went on the rising cadence of the voice, more distant now, a marvel of faint and imperious clearness.

Carter shouted no more; he tried to make out the boat for a time, and when, giving it up, he leaped down from the rail, the heavy obscurity of the brig's main deck was agitated like a sombre pool by his jump, swayed, eddied, seemed to break up. Blotches of darkness recoiled, drifted away, bare feet shuffled hastily, confused murmurs died out. "Lascars," he muttered, "The crew is all agog." Afterward he listened for a moment to the faintly tumultuous snores of the white men sleeping in rows, with their heads under the break of the poop. Somewhere about his feet, the yacht's black dog, invisible, and chained to a deck-ringbolt, whined, rattled the thin links, pattered with his claws in his distress at the unfamiliar surroundings, begging for the charity of human notice. Carter stooped impulsively, and was met by a startling lick in the face. — "Hallo, boy!" He thumped the thick curly sides, stroked the smooth head — "Good boy, Rover. Down. Lie down, dog. You don't know what to make of it — do you, boy?" The dog became still as death. "Well, neither do I," muttered Carter. But such natures are helped by a cheerful contempt for the intricate and endless suggestions of thought. He told himself that he would soon see what was to come of it, and dismissed all speculation. Had he been a little older he would have felt that the situation was beyond his grasp; but he was too young to see it whole and in a manner detached from himself. All these inexplicable events filled him with deep concern — but then on the other hand he had the key of the magazine and he could not find it in his heart to dislike Lingard. He was positive about this at last, and to know that much after the discomfort of an inward conflict went a long way toward a solution. When he followed Shaw into the cabin he could not repress a sense of enjoyment or hide a faint and malicious smile.

"Gone away — did you say? And carried off the lady with him?" discoursed Shaw very loud in the doorway. "Did he? Well, I am not surprised. What can you expect

from a man like that, who leaves his ship in an open roadstead without — I won't say orders — but without as much as a single word to his next in command? And at night at that! That just shows you the kind of man. Is this the way to treat a chief mate? I apprehend he was riled at the little al-ter-cation we had just before you came on board. I told him a truth or two — but — never mind. There's the law and that's enough for me. I am captain as long as he is out of the ship, and if his address before very long is not in one of Her Majesty's jails or other I au-tho-rize you to call me a Dutchman. You mark my words."

He walked in masterfully, sat down and surveyed the cabin in a leisurely and autocratic manner; but suddenly his eyes became stony with amazement and indignation; he pointed a fat and trembling forefinger.

"Niggers," he said, huskily. "In the cuddy! In the cuddy!" He appeared bereft of speech for a time.

Since he entered the cabin Hassim had been watching him in thoughtful and expectant silence. "I can't have it," he continued with genuine feeling in his voice. "Damm! I've too much respect for myself." He rose with heavy deliberation; his eyes bulged out in a severe and dignified stare. "Out you go!" he bellowed; suddenly, making a step forward. — "Great Scott! What are you up to, mister?" asked in a tone of dispassionate surprise the steward whose head appeared in the doorway. "These are the Captain's friends." "Show me a man's friends and . . ." began Shaw, dogmatically, but abruptly passed into the tone of admonition. "You take your mug out of the way, bottle-washer. They ain't friends of mine. I ain't a vagabond. I know what's due to myself. Quit!" he hissed, fiercely. Hassim, with an alert movement, grasped the handle of his kris. Shaw puffed out his cheeks and frowned. — "Look out! He will stick you like a prize pig," murmured Carter without moving a muscle. Shaw looked round helplessly. — "And you would enjoy the fun — wouldn't you?" he said with slow bitterness. Carter's distant non-committal smile quite overwhelmed him by its horrid frigidity. Extreme despondency replaced the proper feeling of racial pride in the primitive soul of the mate. "My God! What luck! What have I done to fall amongst that lot?" he groaned, sat down, and took his big grey head in his hands. Carter drew aside to make room for Immada, who, in obedience to a whisper from her brother, sought to leave the cabin. She passed out after an instant of hesitation, during which she looked up at Carter once. Her brother, motionless in a defensive attitude, protected her retreat. She disappeared; Hassim's grip on his weapon relaxed; he looked in turn at every object in the cabin as if to fix its position in his mind forever, and following his sister, walked out with noiseless footfalls.

They entered the same darkness which had received, enveloped, and hidden the troubled souls of Lingard and Edith, but to these two the light from which they had felt themselves driven away was now like the light of forbidden hopes; it had the awful and tranquil brightness that a light burning on the shore has for an exhausted swimmer about to give himself up to the fateful sea. They looked back; it had disappeared; Carter had shut the cabin door behind them to have it out with Shaw. He wanted to arrive at

some kind of working compromise with the nominal commander, but the mate was so demoralized by the novelty of the assaults made upon his respectability that the young defender of the brig could get nothing from him except lamentations mingled with mild blasphemies. The brig slept, and along her quiet deck the voices raised in her cabin — Shaw's appeals and reproaches directed vociferously to heaven, together with Carter's inflexible drawl mingled into one deadened, modulated, and continuous murmur. The lockouts in the waist, motionless and peering into obscurity, one ear turned to the sea, were aware of that strange resonance like the ghost of a quarrel that seemed to hover at their backs. Wasub, after seeing Hassim and Immada into their canoe, prowled to and fro the whole length of the vessel vigilantly. There was not a star in the sky and no gleam on the water; there was no horizon, no outline, no shape for the eye to rest upon, nothing for the hand to grasp. An obscurity that seemed without limit in space and time had submerged the universe like a destroying flood.

A lull of the breeze kept for a time the small boat in the neighbourhood of the brig. The hoisted sail, invisible, fluttered faintly, mysteriously, and the boat rising and falling bodily to the passage of each invisible undulation of the waters seemed to repose upon a living breast. Lingard, his hand on the tiller, sat up erect, expectant and silent. Mrs. Travers had drawn her cloak close around her body. Their glances plunged infinitely deep into a lightless void, and yet they were still so near the brig that the piteous whine of the dog, mingled with the angry rattling of the chain, reached their ears faintly, evoking obscure images of distress and fury. A sharp bark ending in a plaintive howl that seemed raised by the passage of phantoms invisible to men, rent the black stillness, as though the instinct of the brute inspired by the soul of night had voiced in a lamentable plaint the fear of the future, the anguish of lurking death, the terror of shadows. Not far from the brig's boat Hassim and Immada in their canoe, letting their paddles trail in the water, sat in a silent and invincible torpor as if the fitful puffs of wind had carried to their hearts the breath of a subtle poison that, very soon, would make them die. — "Have you seen the white woman's eyes?" cried the girl. She struck her palms together loudly and remained with her arms extended, with her hands clasped. "O Hassim! Have you seen her eyes shining under her eyebrows like rays of light darting under the arched boughs in a forest? They pierced me. I shuddered at the sound of her voice! I saw her walk behind him — and it seems to me that she does not live on earth — that all this is witchcraft."

She lamented in the night. Hassim kept silent. He had no illusions and in any other man but Lingard he would have thought the proceeding no better than suicidal folly. For him Travers and d'Alcacer were two powerful Rajahs — probably relatives of the Ruler of the land of the English whom he knew to be a woman; but why they should come and interfere with the recovery of his own kingdom was an obscure problem. He was concerned for Lingard's safety. That the risk was incurred mostly for his sake — so that the prospects of the great enterprise should not be ruined by a quarrel over the lives of these whites — did not strike him so much as may be imagined. There was that in him which made such an action on Lingard's part appear all but unavoidable.

Was he not Rajah Hassim and was not the other a man of strong heart, of strong arm, of proud courage, a man great enough to protect highborn princes — a friend? Immada's words called out a smile which, like the words, was lost in the darkness. "Forget your weariness," he said, gently, "lest, O Sister, we should arrive too late." The coming day would throw its light on some decisive event. Hassim thought of his own men who guarded the Emma and he wished to be where they could hear his voice. He regretted Jaffir was not there. Hassim was saddened by the absence from his side of that man who once had carried what he thought would be his last message to his friend. It had not been the last. He had lived to cherish new hopes and to face new troubles and, perchance, to frame another message yet, while death knocked with the hands of armed enemies at the gate. The breeze steadied; the succeeding swells swung the canoe smoothly up the unbroken ridges of water travelling apace along the land. They progressed slowly; but Immada's heart was more weary than her arms, and Hassim, dipping the blade of his paddle without a splash, peered right and left, trying to make out the shadowy forms of islets. A long way ahead of the canoe and holding the same course, the brig's dinghy ran with broad lug extended, making for that narrow and winding passage between the coast and the southern shoals, which led to the mouth of the creek connecting the lagoon with the sea.

Thus on that starless night the Shallows were peopled by uneasy souls. The thick veil of clouds stretched over them, cut them off from the rest of the universe. At times Mrs. Travers had in the darkness the impression of dizzy speed, and again it seemed to her that the boat was standing still, that everything in the world was standing still and only her fancy roamed free from all trammels. Lingard, perfectly motionless by her side, steered, shaping his course by the feel of the wind. Presently he perceived ahead a ghostly flicker of faint, livid light which the earth seemed to throw up against the uniform blackness of the sky. The dinghy was approaching the expanse of the Shallows. The confused clamour of broken water deepened its note.

"How long are we going to sail like this?" asked Mrs. Travers, gently. She did not recognize the voice that pronounced the word "Always" in answer to her question. It had the impersonal ring of a voice without a master. Her heart beat fast.

"Captain Lingard!" she cried.

"Yes. What?" he said, nervously, as if startled out of a dream.

"I asked you how long we were going to sail like this," she repeated, distinctly.

"If the breeze holds we shall be in the lagoon soon after daybreak. That will be the right time, too. I shall leave you on board the hulk with Jorgenson."

"And you? What will you do?" she asked. She had to wait for a while.

"I will do what I can," she heard him say at last. There was another pause. "All I can," he added.

The breeze dropped, the sail fluttered.

"I have perfect confidence in you," she said. "But are you certain of success?"

"No."

The futility of her question came home to Mrs. Travers. In a few hours of life she had been torn away from all her certitudes, flung into a world of improbabilities. This thought instead of augmenting her distress seemed to soothe her. What she experienced was not doubt and it was not fear. It was something else. It might have been only a great fatigue.

She heard a dull detonation as if in the depth of the sea. It was hardly more than a shock and a vibration. A roller had broken amongst the shoals; the livid clearness Lingard had seen ahead flashed and flickered in expanded white sheets much nearer to the boat now. And all this — the wan burst of light, the faint shock as of something remote and immense falling into ruins, was taking place outside the limits of her life which remained encircled by an impenetrable darkness and by an impenetrable silence. Puffs of wind blew about her head and expired; the sail collapsed, shivered audibly, stood full and still in turn; and again the sensation of vertiginous speed and of absolute immobility succeeding each other with increasing swiftness merged at last into a bizarre state of headlong motion and profound peace. The darkness enfolded her like the enervating caress of a sombre universe. It was gentle and destructive. Its languor seduced her soul into surrender. Nothing existed and even all her memories vanished into space. She was content that nothing should exist.

Lingard, aware all the time of their contact in the narrow stern sheets of the boat, was startled by the pressure of the woman's head drooping on his shoulder. He stiffened himself still more as though he had tried on the approach of a danger to conceal his life in the breathless rigidity of his body. The boat soared and descended slowly; a region of foam and reefs stretched across her course hissing like a gigantic cauldron; a strong gust of wind drove her straight at it for a moment then passed on and abandoned her to the regular balancing of the swell. The struggle of the rocks forever overwhelmed and emerging, with the sea forever victorious and repulsed, fascinated the man. He watched it as he would have watched something going on within himself while Mrs. Travers slept sustained by his arm, pressed to his side, abandoned to his support. The shoals guarding the Shore of Refuge had given him his first glimpse of success — the solid support he needed for his action. The Shallows were the shelter of his dreams; their voice had the power to soothe and exalt his thoughts with the promise of freedom for his hopes. Never had there been such a generous friendship. . . . A mass of white foam whirling about a centre of intense blackness spun silently past the side of the boat. . . . That woman he held like a captive on his arm had also been given to him by the Shallows.

Suddenly his eyes caught on a distant sandbank the red gleam of Daman's camp fire instantly eclipsed like the wink of a signalling lantern along the level of the waters. It brought to his mind the existence of the two men — those other captives. If the war canoe transporting them into the lagoon had left the sands shortly after Hassim's retreat from Daman's camp, Travers and d'Alcacer were by this time far away up the creek. Every thought of action had become odious to Lingard since all he could do in

the world now was to hasten the moment of his separation from that woman to whom he had confessed the whole secret of his life.

And she slept. She could sleep! He looked down at her as he would have looked at the slumbering ignorance of a child, but the life within him had the fierce beat of supreme moments. Near by, the eddies sighed along the reefs, the water souged amongst the stones, clung round the rocks with tragic murmurs that resembled promises, good-byes, or prayers. From the unfathomable distances of the night came the booming of the swell assaulting the seaward face of the Shallows. He felt the woman's nearness with such intensity that he heard nothing. . . . Then suddenly he thought of death.

"Wake up!" he shouted in her ear, swinging round in his seat. Mrs. Travers gasped; a splash of water flicked her over the eyes and she felt the separate drops run down her cheeks, she tasted them on her lips, tepid and bitter like tears. A swishing undulation tossed the boat on high followed by another and still another; and then the boat with the breeze abeam glided through still water, laying over at a steady angle.

"Clear of the reef now," remarked Lingard in a tone of relief.

"Were we in any danger?" asked Mrs. Travers in a whisper.

"Well, the breeze dropped and we drifted in very close to the rocks," he answered. "I had to rouse you. It wouldn't have done for you to wake up suddenly struggling in the water."

So she had slept! It seemed to her incredible that she should have closed her eyes in this small boat, with the knowledge of their desperate errand, on so disturbed a sea. The man by her side leaned forward, extended his arm, and the boat going off before the wind went on faster on an even keel. A motionless black bank resting on the sea stretched infinitely right in their way in ominous stillness. She called Lingard's attention to it. "Look at this awful cloud."

"This cloud is the coast and in a moment we shall be entering the creek," he said, quietly. Mrs. Travers stared at it. Was it land — land! It seemed to her even less palpable than a cloud, a mere sinister immobility above the unrest of the sea, nursing in its depth the unrest of men who, to her mind, were no more real than fantastic shadows.

Chapter 5

What struck Mrs. Travers most, directly she set eyes on him, was the other-world aspect of Jorgenson. He had been buried out of sight so long that his tall, gaunt body, his unhurried, mechanical movements, his set face and his eyes with an empty gaze suggested an invincible indifference to all the possible surprises of the earth. That appearance of a resuscitated man who seemed to be commanded by a conjuring spell strolled along the decks of what was even to Mrs. Travers' eyes the mere corpse of a ship and turned on her a pair of deep-sunk, expressionless eyes with an almost unearthly detachment. Mrs. Travers had never been looked at before with that strange and

pregnant abstraction. Yet she didn't dislike Jorgenson. In the early morning light, white from head to foot in a perfectly clean suit of clothes which seemed hardly to contain any limbs, freshly shaven (Jorgenson's sunken cheeks with their withered colouring always had a sort of gloss as though he had the habit of shaving every two hours or so), he looked as immaculate as though he had been indeed a pure spirit superior to the soiling contacts of the material earth. He was disturbing but he was not repulsive. He gave no sign of greeting.

Lingard addressed him at once.

"You have had a regular staircase built up the side of the hulk, Jorgenson," he said. "It was very convenient for us to come aboard now, but in case of an attack don't you think . . ."

"I did think." There was nothing so dispassionate in the world as the voice of Captain H. C. Jorgenson, ex Barque Wild Rose, since he had recrossed the Waters of Oblivion to step back into the life of men. "I did think, but since I don't want to make trouble. . . ."

"Oh, you don't want to make trouble," interrupted Lingard.

"No. Don't believe in it. Do you, King Tom?"

"I may have to make trouble."

"So you came up here in this small dinghy of yours like this to start making trouble, did you?"

"What's the matter with you? Don't you know me yet, Jorgenson?"

"I thought I knew you. How could I tell that a man like you would come along for a fight bringing a woman with him?"

"This lady is Mrs. Travers," said Lingard. "The wife of one of the luckless gentlemen Daman got hold of last evening. . . . This is Jorgenson, the friend of whom I have been telling you, Mrs. Travers."

Mrs. Travers smiled faintly. Her eyes roamed far and near and the strangeness of her surroundings, the overpowering curiosity, the conflict of interest and doubt gave her the aspect of one still new to life, presenting an innocent and naive attitude before the surprises of experience. She looked very guileless and youthful between those two men. Lingard gazed at her with that unconscious tenderness mingled with wonder, which some men manifest toward girlhood. There was nothing of a conqueror of kingdoms in his bearing. Jorgenson preserved his amazing abstraction which seemed neither to hear nor see anything. But, evidently, he kept a mysterious grip on events in the world of living men because he asked very naturally:

"How did she get away?"

"The lady wasn't on the sandbank," explained Lingard, curtly.

"What sandbank?" muttered Jorgenson, perfunctorily. . . . "Is the yacht looted, Tom?"

"Nothing of the kind," said Lingard.

"Ah, many dead?" inquired Jorgenson.

"I tell you there was nothing of the kind," said Lingard, impatiently.

“What? No fight!” inquired Jorgenson again without the slightest sign of animation. “No.”

“And you a fighting man.”

“Listen to me, Jorgenson. Things turned out so that before the time came for a fight it was already too late.” He turned to Mrs. Travers still looking about with anxious eyes and a faint smile on her lips. “While I was talking to you that evening from the boat it was already too late. No. There was never any time for it. I have told you all about myself, Mrs. Travers, and you know that I speak the truth when I say too late. If you had only been alone in that yacht going about the seas!”

“Yes,” she struck in, “but I was not alone.”

Lingard dropped his chin on his breast. Already a foretaste of noonday heat staled the sparkling freshness of the morning. The smile had vanished from Edith Travers’ lips and her eyes rested on Lingard’s bowed head with an expression no longer curious but which might have appeared enigmatic to Jorgenson if he had looked at her. But Jorgenson looked at nothing. He asked from the remoteness of his dead past, “What have you left outside, Tom? What is there now?”

“There’s the yacht on the shoals, my brig at anchor, and about a hundred of the worst kind of Illanun vagabonds under three chiefs and with two war-praus moored to the edge of the bank. Maybe Daman is with them, too, out there.”

“No,” said Jorgenson, positively.

“He has come in,” cried Lingard. “He brought his prisoners in himself then.”

“Landed by torchlight,” uttered precisely the shade of Captain Jorgenson, late of the Barque Wild Rose. He swung his arm pointing across the lagoon and Mrs. Travers turned about in that direction.

All the scene was but a great light and a great solitude. Her gaze travelled over the lustrous, dark sheet of empty water to a shore bordered by a white beach empty, too, and showing no sign of human life. The human habitations were lost in the shade of the fruit trees, masked by the cultivated patches of Indian corn and the banana plantations. Near the shore the rigid lines of two stockaded forts could be distinguished flanking the beach, and between them with a great open space before it, the brown roof slope of an enormous long building that seemed suspended in the air had a great square flag fluttering above it. Something like a small white flame in the sky was the carved white coral finial on the gable of the mosque which had caught full the rays of the sun. A multitude of gay streamers, white and red, flew over the half-concealed roofs, over the brilliant fields and amongst the sombre palm groves. But it might have been a deserted settlement decorated and abandoned by its departed population. Lingard pointed to the stockade on the right.

“That’s where your husband is,” he said to Mrs. Travers.

“Who is the other?” uttered Jorgenson’s voice at their backs. He also was turned that way with his strange sightless gaze fixed beyond them into the void.

“A Spanish gentleman I believe you said, Mrs Travers,” observed Lingard.

"It is extremely difficult to believe that there is anybody there," murmured Mrs. Travers.

"Did you see them both, Jorgenson?" asked Lingard.

"Made out nobody. Too far. Too dark."

As a matter of fact Jorgenson had seen nothing, about an hour before daybreak, but the distant glare of torches while the loud shouts of an excited multitude had reached him across the water only like a faint and tempestuous murmur. Presently the lights went away processionally through the groves of trees into the armed stockades. The distant glare vanished in the fading darkness and the murmurs of the invisible crowd ceased suddenly as if carried off by the retreating shadow of the night. Daylight followed swiftly, disclosing to the sleepless Jorgenson the solitude of the shore and the ghostly outlines of the familiar forms of grouped trees and scattered human habitations. He had watched the varied colours come out in the dawn, the wide cultivated Settlement of many shades of green, framed far away by the fine black lines of the forest-edge that was its limit and its protection.

Mrs. Travers stood against the rail as motionless as a statue. Her face had lost all its mobility and her cheeks were dead white as if all the blood in her body had flowed back into her heart and had remained there. Her very lips had lost their colour. Lingard caught hold of her arm roughly.

"Don't, Mrs. Travers. Why are you terrifying yourself like this? If you don't believe what I say listen to me asking Jorgenson. . . ."

"Yes, ask me," mumbled Jorgenson in his white moustache.

"Speak straight, Jorgenson. What do you think? Are the gentlemen alive?"

"Certainly," said Jorgenson in a sort of disappointed tone as though he had expected a much more difficult question.

"Is their life in immediate danger?"

"Of course not," said Jorgenson.

Lingard turned away from the oracle. "You have heard him, Mrs. Travers. You may believe every word he says. There isn't a thought or a purpose in that Settlement," he continued, pointing at the dumb solitude of the lagoon, "that this man doesn't know as if they were his own."

"I know. Ask me," muttered Jorgenson, mechanically.

Mrs. Travers said nothing but made a slight movement and her whole rigid figure swayed dangerously. Lingard put his arm firmly round her waist and she did not seem aware of it till after she had turned her head and found Lingard's face very near her own. But his eyes full of concern looked so close into hers that she was obliged to shut them like a woman about to faint.

The effect this produced upon Lingard was such that she felt the tightening of his arm and as she opened her eyes again some of the colour returned to her face. She met the deepened expression of his solicitude with a look so steady, with a gaze that in spite of herself was so profoundly vivid that its clearness seemed to Lingard to throw

all his past life into shade. — "I don't feel faint. It isn't that at all," she declared in a perfectly calm voice. It seemed to Lingard as cold as ice.

"Very well," he agreed with a resigned smile. "But you just catch hold of that rail, please, before I let you go." She, too, forced a smile on her lips.

"What incredulity," she remarked, and for a time made not the slightest movement. At last, as if making a concession, she rested the tips of her fingers on the rail. Lingard gradually removed his arm. "And pray don't look upon me as a conventional 'weak woman' person, the delicate lady of your own conception," she said, facing Lingard, with her arm extended to the rail. "Make that effort please against your own conception of what a woman like me should be. I am perhaps as strong as you are, Captain Lingard. I mean it literally. In my body." — "Don't you think I have seen that long ago?" she heard his deep voice protesting. — "And as to my courage," Mrs. Travers continued, her expression charmingly undecided between frowns and smiles; "didn't I tell you only a few hours ago, only last evening, that I was not capable of thinking myself into a fright; you remember, when you were begging me to try something of the kind. Don't imagine that I would have been ashamed to try. But I couldn't have done it. No. Not even for the sake of somebody else's kingdom. Do you understand me?"

"God knows," said the attentive Lingard after a time, with an unexpected sigh. "You people seem to be made of another stuff."

"What has put that absurd notion into your head?"

"I didn't mean better or worse. And I wouldn't say it isn't good stuff either. What I meant to say is that it's different. One feels it. And here we are."

"Yes, here we are," repeated Mrs. Travers. "And as to this moment of emotion, what provoked it is not a concern for anybody or anything outside myself. I felt no terror. I cannot even fix my fears upon any distinct image. You think I am shamelessly heartless in telling you this."

Lingard made no sign. It didn't occur to him to make a sign. He simply hung on Mrs. Travers' words as it were only for the sake of the sound. — "I am simply frank with you," she continued. "What do I know of savagery, violence, murder? I have never seen a dead body in my life. The light, the silence, the mysterious emptiness of this place have suddenly affected my imagination, I suppose. What is the meaning of this wonderful peace in which we stand — you and I alone?"

Lingard shook his head. He saw the narrow gleam of the woman's teeth between the parted lips of her smile, as if all the ardour of her conviction had been dissolved at the end of her speech into wistful recognition of their partnership before things outside their knowledge. And he was warmed by something a little helpless in that smile. Within three feet of them the shade of Jorgenson, very gaunt and neat, stared into space.

"Yes. You are strong," said Lingard. "But a whole long night sitting in a small boat! I wonder you are not too stiff to stand."

"I am not stiff in the least," she interrupted, still smiling. "I am really a very strong woman," she added, earnestly. "Whatever happens you may reckon on that fact."

Lingard gave her an admiring glance. But the shade of Jorgenson, perhaps catching in its remoteness the sound of the word woman, was suddenly moved to begin scolding with all the liberty of a ghost, in a flow of passionless indignation.

“Woman! That’s what I say. That’s just about the last touch — that you, Tom Lingard, red-eyed Tom, King Tom, and all those fine names, that you should leave your weapons twenty miles behind you, your men, your guns, your brig that is your strength, and come along here with your mouth full of fight, bare-handed and with a woman in tow. — Well — well!”

“Don’t forget, Jorgenson, that the lady hears you,” remonstrated Lingard in a vexed tone. . . . “He doesn’t mean to be rude,” he remarked to Mrs. Travers quite loud, as if indeed Jorgenson were but an immaterial and feelingless illusion. “He has forgotten.”

“The woman is not in the least offended. I ask for nothing better than to be taken on that footing.”

“Forgot nothing!” mumbled Jorgenson with a sort of ghostly assertiveness and as it were for his own satisfaction. “What’s the world coming to?”

“It was I who insisted on coming with Captain Lingard,” said Mrs. Travers, treating Jorgenson to a fascinating sweetness of tone.

“That’s what I say! What is the world coming to? Hasn’t King Tom a mind of his own? What has come over him? He’s mad! Leaving his brig with a hundred and twenty born and bred pirates of the worst kind in two praus on the other side of a sandbank. Did you insist on that, too? Has he put himself in the hands of a strange woman?”

Jorgenson seemed to be asking those questions of himself. Mrs. Travers observed the empty stare, the self-communing voice, his unearthly lack of animation. Somehow it made it very easy to speak the whole truth to him.

“No,” she said, “it is I who am altogether in his hands.”

Nobody would have guessed that Jorgenson had heard a single word of that emphatic declaration if he had not addressed himself to Lingard with the question neither more nor less abstracted than all his other speeches.

“Why then did you bring her along?”

“You don’t understand. It was only right and proper. One of the gentlemen is the lady’s husband.”

“Oh, yes,” muttered Jorgenson. “Who’s the other?”

“You have been told. A friend.”

“Poor Mr. d’Alcacer,” said Mrs. Travers. “What bad luck for him to have accepted our invitation. But he is really a mere acquaintance.”

“I hardly noticed him,” observed Lingard, gloomily. “He was talking to you over the back of your chair when I came aboard the yacht as if he had been a very good friend.”

“We always understood each other very well,” said Mrs. Travers, picking up from the rail the long glass that was lying there. “I always liked him, the frankness of his mind, and his great loyalty.”

“What did he do?” asked Lingard.

"He loved," said Mrs. Travers, lightly. "But that's an old story." She raised the glass to her eyes, one arm extended fully to sustain the long tube, and Lingard forgot d'Alcacer in admiring the firmness of her pose and the absolute steadiness of the heavy glass. She was as firm as a rock after all those emotions and all that fatigue.

Mrs. Travers directed the glass instinctively toward the entrance of the lagoon. The smooth water there shone like a piece of silver in the dark frame of the forest. A black speck swept across the field of her vision. It was some time before she could find it again and then she saw, apparently so near as to be within reach of the voice, a small canoe with two people in it. She saw the wet paddles rising and dipping with a flash in the sunlight. She made out plainly the face of Immada, who seemed to be looking straight into the big end of the telescope. The chief and his sister, after resting under the bank for a couple of hours in the middle of the night, had entered the lagoon and were making straight for the hulk. They were already near enough to be perfectly distinguishable to the naked eye if there had been anybody on board to glance that way. But nobody was even thinking of them. They might not have existed except perhaps in the memory of old Jorgenson. But that was mostly busy with all the mysterious secrets of his late tomb.

Mrs. Travers lowered the glass suddenly. Lingard came out from a sort of trance and said:

"Mr. d'Alcacer. Loved! Why shouldn't he?"

Mrs. Travers looked frankly into Lingard's gloomy eyes. "It isn't that alone, of course," she said. "First of all he knew how to love and then. . . . You don't know how artificial and barren certain kinds of life can be. But Mr. d'Alcacer's life was not that. His devotion was worth having."

"You seem to know a lot about him," said Lingard, enviously. "Why do you smile?" She continued to smile at him for a little while. The long brass tube over her shoulder shone like gold against the pale fairness of her bare head. — "At a thought," she answered, preserving the low tone of the conversation into which they had fallen as if their words could have disturbed the self-absorption of Captain H. C. Jorgenson. "At the thought that for all my long acquaintance with Mr. d'Alcacer I don't know half as much about him as I know about you."

"Ah, that's impossible," contradicted Lingard. "Spaniard or no Spaniard, he is one of your kind."

"Tarred with the same brush," murmured Mrs. Travers, with only a half-amused irony. But Lingard continued:

"He was trying to make it up between me and your husband, wasn't he? I was too angry to pay much attention, but I liked him well enough. What pleased me most was the way in which he gave it up. That was done like a gentleman. Do you understand what I mean, Mrs. Travers?"

"I quite understand."

"Yes, you would," he commented, simply. "But just then I was too angry to talk to anybody. And so I cleared out on board my own ship and stayed there, not knowing

what to do and wishing you all at the bottom of the sea. Don't mistake me, Mrs. Travers; it's you, the people aft, that I wished at the bottom of the sea. I had nothing against the poor devils on board, They would have trusted me quick enough. So I fumed there till — till. . . ."

"Till nine o'clock or a little after," suggested Mrs. Travers, impenetrably.

"No. Till I remembered you," said Lingard with the utmost innocence.

"Do you mean to say that you forgot my existence so completely till then? You had spoken to me on board the yacht, you know."

"Did I? I thought I did. What did I say?"

"You told me not to touch a dusky princess," answered Mrs. Travers with a short laugh. Then with a visible change of mood as if she had suddenly out of a light heart been recalled to the sense of the true situation: "But indeed I meant no harm to this figure of your dream. And, look over there. She is pursuing you." Lingard glanced toward the north shore and suppressed an exclamation of remorse. For the second time he discovered that he had forgotten the existence of Hassim and Immada. The canoe was now near enough for its occupants to distinguish plainly the heads of three people above the low bulwark of the Emma. Immada let her paddle trail suddenly in the water, with the exclamation, "I see the white woman there." Her brother looked over his shoulder and the canoe floated, arrested as if by the sudden power of a spell. — "They are no dream to me," muttered Lingard, sturdily. Mrs. Travers turned abruptly away to look at the further shore. It was still and empty to the naked eye and seemed to quiver in the sunshine like an immense painted curtain lowered upon the unknown.

"Here's Rajah Hassim coming, Jorgenson. I had an idea he would perhaps stay outside." Mrs. Travers heard Lingard's voice at her back and the answering grunt of Jorgenson. She raised deliberately the long glass to her eye, pointing it at the shore.

She distinguished plainly now the colours in the flutter of the streamers above the brown roofs of the large Settlement, the stir of palm groves, the black shadows inland and the dazzling white beach of coral sand all ablaze in its formidable mystery. She swept the whole range of the view and was going to lower the glass when from behind the massive angle of the stockade there stepped out into the brilliant immobility of the landscape a man in a long white gown and with an enormous black turban surmounting a dark face. Slow and grave he paced the beach ominously in the sunshine, an enigmatical figure in an Oriental tale with something weird and menacing in its sudden emergence and lonely progress.

With an involuntary gasp Mrs. Travers lowered the glass. All at once behind her back she heard a low musical voice beginning to pour out incomprehensible words in a tone of passionate pleading. Hassim and Immada had come on board and had approached Lingard. Yes! It was intolerable to feel that this flow of soft speech which had no meaning for her could make its way straight into that man's heart.

Part 5 — The Point of Honour and the Point of Passion

Chapter 1

“May I come in?”

“Yes,” said a voice within. “The door is open.” It had a wooden latch. Mr. Travers lifted it while the voice of his wife continued as he entered. “Did you imagine I had locked myself in? Did you ever know me lock myself in?”

Mr. Travers closed the door behind him. “No, it has never come to that,” he said in a tone that was not conciliatory. In that place which was a room in a wooden hut and had a square opening without glass but with a half-closed shutter he could not distinguish his wife very well at once. She was sitting in an armchair and what he could see best was her fair hair all loose over the back of the chair. There was a moment of silence. The measured footsteps of two men pacing athwart the quarter-deck of the dead ship *Emma* commanded by the derelict shade of Jorgenson could be heard outside.

Jorgenson, on taking up his dead command, had a house of thin boards built on the after deck for his own accommodation and that of Lingard during his flying visits to the Shore of Refuge. A narrow passage divided it in two and Lingard’s side was furnished with a camp bedstead, a rough desk, and a rattan armchair. On one of his visits Lingard had brought with him a black seaman’s chest and left it there. Apart from these objects and a small looking-glass worth about half a crown and nailed to the wall there was nothing else in there whatever. What was on Jorgenson’s side of the deckhouse no one had seen, but from external evidence one could infer the existence of a set of razors.

The erection of that primitive deckhouse was a matter of propriety rather than of necessity. It was proper that the white men should have a place to themselves on board, but Lingard was perfectly accurate when he told Mrs. Travers that he had never slept there once. His practice was to sleep on deck. As to Jorgenson, if he did sleep at all he slept very little. It might have been said that he haunted rather than commanded the *Emma*. His white form flitted here and there in the night or stood for hours, silent, contemplating the sombre glimmer of the lagoon. Mr. Travers’ eyes accustomed gradually to the dusk of the place could now distinguish more of his wife’s person than the great mass of honey-coloured hair. He saw her face, the dark eyebrows and her eyes that seemed profoundly black in the half light. He said:

"You couldn't have done so here. There is neither lock nor bolt."

"Isn't there? I didn't notice. I would know how to protect myself without locks and bolts."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Travers in a sullen tone and fell silent again surveying the woman in the chair. "Indulging your taste for fancy dress," he went on with faint irony.

Mrs. Travers clasped her hands behind her head. The wide sleeves slipping back bared her arms to her shoulders. She was wearing a Malay thin cotton jacket, cut low in the neck without a collar and fastened with wrought silver clasps from the throat downward. She had replaced her yachting skirt by a blue check sarong embroidered with threads of gold. Mr. Travers' eyes travelling slowly down attached themselves to the gleaming instep of an agitated foot from which hung a light leather sandal.

"I had no clothes with me but what I stood in," said Mrs. Travers. "I found my yachting costume too heavy. It was intolerable. I was soaked in dew when I arrived. So when these things were produced for my inspection. . . ."

"By enchantment," muttered Mr. Travers in a tone too heavy for sarcasm.

"No. Out of that chest. There are very fine stuffs there."

"No doubt," said Mr. Travers. "The man wouldn't be above plundering the natives. . . ." He sat down heavily on the chest. "A most appropriate costume for this farce," he continued. "But do you mean to wear it in open daylight about the decks?"

"Indeed I do," said Mrs. Travers. "D'Alcacer has seen me already and he didn't seem shocked."

"You should," said Mr. Travers, "try to get yourself presented with some bangles for your ankles so that you may jingle as you walk."

"Bangles are not necessities," said Mrs. Travers in a weary tone and with the fixed upward look of a person unwilling to relinquish her dream. Mr. Travers dropped the subject to ask:

"And how long is this farce going to last?"

Mrs. Travers unclasped her hands, lowered her glance, and changed her whole pose in a moment.

"What do you mean by farce? What farce?"

"The one which is being played at my expense."

"You believe that?"

"Not only believe. I feel deeply that it is so. At my expense. It's a most sinister thing," Mr. Travers pursued, still with downcast eyes and in an unforgiving tone. "I must tell you that when I saw you in that courtyard in a crowd of natives and leaning on that man's arm, it gave me quite a shock."

"Did I, too, look sinister?" said Mrs. Travers, turning her head slightly toward her husband. "And yet I assure you that I was glad, profoundly glad, to see you safe from danger for a time at least. To gain time is everything. . . ."

"I ask myself," Mr. Travers meditated aloud, "was I ever in danger? Am I safe now? I don't know. I can't tell. No! All this seems an abominable farce."

There was that in his tone which made his wife continue to look at him with awakened interest. It was obvious that he suffered from a distress which was not the effect of fear; and Mrs. Travers' face expressed real concern till he added in a freezing manner: "The question, however, is as to your discretion."

She leaned back again in the chair and let her hands rest quietly in her lap. "Would you have preferred me to remain outside, in the yacht, in the near neighbourhood of these wild men who captured you? Or do you think that they, too, were got up to carry on a farce?"

"Most decidedly." Mr. Travers raised his head, though of course not his voice. "You ought to have remained in the yacht amongst white men, your servants, the sailing-master, the crew whose duty it was to. . . . Who would have been ready to die for you."

"I wonder why they should have — and why I should have asked them for that sacrifice. However, I have no doubt they would have died. Or would you have preferred me to take up my quarters on board that man's brig? We were all fairly safe there. The real reason why I insisted on coming in here was to be nearer to you — to see for myself what could be or was being done. . . . But really if you want me to explain my motives then I may just as well say nothing. I couldn't remain outside for days without news, in a state of horrible doubt. We couldn't even tell whether you and d'Alcacer were still alive till we arrived here. You might have been actually murdered on the sandbank, after Rajah Hassim and that girl had gone away; or killed while going up the river. And I wanted to know at once, as soon as possible. It was a matter of impulse. I went off in what I stood in without delaying a moment."

"Yes," said Mr. Travers. "And without even thinking of having a few things put up for me in a bag. No doubt you were in a state of excitement. Unless you took such a tragic view that it seemed to you hardly worth while to bother about my clothes."

"It was absolutely the impulse of the moment. I could have done nothing else. Won't you give me credit for it?"

Mr. Travers raised his eyes again to his wife's face. He saw it calm, her attitude reposeful. Till then his tone had been resentful, dull, without sarcasm. But now he became slightly pompous.

"No. As a matter of fact, as a matter of experience, I can't credit you with the possession of feelings appropriate to your origin, social position, and the ideas of the class to which you belong. It was the heaviest disappointment of my life. I had made up my mind not to mention it as long as I lived. This, however, seems an occasion which you have provoked yourself. It isn't at all a solemn occasion. I don't look upon it as solemn at all. It's very disagreeable and humiliating. But it has presented itself. You have never taken a serious interest in the activities of my life which of course are its distinction and its value. And why you should be carried away suddenly by a feeling toward the mere man I don't understand."

"Therefore you don't approve," Mrs. Travers commented in an even tone. "But I assure you, you may safely. My feeling was of the most conventional nature, exactly as

if the whole world were looking on. After all, we are husband and wife. It's eminently fitting that I should be concerned about your fate. Even the man you distrust and dislike so much (the warmest feeling, let me tell you, that I ever saw you display) even that man found my conduct perfectly proper. His own word. Proper. So eminently proper that it altogether silenced his objections."

Mr. Travers shifted uneasily on his seat.

"It's my belief, Edith, that if you had been a man you would have led a most irregular life. You would have been a frank adventurer. I mean morally. It has been a great grief to me. You have a scorn in you for the serious side of life, for the ideas and the ambitions of the social sphere to which you belong."

He stopped because his wife had clasped again her hands behind her head and was no longer looking at him.

"It's perfectly obvious," he began again. "We have been living amongst most distinguished men and women and your attitude to them has been always so — so negative! You would never recognize the importance of achievements, of acquired positions. I don't remember you ever admiring frankly any political or social success. I ask myself what after all you could possibly have expected from life."

"I could never have expected to hear such a speech from you. As to what I did expect! . . . I must have been very stupid."

"No, you are anything but that," declared Mr. Travers, conscientiously. "It isn't stupidity." He hesitated for a moment. "It's a kind of wilfulness, I think. I preferred not to think about this grievous difference in our points of view, which, you will admit, I could not have possibly foreseen before we. . . ."

A sort of solemn embarrassment had come over Mr. Travers. Mrs. Travers, leaning her chin on the palm of her hand, stared at the bare matchboard side of the hut.

"Do you charge me with profound girlish duplicity?" she asked, very softly.

The inside of the deckhouse was full of stagnant heat perfumed by a slight scent which seemed to emanate from the loose mass of Mrs. Travers' hair. Mr. Travers evaded the direct question which struck him as lacking fineness even to the point of impropriety.

"I must suppose that I was not in the calm possession of my insight and judgment in those days," he said. "I — I was not in a critical state of mind at the time," he admitted further; but even after going so far he did not look up at his wife and therefore missed something like the ghost of a smile on Mrs. Travers' lips. That smile was tinged with scepticism which was too deep-seated for anything but the faintest expression. Therefore she said nothing, and Mr. Travers went on as if thinking aloud:

"Your conduct was, of course, above reproach; but you made for yourself a detestable reputation of mental superiority, expressed ironically. You inspired mistrust in the best people. You were never popular."

"I was bored," murmured Mrs. Travers in a reminiscent tone and with her chin resting in the hollow of her hand.

Mr. Travers got up from the seaman's chest as unexpectedly as if he had been stung by a wasp, but, of course, with a much slower and more solemn motion.

"The matter with you, Edith, is that at heart you are perfectly primitive." Mrs. Travers stood up, too, with a supple, leisurely movement, and raising her hands to her hair turned half away with a pensive remark:

"Imperfectly civilized."

"Imperfectly disciplined," corrected Mr. Travers after a moment of dreary meditation.

She let her arms fall and turned her head.

"No, don't say that," she protested with strange earnestness. "I am the most severely disciplined person in the world. I am tempted to say that my discipline has stopped at nothing short of killing myself. I suppose you can hardly understand what I mean."

Mr. Travers made a slight grimace at the floor.

"I shall not try," he said. "It sounds like something that a barbarian, hating the delicate complexities and the restraints of a nobler life, might have said. From you it strikes me as wilful bad taste. . . . I have often wondered at your tastes. You have always liked extreme opinions, exotic costumes, lawless characters, romantic personalities — like d'Alcacer . . ."

"Poor Mr. d'Alcacer," murmured Mrs. Travers.

"A man without any ideas of duty or usefulness," said Mr. Travers, acidly. "What are you pitying him for?"

"Why! For finding himself in this position out of mere good-nature. He had nothing to expect from joining our voyage, no advantage for his political ambitions or anything of the kind. I suppose you asked him on board to break our tete-a-tete which must have grown wearisome to you."

"I am never bored," declared Mr. Travers. "D'Alcacer seemed glad to come. And, being a Spaniard, the horrible waste of time cannot matter to him in the least."

"Waste of time!" repeated Mrs. Travers, indignantly.

"He may yet have to pay for his good nature with his life."

Mr. Travers could not conceal a movement of anger.

"Ah! I forgot those assumptions," he said between his clenched teeth. "He is a mere Spaniard. He takes this farcical conspiracy with perfect nonchalance. Decayed races have their own philosophy."

"He takes it with a dignity of his own."

"I don't know what you call his dignity. I should call it lack of self-respect."

"Why? Because he is quiet and courteous, and reserves his judgment. And allow me to tell you, Martin, that you are not taking our troubles very well."

"You can't expect from me all those foreign affectations. I am not in the habit of compromising with my feelings."

Mrs. Travers turned completely round and faced her husband. "You sulk," she said. . . . Mr. Travers jerked his head back a little as if to let the word go past. — "I am outraged," he declared. Mrs. Travers recognized there something like real suffering. —

"I assure you," she said, seriously (for she was accessible to pity), "I assure you that this strange Lingard has no idea of your importance. He doesn't know anything of your social and political position and still less of your great ambitions." Mr. Travers listened with some attention. — "Couldn't you have enlightened him?" he asked. — "It would have been no use; his mind is fixed upon his own position and upon his own sense of power. He is a man of the lower classes. . . ." — "He is a brute," said Mr. Travers, obstinately, and for a moment those two looked straight into each other's eyes. — "Oh," said Mrs. Travers, slowly, "you are determined not to compromise with your feelings!" An undertone of scorn crept into her voice. "But shall I tell you what I think? I think," and she advanced her head slightly toward the pale, unshaven face that confronted her dark eyes, "I think that for all your blind scorn you judge the man well enough to feel that you can indulge your indignation with perfect safety. Do you hear? With perfect safety!" Directly she had spoken she regretted these words. Really it was unreasonable to take Mr. Travers' tricks of character more passionately on this spot of the Eastern Archipelago full of obscure plots and warring motives than in the more artificial atmosphere of the town. After all what she wanted was simply to save his life, not to make him understand anything. Mr. Travers opened his mouth and without uttering a word shut it again. His wife turned toward the looking-glass nailed to the wall. She heard his voice behind her.

"Edith, where's the truth in all this?"

She detected the anguish of a slow mind with an instinctive dread of obscure places wherein new discoveries can be made. She looked over her shoulder to say:

"It's on the surface, I assure you. Altogether on the surface."

She turned again to the looking-glass where her own face met her with dark eyes and a fair mist of hair above the smooth forehead; but her words had produced no soothing effect.

"But what does it mean?" cried Mr. Travers. "Why doesn't the fellow apologize? Why are we kept here? Are we being kept here? Why don't we get away? Why doesn't he take me back on board my yacht? What does he want from me? How did he procure our release from these people on shore who he says intended to cut our throats? Why did they give us up to him instead?"

Mrs. Travers began to twist her hair on her head.

"Matters of high policy and of local politics. Conflict of personal interests, mistrust between the parties, intrigues of individuals — you ought to know how that sort of thing works. His diplomacy made use of all that. The first thing to do was not to liberate you but to get you into his keeping. He is a very great man here and let me tell you that your safety depends on his dexterity in the use of his prestige rather than on his power which he cannot use. If you would let him talk to you I am sure he would tell you as much as it is possible for him to disclose."

"I don't want to be told about any of his rascalities. But haven't you been taken into his confidence?"

"Completely," admitted Mrs. Travers, peering into the small looking-glass.

“What is the influence you brought to bear upon this man? It looks to me as if our fate were in your hands.”

“Your fate is not in my hands. It is not even in his hands. There is a moral situation here which must be solved.”

“Ethics of blackmail,” commented Mr. Travers with unexpected sarcasm. It flashed through his wife’s mind that perhaps she didn’t know him so well as she had supposed. It was as if the polished and solemn crust of hard proprieties had cracked slightly, here and there, under the strain, disclosing the mere wrongheadedness of a common mortal. But it was only manner that had cracked a little; the marvellous stupidity of his conceit remained the same. She thought that this discussion was perfectly useless, and as she finished putting up her hair she said: “I think we had better go on deck now.”

“You propose to go out on deck like this?” muttered Mr. Travers with downcast eyes.

“Like this? Certainly. It’s no longer a novelty. Who is going to be shocked?”

Mr. Travers made no reply. What she had said of his attitude was very true. He sulked at the enormous offensiveness of men, things, and events; of words and even of glances which he seemed to feel physically resting on his skin like a pain, like a degrading contact. He managed not to wince. But he sulked. His wife continued, “And let me tell you that those clothes are fit for a princess — I mean they are of the quality, material and style custom prescribes for the highest in the land, a far-distant land where I am informed women rule as much as the men. In fact they were meant to be presented to an actual princess in due course. They were selected with the greatest care for that child Immada. Captain Lingard. . . .”

Mr. Travers made an inarticulate noise partaking of a groan and a grunt.

“Well, I must call him by some name and this I thought would be the least offensive for you to hear. After all, the man exists. But he is known also on a certain portion of the earth’s surface as King Tom. D’Alcacer is greatly taken by that name. It seems to him wonderfully well adapted to the man, in its familiarity and deference. And if you prefer. . . .”

“I would prefer to hear nothing,” said Mr. Travers, distinctly. “Not a single word. Not even from you, till I am a free agent again. But words don’t touch me. Nothing can touch me; neither your sinister warnings nor the moods of levity which you think proper to display before a man whose life, according to you, hangs on a thread.”

“I never forget it for a moment,” said Mrs. Travers. “And I not only know that it does but I also know the strength of the thread. It is a wonderful thread. You may say if you like it has been spun by the same fate which made you what you are.”

Mr. Travers felt awfully offended. He had never heard anybody, let alone his own self, addressed in such terms. The tone seemed to question his very quality. He reflected with shocked amazement that he had lived with that woman for eight years! And he said to her gloomily:

“You talk like a pagan.”

It was a very strong condemnation which apparently Mrs. Travers had failed to hear for she pursued with animation:

“But really, you can’t expect me to meditate on it all the time or shut myself up here and mourn the circumstances from morning to night. It would be morbid. Let us go on deck.”

“And you look simply heathenish in this costume,” Mr. Travers went on as though he had not been interrupted, and with an accent of deliberate disgust.

Her heart was heavy but everything he said seemed to force the tone of levity on to her lips. “As long as I don’t look like a guy,” she remarked, negligently, and then caught the direction of his lurid stare which as a matter of fact was fastened on her bare feet. She checked herself, “Oh, yes, if you prefer it I will put on my stockings. But you know I must be very careful of them. It’s the only pair I have here. I have washed them this morning in that bathroom which is built over the stern. They are now drying over the rail just outside. Perhaps you will be good enough to pass them to me when you go on deck.”

Mr. Travers spun round and went on deck without a word. As soon as she was alone Mrs. Travers pressed her hands to her temples, a gesture of distress which relieved her by its sincerity. The measured footsteps of two men came to her plainly from the deck, rhythmic and double with a suggestion of tranquil and friendly intercourse. She distinguished particularly the footfalls of the man whose life’s orbit was most remote from her own. And yet the orbits had cut! A few days ago she could not have even conceived of his existence, and now he was the man whose footsteps, it seemed to her, her ears could single unerringly in the tramp of a crowd. It was, indeed, a fabulous thing. In the half light of her over-heated shelter she let an irresolute, frightened smile pass off her lips before she, too, went on deck.

Chapter 2

An ingeniously constructed framework of light posts and thin laths occupied the greater part of the deck amidships of the Emma. The four walls of that airy structure were made of muslin. It was comparatively lofty. A door-like arrangement of light battens filled with calico was further protected by a system of curtains calculated to baffle the pursuit of mosquitoes that haunted the shores of the lagoon in great singing clouds from sunset till sunrise. A lot of fine mats covered the deck space within the transparent shelter devised by Lingard and Jorgenson to make Mrs. Travers’ existence possible during the time when the fate of the two men, and indeed probably of everybody else on board the Emma, had to hang in the balance. Very soon Lingard’s unbidden and fatal guests had learned the trick of stepping in and out of the place quickly. Mr. d’Alcacer performed the feat without apparent haste, almost nonchalantly, yet as well as anybody. It was generally conceded that he had never let a mosquito in together with himself. Mr. Travers dodged in and out without grace and was obviously

much irritated at the necessity. Mrs. Travers did it in a manner all her own, with marked cleverness and an unconscious air. There was an improvised table in there and some wicker armchairs which Jorgenson had produced from somewhere in the depths of the ship. It was hard to say what the inside of the Emma did not contain. It was crammed with all sorts of goods like a general store. That old hulk was the arsenal and the war-chest of Lingard's political action; she was stocked with muskets and gunpowder, with bales of longcloth, of cotton prints, of silks; with bags of rice and currency brass guns. She contained everything necessary for dealing death and distributing bribes, to act on the cupidity and upon the fears of men, to march and to organize, to feed the friends and to combat the enemies of the cause. She held wealth and power in her flanks, that grounded ship that would swim no more, without masts and with the best part of her deck cumbered by the two structures of thin boards and of transparent muslin.

Within the latter lived the Europeans, visible in the daytime to the few Malays on board as if through a white haze. In the evening the lighting of the hurricane lamps inside turned them into dark phantoms surrounded by a shining mist, against which the insect world rushing in its millions out of the forest on the bank was baffled mysteriously in its assault. Rigidly enclosed by transparent walls, like captives of an enchanted cobweb, they moved about, sat, gesticulated, conversed publicly during the day; and at night when all the lanterns but one were extinguished, their slumbering shapes covered all over by white cotton sheets on the camp bedsteads, which were brought in every evening, conveyed the gruesome suggestion of dead bodies reposing on stretchers. The food, such as it was, was served within that glorified mosquito net which everybody called the "Cage" without any humorous intention. At meal times the party from the yacht had the company of Lingard who attached to this ordeal a sense of duty performed at the altar of civility and conciliation. He could have no conception how much his presence added to the exasperation of Mr. Travers because Mr. Travers' manner was too intensely consistent to present any shades. It was determined by an ineradicable conviction that he was a victim held to ransom on some incomprehensible terms by an extraordinary and outrageous bandit. This conviction, strung to the highest pitch, never left him for a moment, being the object of indignant meditation to his mind, and even clinging, as it were, to his very body. It lurked in his eyes, in his gestures, in his ungracious mutters, and in his sinister silences. The shock to his moral being had ended by affecting Mr. Travers' physical machine. He was aware of hepatic pains, suffered from accesses of somnolence and suppressed gusts of fury which frightened him secretly. His complexion had acquired a yellow tinge, while his heavy eyes had become bloodshot because of the smoke of the open wood fires during his three days' detention inside Belarab's stockade. His eyes had been always very sensitive to outward conditions. D'Alcacer's fine black eyes were more enduring and his appearance did not differ very much from his ordinary appearance on board the yacht. He had accepted with smiling thanks the offer of a thin blue flannel tunic from Jorgenson. Those two men were much of the same build, though of course d'Alcacer, quietly

alive and spiritually watchful, did not resemble Jorgenson, who, without being exactly macabre, behaved more like an indifferent but restless corpse. Those two could not be said to have ever conversed together. Conversation with Jorgenson was an impossible thing. Even Lingard never attempted the feat. He propounded questions to Jorgenson much as a magician would interrogate an evoked shade, or gave him curt directions as one would make use of some marvellous automaton. And that was apparently the way in which Jorgenson preferred to be treated. Lingard's real company on board the Emma was d'Alcacer. D'Alcacer had met Lingard on the easy terms of a man accustomed all his life to good society in which the very affectations must be carried on without effort. Whether affectation, or nature, or inspired discretion, d'Alcacer never let the slightest curiosity pierce the smoothness of his level, grave courtesy lightened frequently by slight smiles which often had not much connection with the words he uttered, except that somehow they made them sound kindly and as it were tactful. In their character, however, those words were strictly neutral.

The only time when Lingard had detected something of a deeper comprehension in d'Alcacer was the day after the long negotiations inside Belarab's stockade for the temporary surrender of the prisoners. That move had been suggested to him, exactly as Mrs. Travers had told her husband, by the rivalries of the parties and the state of public opinion in the Settlement deprived of the presence of the man who, theoretically at least, was the greatest power and the visible ruler of the Shore of Refuge. Belarab still lingered at his father's tomb. Whether that man of the embittered and pacific heart had withdrawn there to meditate upon the unruliness of mankind and the thankless nature of his task; or whether he had gone there simply to bathe in a particularly clear pool which was a feature of the place, give himself up to the enjoyment of a certain fruit which grew in profusion there and indulge for a time in a scrupulous performance of religious exercises, his absence from the Settlement was a fact of the utmost gravity. It is true that the prestige of a long-unquestioned rulership and the long-settled mental habits of the people had caused the captives to be taken straight to Belarab's stockade as a matter of course. Belarab, at a distance, could still outweigh the power on the spot of Tengga, whose secret purposes were no better known, who was jovial, talkative, outspoken and pugnacious; but who was not a professed servant of God famed for many charities and a scrupulous performance of pious practices, and who also had no father who had achieved a local saintship. But Belarab, with his glamour of asceticism and melancholy together with a reputation for severity (for a man so pious would be naturally ruthless), was not on the spot. The only favourable point in his absence was the fact that he had taken with him his latest wife, the same lady whom Jorgenson had mentioned in his letter to Lingard as anxious to bring about battle, murder, and the looting of the yacht, not because of inborn wickedness of heart but from a simple desire for silks, jewels and other objects of personal adornment, quite natural in a girl so young and elevated to such a high position. Belarab had selected her to be the companion of his retirement and Lingard was glad of it. He was not afraid of her influence over Belarab. He knew his man. No words, no blandishments,

no sulks, scoldings, or whisperings of a favourite could affect either the resolves or the irresolutions of that Arab whose action ever seemed to hang in mystic suspense between the contradictory speculations and judgments disputing the possession of his will. It was not what Belarab would either suddenly do or leisurely determine upon that Lingard was afraid of. The danger was that in his taciturn hesitation, which had something hopelessly godlike in its remote calmness, the man would do nothing and leave his white friend face to face with unruly impulses against which Lingard had no means of action but force which he dared not use since it would mean the destruction of his plans and the downfall of his hopes; and worse still would wear an aspect of treachery to Hassim and Immada, those fugitives whom he had snatched away from the jaws of death on a night of storm and had promised to lead back in triumph to their own country he had seen but once, sleeping unmoved under the wrath and fire of heaven.

On the afternoon of the very day he had arrived with her on board the Emma — to the infinite disgust of Jorgenson — Lingard held with Mrs. Travers (after she had had a couple of hours' rest) a long, fiery, and perplexed conversation. From the nature of the problem it could not be exhaustive; but toward the end of it they were both feeling thoroughly exhausted. Mrs. Travers had no longer to be instructed as to facts and possibilities. She was aware of them only too well and it was not her part to advise or argue. She was not called upon to decide or to plead. The situation was far beyond that. But she was worn out with watching the passionate conflict within the man who was both so desperately reckless and so rigidly restrained in the very ardour of his heart and the greatness of his soul. It was a spectacle that made her forget the actual questions at issue. This was no stage play; and yet she had caught herself looking at him with bated breath as at a great actor on a darkened stage in some simple and tremendous drama. He extorted from her a response to the forces that seemed to tear at his single-minded brain, at his guileless breast. He shook her with his own struggles, he possessed her with his emotions and imposed his personality as if its tragedy were the only thing worth considering in this matter. And yet what had she to do with all those obscure and barbarous things? Obviously nothing. Unluckily she had been taken into the confidence of that man's passionate perplexity, a confidence provoked apparently by nothing but the power of her personality. She was flattered, and even more, she was touched by it; she was aware of something that resembled gratitude and provoked a sort of emotional return as between equals who had secretly recognized each other's value. Yet at the same time she regretted not having been left in the dark; as much in the dark as Mr. Travers himself or d'Alcacer, though as to the latter it was impossible to say how much precise, unaccountable, intuitive knowledge was buried under his unruffled manner.

D'Alcacer was the sort of man whom it would be much easier to suspect of anything in the world than ignorance — or stupidity. Naturally he couldn't know anything definite or even guess at the bare outline of the facts but somehow he must have scented the situation in those few days of contact with Lingard. He was an acute

and sympathetic observer in all his secret aloofness from the life of men which was so very different from Jorgenson's secret divorce from the passions of this earth. Mrs. Travers would have liked to share with d'Alcacer the burden (for it was a burden) of Lingard's story. After all, she had not provoked those confidences, neither had that unexpected adventurer from the sea laid on her an obligation of secrecy. No, not even by implication. He had never said to her that she was the only person whom he wished to know that story.

No. What he had said was that she was the only person to whom he could tell the tale himself, as if no one else on earth had the power to draw it from him. That was the sense and nothing more. Yes, it would have been a relief to tell d'Alcacer. It would have been a relief to her feeling of being shut off from the world alone with Lingard as if within the four walls of a romantic palace and in an exotic atmosphere. Yes, that relief and also another: that of sharing the responsibility with somebody fit to understand. Yet she shrank from it, with unaccountable reserve, as if by talking of Lingard with d'Alcacer she was bound to give him an insight into herself. It was a vague uneasiness and yet so persistent that she felt it, too, when she had to approach and talk to Lingard under d'Alcacer's eyes. Not that Mr. d'Alcacer would ever dream of staring or even casting glances. But was he averting his eyes on purpose? That would be even more offensive.

"I am stupid," whispered Mrs. Travers to herself, with a complete and reassuring conviction. Yet she waited motionless till the footsteps of the two men stopped outside the deckhouse, then separated and died away, before she went out on deck. She came out on deck some time after her husband. As if in intended contrast to the conflicts of men a great aspect of serenity lay upon all visible things. Mr. Travers had gone inside the Cage in which he really looked like a captive and thoroughly out of place. D'Alcacer had gone in there, too, but he preserved — or was it an illusion? — an air of independence. It was not that he put it on. Like Mr. Travers he sat in a wicker armchair in very much the same attitude as the other gentleman and also silent; but there was somewhere a subtle difference which did away with the notion of captivity. Moreover, d'Alcacer had that peculiar gift of never looking out of place in any surroundings. Mrs. Travers, in order to save her European boots for active service, had been persuaded to use a pair of leather sandals also extracted from that seaman's chest in the deckhouse. An additional fastening had been put on them but she could not avoid making a delicate clatter as she walked on the deck. No part of her costume made her feel so exotic. It also forced her to alter her usual gait and move with quick, short steps very much like Immada.

"I am robbing the girl of her clothes," she had thought to herself, "besides other things." She knew by this time that a girl of such high rank would never dream of wearing anything that had been worn by somebody else.

At the slight noise of Mrs. Travers' sandals d'Alcacer looked over the back of his chair. But he turned his head away at once and Mrs. Travers, leaning her elbow on

the rail and resting her head on the palm of her hand, looked across the calm surface of the lagoon, idly.

She was turning her back on the Cage, the fore-part of the deck and the edge of the nearest forest. That great erection of enormous solid trunks, dark, rugged columns festooned with writhing creepers and steeped in gloom, was so close to the bank that by looking over the side of the ship she could see inverted in the glassy belt of water its massive and black reflection on the reflected sky that gave the impression of a clear blue abyss seen through a transparent film. And when she raised her eyes the same abysmal immobility seemed to reign over the whole sun-bathed enlargement of that lagoon which was one of the secret places of the earth. She felt strongly her isolation. She was so much the only being of her kind moving within this mystery that even to herself she looked like an apparition without rights and without defence and that must end by surrendering to those forces which seemed to her but the expression of the unconscious genius of the place. Hers was the most complete loneliness, charged with a catastrophic tension. It lay about her as though she had been set apart within a magic circle. It cut off — but it did not protect. The footsteps that she knew how to distinguish above all others on that deck were heard suddenly behind her. She did not turn her head.

Since that afternoon when the gentlemen, as Lingard called them, had been brought on board, Mrs. Travers and Lingard had not exchanged one significant word.

When Lingard had decided to proceed by way of negotiation she had asked him on what he based his hope of success; and he had answered her: "On my luck." What he really depended on was his prestige; but even if he had been aware of such a word he would not have used it, since it would have sounded like a boast. And, besides, he did really believe in his luck. Nobody, either white or brown, had ever doubted his word and that, of course, gave him great assurance in entering upon the negotiation. But the ultimate issue of it would be always a matter of luck. He said so distinctly to Mrs. Travers at the moment of taking leave of her, with Jorgenson already waiting for him in the boat that was to take them across the lagoon to Belarab's stockade.

Startled by his decision (for it had come suddenly clinched by the words "I believe I can do it"), Mrs. Travers had dropped her hand into his strong open palm on which an expert in palmistry could have distinguished other lines than the line of luck. Lingard's hand closed on hers with a gentle pressure. She looked at him, speechless. He waited for a moment, then in an unconsciously tender voice he said: "Well, wish me luck then."

She remained silent. And he still holding her hand looked surprised at her hesitation. It seemed to her that she could not let him go, and she didn't know what to say till it occurred to her to make use of the power she knew she had over him. She would try it again. "I am coming with you," she declared with decision. "You don't suppose I could remain here in suspense for hours, perhaps."

He dropped her hand suddenly as if it had burnt him — "Oh, yes, of course," he mumbled with an air of confusion. One of the men over there was her husband! And nothing less could be expected from such a woman. He had really nothing to say but

she thought he hesitated. — "Do you think my presence would spoil everything? I assure you I am a lucky person, too, in a way. . . . As lucky as you, at least," she had added in a murmur and with a smile which provoked his responsive mutter — "Oh, yes, we are a lucky pair of people." — "I count myself lucky in having found a man like you to fight my — our battles," she said, warmly. "Suppose you had not existed? . . . You must let me come with you!" For the second time before her expressed wish to stand by his side he bowed his head. After all, if things came to the worst, she would be as safe between him and Jorgenson as left alone on board the Emma with a few Malay spearmen for all defence. For a moment Lingard thought of picking up the pistols he had taken out of his belt preparatory to joining Jorgenson in the boat, thinking it would be better to go to a big talk completely unarmed. They were lying on the rail but he didn't pick them up. Four shots didn't matter. They could not matter if the world of his creation were to go to pieces. He said nothing of that to Mrs. Travers but busied himself in giving her the means to alter her personal appearance. It was then that the sea-chest in the deckhouse was opened for the first time before the interested Mrs. Travers who had followed him inside. Lingard handed to her a Malay woman's light cotton coat with jewelled clasps to put over her European dress. It covered half of her yachting skirt. Mrs. Travers obeyed him without comment. He pulled out a long and wide scarf of white silk embroidered heavily on the edges and ends, and begged her to put it over her head and arrange the ends so as to muffle her face, leaving little more than her eyes exposed to view. — "We are going amongst a lot of Mohammedans," he explained. — "I see. You want me to look respectable," she jested. — "I assure you, Mrs. Travers," he protested, earnestly, "that most of the people there and certainly all the great men have never seen a white woman in their lives. But perhaps you would like better one of those other scarves? There are three in there." — "No, I like this one well enough. They are all very gorgeous. I see that the Princess is to be sent back to her land with all possible splendour. What a thoughtful man you are, Captain Lingard. That child will be touched by your generosity. . . . Will I do like this?"

"Yes," said Lingard, averting his eyes. Mrs. Travers followed him into the boat where the Malays stared in silence while Jorgenson, stiff and angular, gave no sign of life, not even so much as a movement of the eyes. Lingard settled her in the stern sheets and sat down by her side. The ardent sunshine devoured all colours. The boat swam forward on the glare heading for the strip of coral beach dazzling like a crescent of metal raised to a white heat. They landed. Gravely, Jorgenson opened above Mrs. Travers' head a big white cotton parasol and she advanced between the two men, dazed, as if in a dream and having no other contact with the earth but through the soles of her feet. Everything was still, empty, incandescent, and fantastic. Then when the gate of the stockade was thrown open she perceived an expectant and still multitude of bronze figures draped in coloured stuffs. They crowded the patches of shade under the three lofty forest trees left within the enclosure between the sun-smitten empty spaces of hard-baked ground. The broad blades of the spears decorated with crimson tufts of horsehair had a cool gleam under the outspread boughs. To the left a group

of buildings on piles with long verandahs and immense roofs towered high in the air above the heads of the crowd, and seemed to float in the glare, looking much less substantial than their heavy shadows. Lingard, pointing to one of the smallest, said in an undertone, "I lived there for a fortnight when I first came to see Belarab"; and Mrs. Travers felt more than ever as if walking in a dream when she perceived beyond the rails of its verandah and visible from head to foot two figures in an armour of chain mail with pointed steel helmets crested with white and black feathers and guarding the closed door. A high bench draped in turkey cloth stood in an open space of the great audience shed. Lingard led her up to it, Jorgenson on her other side closed the parasol calmly, and when she sat down between them the whole throng before her eyes sank to the ground with one accord disclosing in the distance of the courtyard a lonely figure leaning against the smooth trunk of a tree. A white cloth was fastened round his head by a yellow cord. Its pointed ends fell on his shoulders, framing a thin dark face with large eyes, a silk cloak striped black and white fell to his feet, and in the distance he looked aloof and mysterious in his erect and careless attitude suggesting assurance and power.

Lingard, bending slightly, whispered into Mrs. Travers' ear that that man, apart and dominating the scene, was Daman, the supreme leader of the Illanuns, the one who had ordered the capture of those gentlemen in order perhaps to force his hand. The two barbarous, half-naked figures covered with ornaments and charms, squatting at his feet with their heads enfolded in crimson and gold handkerchiefs and with straight swords lying across their knees, were the Pangerans who carried out the order, and had brought the captives into the lagoon. But the two men in chain armour on watch outside the door of the small house were Belarab's two particular body-guards, who got themselves up in that way only on very great occasions. They were the outward and visible sign that the prisoners were in Belarab's keeping, and this was good, so far. The pity was that the Great Chief himself was not there. Then Lingard assumed a formal pose and Mrs. Travers stared into the great courtyard and with rows and rows of faces ranged on the ground at her feet felt a little giddy for a moment.

Every movement had died in the crowd. Even the eyes were still under the variegated mass of coloured headkerchiefs: while beyond the open gate a noble palm tree looked intensely black against the glitter of the lagoon and the pale incandescence of the sky. Mrs. Travers gazing that way wondered at the absence of Hassim and Immada. But the girl might have been somewhere within one of the houses with the ladies of Belarab's stockade. Then suddenly Mrs. Travers became aware that another bench had been brought out and was already occupied by five men dressed in gorgeous silks, and embroidered velvets, round-faced and grave. Their hands reposed on their knees; but one amongst them clad in a white robe and with a large nearly black turban on his head leaned forward a little with his chin in his hand. His cheeks were sunken and his eyes remained fixed on the ground as if to avoid looking at the infidel woman.

She became aware suddenly of a soft murmur, and glancing at Lingard she saw him in an attitude of impassive attention. The momentous negotiations had begun, and it

went on like this in low undertones with long pauses and in the immobility of all the attendants squatting on the ground, with the distant figure of Daman far off in the shade towering over all the assembly. But in him, too, Mrs. Travers could not detect the slightest movement while the slightly modulated murmurs went on enveloping her in a feeling of peace.

The fact that she couldn't understand anything of what was said soothed her apprehensions. Sometimes a silence fell and Lingard bending toward her would whisper, "It isn't so easy," and the stillness would be so perfect that she would hear the flutter of a pigeon's wing somewhere high up in the great overshadowing trees. And suddenly one of the men before her without moving a limb would begin another speech rendered more mysterious still by the total absence of action or play of feature. Only the watchfulness of the eyes which showed that the speaker was not communing with himself made it clear that this was not a spoken meditation but a flow of argument directed to Lingard who now and then uttered a few words either with a grave or a smiling expression. They were always followed by murmurs which seemed mostly to her to convey assent; and then a reflective silence would reign again and the immobility of the crowd would appear more perfect than before.

When Lingard whispered to her that it was now his turn to make a speech Mrs. Travers expected him to get up and assert himself by some commanding gesture. But he did not. He remained seated, only his voice had a vibrating quality though he obviously tried to restrain it, and it travelled masterfully far into the silence. He spoke for a long time while the sun climbing the unstained sky shifted the diminished shadows of the trees, pouring on the heads of men its heat through the thick and motionless foliage. Whenever murmurs arose he would stop and glancing fearlessly at the assembly, wait till they subsided. Once or twice, they rose to a loud hum and Mrs. Travers could hear on the other side of her Jorgenson muttering something in his moustache. Beyond the rows of heads Daman under the tree had folded his arms on his breast. The edge of the white cloth concealed his forehead and at his feet the two Illanun chiefs, half naked and bedecked with charms and ornaments of bright feathers, of shells, with necklaces of teeth, claws, and shining beads, remained cross-legged with their swords across their knees like two bronze idols. Even the plumes of their head-dresses stirred not.

"Sudah! It is finished!" A movement passed along all the heads, the seated bodies swayed to and fro. Lingard had ceased speaking. He remained seated for a moment looking his audience all over and when he stood up together with Mrs. Travers and Jorgenson the whole assembly rose from the ground together and lost its ordered formation. Some of Belarab's retainers, young broad-faced fellows, wearing a sort of uniform of check-patterned sarongs, black silk jackets and crimson skull-caps set at a rakish angle, swaggered through the broken groups and ranged themselves in two rows before the motionless Daman and his Illanun chiefs in martial array. The members of the council who had left their bench approached the white people with gentle smiles and deferential movements of the hands. Their bearing was faintly propitiatory; only

the man in the big turban remained fanatically aloof, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground.

"I have done it," murmured Lingard to Mrs. Travers. — "Was it very difficult?" she asked. — "No," he said, conscious in his heart that he had strained to the fullest extent the prestige of his good name and that habit of deference to his slightest wish established by the glamour of his wealth and the fear of his personality in this great talk which after all had done nothing except put off the decisive hour. He offered Mrs. Travers his arm ready to lead her away, but at the last moment did not move.

With an authoritative gesture Daman had parted the ranks of Belarab's young followers with the red skullcaps and was seen advancing toward the whites striking into an astonished silence all the scattered groups in the courtyard. But the broken ranks had closed behind him. The Illanun chiefs, for all their truculent aspect, were much too prudent to attempt to move. They had not needed for that the faint warning murmur from Daman. He advanced alone. The plain hilt of a sword protruded from the open edges of his cloak. The parted edges disclosed also the butts of two flintlock pistols. The Koran in a velvet case hung on his breast by a red cord of silk. He was pious, magnificent, and warlike, with calm movements and a straight glance from under the hem of the simple piece of linen covering his head. He carried himself rigidly and his bearing had a sort of solemn modesty. Lingard said hurriedly to Mrs. Travers that the man had met white people before and that, should he attempt to shake hands with her, she ought to offer her own covered with the end of her scarf. — "Why?" she asked. "Propriety?" — "Yes, it will be better," said Lingard and the next moment Mrs. Travers felt her enveloped hand pressed gently by slender dark fingers and felt extremely Oriental herself when, with her face muffled to the eyes, she encountered the lustrous black stare of the sea-robbers' leader. It was only for an instant, because Daman turned away at once to shake hands with Lingard. In the straight, ample folds of his robes he looked very slender facing the robust white man.

"Great is your power," he said, in a pleasant voice. "The white men are going to be delivered to you."

"Yes, they pass into my keeping," said Lingard, returning the other's bright smile but otherwise looking grim enough with the frown which had settled on his forehead at Daman's approach. He glanced over his shoulder at a group of spearmen escorting the two captives who had come down the steps from the hut. At the sight of Daman barring as it were Lingard's way they had stopped at some distance and had closed round the two white men. Daman also glanced dispassionately that way.

"They were my guests," he murmured. "Please God I shall come soon to ask you for them . . . as a friend," he added after a slight pause.

"And please God you will not go away empty handed," said Lingard, smoothing his brow. "After all you and I were not meant to meet only to quarrel. Would you have preferred to see them pass into Tengga's keeping?"

"Tengga is fat and full of wiles," said Daman, disdainfully, "a mere shopkeeper smitten by a desire to be a chief. He is nothing. But you and I are men that have real

power. Yet there is a truth that you and I can confess to each other. Men's hearts grow quickly discontented. Listen. The leaders of men are carried forward in the hands of their followers; and common men's minds are unsteady, their desires changeable, and their thoughts not to be trusted. You are a great chief they say. Do not forget that I am a chief, too, and a leader of armed men."

"I have heard of you, too," said Lingard in a composed voice.

Daman had cast his eyes down. Suddenly he opened them very wide with an effect that startled Mrs. Travers. — "Yes. But do you see?" Mrs. Travers, her hand resting lightly on Lingard's arm, had the sensation of acting in a gorgeously got up play on the brilliantly lighted stage of an exotic opera whose accompaniment was not music but the varied strains of the all-pervading silence. — "Yes, I see," Lingard replied with a surprisingly confidential intonation. "But power, too, is in the hands of a great leader."

Mrs. Travers watched the faint movements of Daman's nostrils as though the man were suffering from some powerful emotion, while under her fingers Lingard's forearm in its white sleeve was as steady as a limb of marble. Without looking at him she seemed to feel that with one movement he could crush that nervous figure in which lived the breath of the great desert haunted by his nomad, camel-riding ancestors. — "Power is in the hand of God," he said, all animation dying out of his face, and paused to wait for Lingard's "Very true," then continued with a fine smile, "but He apportions it according to His will for His own purposes, even to those that are not of the Faith."

"Such being the will of God you should harbour no bitterness against them in your heart."

The low exclamation, "Against those!" and a slight dismissing gesture of a meagre dark hand out of the folds of the cloak were almost understandable to Mrs. Travers in the perfection of their melancholy contempt, and gave Lingard a further insight into the character of the ally secured to him by the diplomacy of Belarab. He was only half reassured by this assumption of superior detachment. He trusted to the man's self-interest more; for Daman no doubt looked to the reconquered kingdom for the reward of dignity and ease. His father and grandfather (the men of whom Jorgenson had written as having been hanged for an example twelve years before) had been friends of Sultans, advisers of Rulers, wealthy financiers of the great raiding expeditions of the past. It was hatred that had turned Daman into a self-made outcast, till Belarab's diplomacy had drawn him out from some obscure and uneasy retreat.

In a few words Lingard assured Daman of the complete safety of his followers as long as they themselves made no attempt to get possession of the stranded yacht. Lingard understood very well that the capture of Travers and d'Alcacer was the result of a sudden fear, a move directed by Daman to secure his own safety. The sight of the stranded yacht shook his confidence completely. It was as if the secrets of the place had been betrayed. After all, it was perhaps a great folly to trust any white man, no matter how much he seemed estranged from his own people. Daman felt he might have been the victim of a plot. Lingard's brig appeared to him a formidable engine of war. He did not know what to think and the motive for getting hold of the two white men

was really the wish to secure hostages. Distrusting the fierce impulses of his followers he had hastened to put them into Belarab's keeping. But everything in the Settlement seemed to him suspicious: Belarab's absence, Jorgenson's refusal to make over at once the promised supply of arms and ammunition. And now that white man had by the power of his speech got them away from Belarab's people. So much influence filled Daman with wonder and awe. A recluse for many years in the most obscure corner of the Archipelago he felt himself surrounded by intrigues. But the alliance was a great thing, too. He did not want to quarrel. He was quite willing for the time being to accept Lingard's assurance that no harm should befall his people encamped on the sandbanks. Attentive and slight, he seemed to let Lingard's deliberate words sink into him. The force of that unarmed big man seemed overwhelming. He bowed his head slowly.

"Allah is our refuge," he murmured, accepting the inevitable.

He delighted Mrs. Travers not as a living being but like a clever sketch in colours, a vivid rendering of an artist's vision of some soul, delicate and fierce. His bright half-smile was extraordinary, sharp like clear steel, painfully penetrating. Glancing right and left Mrs. Travers saw the whole courtyard smitten by the desolating fury of sunshine and peopled with shadows, their forms and colours fading in the violence of the light. The very brown tones of roof and wall dazzled the eye. Then Daman stepped aside. He was no longer smiling and Mrs. Travers advanced with her hand on Lingard's arm through a heat so potent that it seemed to have a taste, a feel, a smell of its own. She moved on as if floating in it with Lingard's support.

"Where are they?" she asked.

"They are following us all right," he answered. Lingard was so certain that the prisoners would be delivered to him on the beach that he never glanced back till, after reaching the boat, he and Mrs. Travers turned about.

The group of spearmen parted right and left, and Mr. Travers and d'Alcacer walked forward alone looking unreal and odd like their own day-ghosts. Mr. Travers gave no sign of being aware of his wife's presence. It was certainly a shock to him. But d'Alcacer advanced smiling, as if the beach were a drawing room.

With a very few paddlers the heavy old European-built boat moved slowly over the water that seemed as pale and blazing as the sky above. Jorgenson had perched himself in the bow. The other four white people sat in the stern sheets, the ex-prisoners side by side in the middle. Lingard spoke suddenly.

"I want you both to understand that the trouble is not over yet. Nothing is finished. You are out on my bare word."

While Lingard was speaking Mr. Travers turned his face away but d'Alcacer listened courteously. Not another word was spoken for the rest of the way. The two gentlemen went up the ship's side first. Lingard remained to help Mrs. Travers at the foot of the ladder. She pressed his hand strongly and looking down at his upturned face:

"This was a wonderful success," she said.

For a time the character of his fascinated gaze did not change. It was as if she had said nothing. Then he whispered, admiringly, "You understand everything."

She moved her eyes away and had to disengage her hand to which he clung for a moment, giddy, like a man falling out of the world.

Chapter 3

Mrs. Travers, acutely aware of Lingard behind her, remained gazing over the lagoon. After a time he stepped forward and placed himself beside her close to the rail. She went on staring at the sheet of water turned to deep purple under the sunset sky.

"Why have you been avoiding me since we came back from the stockade?" she asked in a deadened voice.

"There is nothing to tell you till Rajah Hassim and his sister Immada return with some news," Lingard answered in the same tone. "Has my friend succeeded? Will Belarab listen to any arguments? Will he consent to come out of his shell? Is he on his way back? I wish I knew! . . . Not a whisper comes from there! He may have started two days ago and he may be now near the outskirts of the Settlement. Or he may have gone into camp half way down, from some whim or other; or he may be already arrived for all I know. We should not have seen him. The road from the hills does not lead along the beach."

He snatched nervously at the long glass and directed it at the dark stockade. The sun had sunk behind the forests leaving the contour of the tree-tops outlined by a thread of gold under a band of delicate green lying across the lower sky. Higher up a faint crimson glow faded into the darkened blue overhead. The shades of the evening deepened over the lagoon, clung to the sides of the Emma and to the forms of the further shore. Lingard laid the glass down.

"Mr. d'Alcacer, too, seems to have been avoiding me," said Mrs. Travers. "You are on very good terms with him, Captain Lingard."

"He is a very pleasant man," murmured Lingard, absently. "But he says funny things sometimes. He inquired the other day if there were any playing cards on board, and when I asked him if he liked card-playing, just for something to say, he told me with that queer smile of his that he had read a story of some people condemned to death who passed the time before execution playing card games with their guards."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him that there were probably cards on board somewhere — Jorgenson would know. Then I asked him whether he looked on me as a gaoler. He was quite startled and sorry for what he said."

"It wasn't very kind of you, Captain Lingard."

"It slipped out awkwardly and we made it up with a laugh."

Mrs. Travers leaned her elbows on the rail and put her head into her hands. Every attitude of that woman surprised Lingard by its enchanting effect upon himself. He sighed, and the silence lasted for a long while.

“I wish I had understood every word that was said that morning.”

“That morning,” repeated Lingard. “What morning do you mean?”

“I mean the morning when I walked out of Belarab’s stockade on your arm, Captain Lingard, at the head of the procession. It seemed to me that I was walking on a splendid stage in a scene from an opera, in a gorgeous show fit to make an audience hold its breath. You can’t possibly guess how unreal all this seemed, and how artificial I felt myself. An opera, you know. . . .”

“I know. I was a gold digger at one time. Some of us used to come down to Melbourne with our pockets full of money. I daresay it was poor enough to what you must have seen, but once I went to a show like that. It was a story acted to music. All the people went singing through it right to the very end.”

“How it must have jarred on your sense of reality,” said Mrs. Travers, still not looking at him. “You don’t remember the name of the opera?”

“No. I never troubled my head about it. We — our lot never did.”

“I won’t ask you what the story was like. It must have appeared to you like the very defiance of all truth. Would real people go singing through their life anywhere except in a fairy tale?”

“These people didn’t always sing for joy,” said Lingard, simply. “I don’t know much about fairy tales.”

“They are mostly about princesses,” murmured Mrs. Travers.

Lingard didn’t quite hear. He bent his ear for a moment but she wasn’t looking at him and he didn’t ask her to repeat her remark. “Fairy tales are for children, I believe,” he said. “But that story with music I am telling you of, Mrs. Travers, was not a tale for children. I assure you that of the few shows I have seen that one was the most real to me. More real than anything in life.”

Mrs. Travers, remembering the fatal inanity of most opera librettos, was touched by these words as if there had been something pathetic in this readiness of response; as if she had heard a starved man talking of the delight of a crust of dry bread. “I suppose you forgot yourself in that story, whatever it was,” she remarked in a detached tone.

“Yes, it carried me away. But I suppose you know the feeling.”

“No. I never knew anything of the kind, not even when I was a chit of a girl.” Lingard seemed to accept this statement as an assertion of superiority. He inclined his head slightly. Moreover, she might have said what she liked. What pleased him most was her not looking at him; for it enabled him to contemplate with perfect freedom the curve of her cheek, her small ear half hidden by the clear mesh of fine hair, the fascination of her uncovered neck. And her whole person was an impossible, an amazing and solid marvel which somehow was not so much convincing to the eye as to something within him that was apparently independent of his senses. Not even for a moment did he think of her as remote. Untouchable — possibly! But remote — no. Whether consciously or

unconsciously he took her spiritually for granted. It was materially that she was a wonder of the sort that is at the same time familiar and sacred.

“No,” Mrs. Travers began again, abruptly. “I never forgot myself in a story. It was not in me. I have not even been able to forget myself on that morning on shore which was part of my own story.”

“You carried yourself first rate,” said Lingard, smiling at the nape of her neck, her ear, the film of escaped hair, the modelling of the corner of her eye. He could see the flutter of the dark eyelashes: and the delicate flush on her cheek had rather the effect of scent than of colour.

“You approved of my behaviour.”

“Just right, I tell you. My word, weren’t they all struck of a heap when they made out what you were.”

“I ought to feel flattered. I will confess to you that I felt only half disguised and was half angry and wholly uncomfortable. What helped me, I suppose, was that I wanted to please. . . .”

“I don’t mean to say that they were exactly pleased,” broke in Lingard, conscientiously. “They were startled more.”

“I wanted to please you,” dropped Mrs. Travers, negligently. A faint, hoarse, and impatient call of a bird was heard from the woods as if calling to the oncoming night. Lingard’s face grew hot in the deepening dusk. The delicate lemon yellow and ethereal green tints had vanished from the sky and the red glow darkened menacingly. The sun had set behind the black pall of the forest, no longer edged with a line of gold. “Yes, I was absurdly self-conscious,” continued Mrs. Travers in a conversational tone. “And it was the effect of these clothes that you made me put on over some of my European — I almost said disguise; because you know in the present more perfect costume I feel curiously at home; and yet I can’t say that these things really fit me. The sleeves of this silk under-jacket are rather tight. My shoulders feel bound, too, and as to the sarong it is scandalously short. According to rule it should have been long enough to fall over my feet. But I like freedom of movement. I have had very little of what I liked in life.”

“I can hardly believe that,” said Lingard. “If it wasn’t for your saying so. . . .”

“I wouldn’t say so to everybody,” she said, turning her head for a moment to Lingard and turning it away again to the dusk which seemed to come floating over the black lagoon. Far away in its depth a couple of feeble lights twinkled; it was impossible to say whether on the shore or on the edge of the more distant forest. Overhead the stars were beginning to come out, but faint yet, as if too remote to be reflected in the lagoon. Only to the west a setting planet shone through the red fog of the sunset glow. “It was supposed not to be good for me to have much freedom of action. So at least I was told. But I have a suspicion that it was only displeasing to other people.”

“I should have thought,” began Lingard, then hesitated and stopped. It seemed to him inconceivable that everybody should not have loved to make that woman happy. And he was impressed by the bitterness of her tone. Mrs. Travers did not seem curious

to know what he wanted to say and after a time she added, "I don't mean only when I was a child. I don't remember that very well. I daresay I was very objectionable as a child."

Lingard tried to imagine her as a child. The idea was novel to him. Her perfection seemed to have come into the world complete, mature, and without any hesitation or weakness. He had nothing in his experience that could help him to imagine a child of that class. The children he knew played about the village street and ran on the beach. He had been one of them. He had seen other children, of course, since, but he had not been in touch with them except visually and they had not been English children. Her childhood, like his own, had been passed in England, and that very fact made it almost impossible for him to imagine it. He could not even tell whether it was in town or in the country, or whether as a child she had even seen the sea. And how could a child of that kind be objectionable? But he remembered that a child disapproved of could be very unhappy, and he said:

"I am sorry."

Mrs. Travers laughed a little. Within the muslin cage forms had turned to blurred shadows. Amongst them the form of d'Alcacer arose and moved. The systematic or else the morbid dumbness of Mr. Travers bored and exasperated him, though, as a matter of fact, that gentleman's speeches had never had the power either to entertain or to soothe his mind.

"It's very nice of you. You have a great capacity for sympathy, but after all I am not certain on which side your sympathies lie. With me, or those much-tried people," said Mrs. Travers.

"With the child," said Lingard, disregarding the bantering tone. "A child can have a very bad time of it all to itself."

"What can you know of it?" she asked.

"I have my own feelings," he answered in some surprise.

Mrs. Travers, with her back to him, was covered with confusion. Neither could she depict to herself his childhood as if he, too, had come into the world in the fullness of his strength and his purpose. She discovered a certain naiveness in herself and laughed a little. He made no sound.

"Don't be angry," she said. "I wouldn't dream of laughing at your feelings. Indeed your feelings are the most serious thing that ever came in my way. I couldn't help laughing at myself — at a funny discovery I made."

"In the days of your childhood?" she heard Lingard's deep voice asking after a pause.

"Oh, no. Ages afterward. No child could have made that discovery. Do you know the greatest difference there is between us? It is this: That I have been living since my childhood in front of a show and that I never have been taken in for a moment by its tinsel and its noise or by anything that went on on the stage. Do you understand what I mean, Captain Lingard?"

There was a moment of silence. "What does it matter? We are no children now." There was an infinite gentleness in Lingard's deep tones. "But if you have been unhappy

then don't tell me that it has not been made up to you since. Surely you have only to make a sign. A woman like you."

"You think I could frighten the whole world on to its knees?"

"No, not frighten." The suggestion of a laugh in the deadened voice passed off in a catch of the breath. Then he was heard beginning soberly: "Your husband. . . ." He hesitated a little and she took the opportunity to say coldly:

"His name is Mr. Travers."

Lingard didn't know how to take it. He imagined himself to have been guilty of some sort of presumption. But how on earth was he to call the man? After all he was her husband. That idea was disagreeable to him because the man was also inimical in a particularly unreasonable and galling manner. At the same time he was aware that he didn't care a bit for his enmity and had an idea that he would not have cared for his friendship either. And suddenly he felt very much annoyed.

"Yes. That's the man I mean," he said in a contemptuous tone. "I don't particularly like the name and I am sure I don't want to talk about him more than I can help. If he hadn't been your husband I wouldn't have put up with his manners for an hour. Do you know what would have happened to him if he hadn't been your husband?"

"No," said Mrs. Travers. "Do you, Captain Lingard?"

"Not exactly," he admitted. "Something he wouldn't have liked, you may be sure."

"While of course he likes this very much," she observed. Lingard gave an abrupt laugh.

"I don't think it's in my power to do anything that he would like," he said in a serious tone. "Forgive me my frankness, Mrs. Travers, but he makes it very difficult sometimes for me to keep civil. Whatever I have had to put up with in life I have never had to put up with contempt."

"I quite believe that," said Mrs. Travers. "Don't your friends call you King Tom?"

"Nobody that I care for. I have no friends. Oh, yes, they call me that . . ."

"You have no friends?"

"Not I," he said with decision. "A man like me has no chums."

"It's quite possible," murmured Mrs. Travers to herself.

"No, not even Jorgenson. Old crazy Jorgenson. He calls me King Tom, too. You see what that's worth."

"Yes, I see. Or rather I have heard. That poor man has no tone, and so much depends on that. Now suppose I were to call you King Tom now and then between ourselves," Mrs. Travers' voice proposed, distantly tentative in the night that invested her person with a colourless vagueness of form.

She waited in the stillness, her elbows on the rail and her face in her hands as if she had already forgotten what she had said. She heard at her elbow the deep murmur of:

"Let's hear you say it."

She never moved the least bit. The sombre lagoon sparkled faintly with the reflection of the stars.

“Oh, yes, I will let you hear it,” she said into the starlit space in a voice of unaccented gentleness which changed subtly as she went on. “I hope you will never regret that you came out of your friendless mystery to speak to me, King Tom. How many days ago it was! And here is another day gone. Tell me how many more of them there must be? Of these blinding days and nights without a sound.”

“Be patient,” he murmured. “Don’t ask me for the impossible.”

“How do you or I know what is possible?” she whispered with a strange scorn. “You wouldn’t dare guess. But I tell you that every day that passes is more impossible to me than the day before.”

The passion of that whisper went like a stab into his breast. “What am I to tell you?” he murmured, as if with despair. “Remember that every sunset makes it a day less. Do you think I want you here?”

A bitter little laugh floated out into the starlight. Mrs. Travers heard Lingard move suddenly away from her side. She didn’t change her pose by a hair’s breadth. Presently she heard d’Alcacer coming out of the Cage. His cultivated voice asked half playfully:

“Have you had a satisfactory conversation? May I be told something of it?”

“Mr. d’Alcacer, you are curious.”

“Well, in our position, I confess. . . . You are our only refuge, remember.”

“You want to know what we were talking about,” said Mrs. Travers, altering slowly her position so as to confront d’Alcacer whose face was almost undistinguishable. “Oh, well, then, we talked about opera, the realities and illusions of the stage, of dresses, of people’s names, and things of that sort.”

“Nothing of importance,” he said courteously. Mrs. Travers moved forward and he stepped to one side. Inside the Cage two Malay hands were hanging round lanterns, the light of which fell on Mr. Travers’ bowed head as he sat in his chair.

When they were all assembled for the evening meal Jorgenson strolled up from nowhere in particular as his habit was, and speaking through the muslin announced that Captain Lingard begged to be excused from joining the company that evening. Then he strolled away. From that moment till they got up from the table and the camp bedsteads were brought in not twenty words passed between the members of the party within the net. The strangeness of their situation made all attempts to exchange ideas very arduous; and apart from that each had thoughts which it was distinctly useless to communicate to the others. Mr. Travers had abandoned himself to his sense of injury. He did not so much brood as rage inwardly in a dull, dispirited way. The impossibility of asserting himself in any manner galled his very soul. D’Alcacer was extremely puzzled. Detached in a sense from the life of men perhaps as much even as Jorgenson himself, he took yet a reasonable interest in the course of events and had not lost all his sense of self-preservation. Without being able to appreciate the exact values of the situation he was not one of those men who are ever completely in the dark in any given set of circumstances. Without being humorous he was a good-humoured man. His habitual, gentle smile was a true expression. More of a European than of a Spaniard he had that truly aristocratic nature which is inclined to credit every honest

man with something of its own nobility and in its judgment is altogether independent of class feeling. He believed Lingard to be an honest man and he never troubled his head to classify him, except in the sense that he found him an interesting character. He had a sort of esteem for the outward personality and the bearing of that seaman. He found in him also the distinction of being nothing of a type. He was a specimen to be judged only by its own worth. With his natural gift of insight d'Alcacer told himself that many overseas adventurers of history were probably less worthy because obviously they must have been less simple. He didn't, however, impart those thoughts formally to Mrs. Travers. In fact he avoided discussing Lingard with Mrs. Travers who, he thought, was quite intelligent enough to appreciate the exact shade of his attitude. If that shade was fine, Mrs. Travers was fine, too; and there was no need to discuss the colours of this adventure. Moreover, she herself seemed to avoid all direct discussion of the Lingard element in their fate. D'Alcacer was fine enough to be aware that those two seemed to understand each other in a way that was not obvious even to themselves. Whenever he saw them together he was always much tempted to observe them. And he yielded to the temptation. The fact of one's life depending on the phases of an obscure action authorizes a certain latitude of behaviour. He had seen them together repeatedly, communing openly or apart, and there was in their way of joining each other, in their poses and their ways of separating, something special and characteristic and pertaining to themselves only, as if they had been made for each other.

What he couldn't understand was why Mrs. Travers should have put off his natural curiosity as to her latest conference with the Man of Fate by an incredible statement as to the nature of the conversation. Talk about dresses, opera, people's names. He couldn't take this seriously. She might have invented, he thought, something more plausible; or simply have told him that this was not for him to know. She ought to have known that he would not have been offended. Couldn't she have seen already that he accepted the complexion of mystery in her relation to that man completely, unquestionably; as though it had been something preordained from the very beginning of things? But he was not annoyed with Mrs. Travers. After all it might have been true. She would talk exactly as she liked, and even incredibly, if it so pleased her, and make the man hang on her lips. And likewise she was capable of making the man talk about anything by a power of inspiration for reasons simple or perverse. Opera! Dresses! Yes — about Shakespeare and the musical glasses! For a mere whim or for the deepest purpose. Women worthy of the name were like that. They were very wonderful. They rose to the occasion and sometimes above the occasion when things were bound to occur that would be comic or tragic (as it happened) but generally charged with trouble even to innocent beholders. D'Alcacer thought these thoughts without bitterness and even without irony. With his half-secret social reputation as a man of one great passion in a world of mere intrigues he liked all women. He liked them in their sentiment and in their hardness, in the tragic character of their foolish or clever impulses, at which he looked with a sort of tender seriousness.

He didn't take a favourable view of the position but he considered Mrs. Travers' statement about operas and dresses as a warning to keep off the subject. For this reason he remained silent through the meal.

When the bustle of clearing away the table was over he strolled toward Mrs. Travers and remarked very quietly:

"I think that in keeping away from us this evening the Man of Fate was well inspired. We dined like a lot of Carthusian monks."

"You allude to our silence?"

"It was most scrupulous. If we had taken an eternal vow we couldn't have kept it better."

"Did you feel bored?"

"Pas du tout," d'Alcacer assured her with whimsical gravity. "I felt nothing. I sat in a state of blessed vacuity. I believe I was the happiest of us three. Unless you, too, Mrs. Travers. . . ."

"It's absolutely no use your fishing for my thoughts, Mr. d'Alcacer. If I were to let you see them you would be appalled."

"Thoughts really are but a shape of feelings. Let me congratulate you on the impassive mask you can put on those horrors you say you nurse in your breast. It was impossible to tell anything by your face."

"You will always say flattering things."

"Madame, my flatteries come from the very bottom of my heart. I have given up long ago all desire to please. And I was not trying to get at your thoughts. Whatever else you may expect from me you may count on my absolute respect for your privacy. But I suppose with a mask such as you can make for yourself you really don't care. The Man of Fate, I noticed, is not nearly as good at it as you are."

"What a pretentious name. Do you call him by it to his face, Mr. d'Alcacer?"

"No, I haven't the cheek," confessed d'Alcacer, equably. "And, besides, it's too momentous for daily use. And he is so simple that he might mistake it for a joke and nothing could be further from my thoughts. Mrs. Travers, I will confess to you that I don't feel jocular in the least. But what can he know about people of our sort? And when I reflect how little people of our sort can know of such a man I am quite content to address him as Captain Lingard. It's common and soothing and most respectable and satisfactory; for Captain is the most empty of all titles. What is a Captain? Anybody can be a Captain; and for Lingard it's a name like any other. Whereas what he deserves is something special, significant, and expressive, that would match his person, his simple and romantic person."

He perceived that Mrs. Travers was looking at him intently. They hastened to turn their eyes away from each other.

"He would like your appreciation," Mrs. Travers let drop negligently.

"I am afraid he would despise it."

"Despise it! Why, that sort of thing is the very breath of his nostrils."

"You seem to understand him, Mrs. Travers. Women have a singular capacity for understanding. I mean subjects that interest them; because when their imagination is stimulated they are not afraid of letting it go. A man is more mistrustful of himself, but women are born much more reckless. They push on and on under the protection of secrecy and silence, and the greater the obscurity of what they wish to explore the greater their courage."

"Do you mean seriously to tell me that you consider me a creature of darkness?"

"I spoke in general," remonstrated d'Alcacer. "Anything else would have been an impertinence. Yes, obscurity is women's best friend. Their daring loves it; but a sudden flash of light disconcerts them. Generally speaking, if they don't get exactly at the truth they always manage to come pretty near to it."

Mrs. Travers had listened with silent attention and she allowed the silence to continue for some time after d'Alcacer had ceased. When she spoke it was to say in an unconcerned tone that as to this subject she had had special opportunities. Her self-possessed interlocutor managed to repress a movement of real curiosity under an assumption of conventional interest. "Indeed," he exclaimed, politely. "A special opportunity. How did you manage to create it?"

This was too much for Mrs. Travers. "I! Create it!" she exclaimed, indignantly, but under her breath. "How on earth do you think I could have done it?"

Mr. d'Alcacer, as if communing with himself, was heard to murmur unrepentantly that indeed women seldom knew how they had "done it," to which Mrs. Travers in a weary tone returned the remark that no two men were dense in the same way. To this Mr. d'Alcacer assented without difficulty. "Yes, our brand presents more varieties. This, from a certain point of view, is obviously to our advantage. We interest. . . . Not that I imagine myself interesting to you, Mrs. Travers. But what about the Man of Fate?"

"Oh, yes," breathed out Mrs. Travers.

"I see! Immensely!" said d'Alcacer in a tone of mysterious understanding. "Was his stupidity so colossal?"

"It was indistinguishable from great visions that were in no sense mean and made up for him a world of his own."

"I guessed that much," muttered d'Alcacer to himself. "But that, you know, Mrs. Travers, that isn't good news at all to me. World of dreams, eh? That's very bad, very dangerous. It's almost fatal, Mrs. Travers."

"Why all this dismay? Why do you object to a world of dreams?"

"Because I dislike the prospect of being made a sacrifice of by those Moors. I am not an optimist like our friend there," he continued in a low tone nodding toward the dismal figure of Mr. Travers huddled up in the chair. "I don't regard all this as a farce and I have discovered in myself a strong objection to having my throat cut by those gorgeous barbarians after a lot of fatuous talk. Don't ask me why, Mrs. Travers. Put it down to an absurd weakness."

Mrs. Travers made a slight movement in her chair, raising her hands to her head, and in the dim light of the lanterns d'Alcacer saw the mass of her clear gleaming hair fall down and spread itself over her shoulders. She seized half of it in her hands which looked very white, and with her head inclined a little on one side she began to make a plait.

"You are terrifying," he said after watching the movement of her fingers for a while.

"Yes . . . ?" she accentuated interrogatively.

"You have the awfulness of the predestined. You, too, are the prey of dreams."

"Not of the Moors, then," she uttered, calmly, beginning the other plait. D'Alcacer followed the operation to the end. Close against her, her diaphanous shadow on the muslin reproduced her slightest movements. D'Alcacer turned his eyes away.

"No! No barbarian shall touch you. Because if it comes to that I believe he would be capable of killing you himself."

A minute elapsed before he stole a glance in her direction. She was leaning back again, her hands had fallen on her lap and her head with a plait of hair on each side of her face, her head incredibly changed in character and suggesting something medieval, ascetic, drooped dreamily on her breast.

D'Alcacer waited, holding his breath. She didn't move. In the dim gleam of jewelled clasps, the faint sheen of gold embroideries and the shimmer of silks, she was like a figure in a faded painting. Only her neck appeared dazzlingly white in the smoky redness of the light. D'Alcacer's wonder approached a feeling of awe. He was on the point of moving away quietly when Mrs. Travers, without stirring in the least, let him hear the words:

"I have told him that every day seemed more difficult to live. Don't you see how impossible this is?"

D'Alcacer glanced rapidly across the Cage where Mr. Travers seemed to be asleep all in a heap and presenting a ruffled appearance like a sick bird. Nothing was distinct of him but the bald patch on the top of his head.

"Yes," he murmured, "it is most unfortunate. . . . I understand your anxiety, Mrs. Travers, but . . ."

"I am frightened," she said.

He reflected a moment. "What answer did you get?" he asked, softly.

"The answer was: 'Patience.'"

D'Alcacer laughed a little. — "You may well laugh," murmured Mrs. Travers in a tone of anguish. — "That's why I did," he whispered. "Patience! Didn't he see the horror of it?" — "I don't know. He walked away," said Mrs. Travers. She looked immovably at her hands clasped in her lap, and then with a burst of distress, "Mr. d'Alcacer, what is going to happen?" — "Ah, you are asking yourself the question at last. That will happen which cannot be avoided; and perhaps you know best what it is." — "No. I am still asking myself what he will do." — "Ah, that is not for me to know," declared d'Alcacer. "I can't tell you what he will do, but I know what will happen to him." — "To him, you say! To him!" she cried. — "He will break his heart," said d'Alcacer,

distinctly, bending a little over the chair with a slight gasp at his own audacity — and waited.

“Croyez-vous?” came at last from Mrs. Travers in an accent so coldly languid that d’Alcacer felt a shudder run down his spine.

Was it possible that she was that kind of woman, he asked himself. Did she see nothing in the world outside herself? Was she above the commonest kind of compassion? He couldn’t suspect Mrs. Travers of stupidity; but she might have been heartless and, like some women of her class, quite unable to recognize any emotion in the world except her own. D’Alcacer was shocked and at the same time he was relieved because he confessed to himself that he had ventured very far. However, in her humanity she was not vulgar enough to be offended. She was not the slave of small meannesses. This thought pleased d’Alcacer who had schooled himself not to expect too much from people. But he didn’t know what to do next. After what he had ventured to say and after the manner in which she had met his audacity the only thing to do was to change the conversation. Mrs. Travers remained perfectly still. “I will pretend that I think she is asleep,” he thought to himself, meditating a retreat on tip-toe.

He didn’t know that Mrs. Travers was simply trying to recover the full command of her faculties. His words had given her a terrible shock. After managing to utter this defensive “croyez-vous” which came out of her lips cold and faint as if in a last effort of dying strength, she felt herself turn rigid and speechless. She was thinking, stiff all over with emotion: “D’Alcacer has seen it! How much more has he been able to see?” She didn’t ask herself that question in fear or shame but with a reckless resignation. Out of that shock came a sensation of peace. A glowing warmth passed through all her limbs. If d’Alcacer had peered by that smoky light into her face he might have seen on her lips a fatalistic smile come and go. But d’Alcacer would not have dreamed of doing such a thing, and, besides, his attention just then was drawn in another direction. He had heard subdued exclamations, had noticed a stir on the decks of the Emma, and even some sort of noise outside the ship.

“These are strange sounds,” he said.

“Yes, I hear,” Mrs. Travers murmured, uneasily.

Vague shapes glided outside the Cage, barefooted, almost noiseless, whispering Malay words secretly.

“It seems as though a boat had come alongside,” observed d’Alcacer, lending an attentive ear. “I wonder what it means. In our position. . . .”

“It may mean anything,” interrupted Mrs. Travers.

“Jaffir is here,” said a voice in the darkness of the after end of the ship. Then there were some more words in which d’Alcacer’s attentive ear caught the word “surat.”

“A message of some sort has come,” he said. “They will be calling Captain Lingard. I wonder what thoughts or what dreams this call will interrupt.” He spoke lightly, looking now at Mrs. Travers who had altered her position in the chair; and by their tones and attitudes these two might have been on board the yacht sailing the sea in

perfect safety. "You, of course, are the one who will be told. Don't you feel a sort of excitement, Mrs. Travers?"

"I have been lately exhorted to patience," she said in the same easy tone. "I can wait and I imagine I shall have to wait till the morning."

"It can't be very late yet," he said. "Time with us has been standing still for ever so long. And yet this may be the hour of fate."

"Is this the feeling you have at this particular moment?"

"I have had that feeling for a considerable number of moments already. At first it was exciting. Now I am only moderately anxious. I have employed my time in going over all my past life."

"Can one really do that?"

"Yes. I can't say I have been bored to extinction. I am still alive, as you see; but I have done with that and I feel extremely idle. There is only one thing I would like to do. I want to find a few words that could convey to you my gratitude for all your friendliness in the past, at the time when you let me see so much of you in London. I felt always that you took me on my own terms and that so kindly that often I felt inclined to think better of myself. But I am afraid I am wearying you, Mrs. Travers."

"I assure you you have never done that — in the past. And as to the present moment I beg you not to go away. Stay by me please. We are not going to pretend that we are sleepy at this early hour."

D'Alcacer brought a stool close to the long chair and sat down on it. "Oh, yes, the possible hour of fate," he said. "I have a request to make, Mrs. Travers. I don't ask you to betray anything. What would be the good? The issue when it comes will be plain enough. But I should like to get a warning, just something that would give me time to pull myself together, to compose myself as it were. I want you to promise me that if the balance tips against us you will give me a sign. You could, for instance, seize the opportunity when I am looking at you to put your left hand to your forehead like this. It is a gesture that I have never seen you make, and so. . . ."

"Jorgenson!" Lingard's voice was heard forward where the light of a lantern appeared suddenly. Then, after a pause, Lingard was heard again: "Here!"

Then the silent minutes began to go by. Mrs. Travers reclining in her chair and d'Alcacer sitting on the stool waited motionless without a word. Presently through the subdued murmurs and agitation pervading the dark deck of the Emma Mrs. Travers heard a firm footstep, and, lantern in hand, Lingard appeared outside the muslin cage.

"Will you come out and speak to me?" he said, loudly. "Not you. The lady," he added in an authoritative tone as d'Alcacer rose hastily from the stool. "I want Mrs. Travers."

"Of course," muttered d'Alcacer to himself and as he opened the door of the Cage to let Mrs. Travers slip through he whispered to her, "This is the hour of fate."

She brushed past him swiftly without the slightest sign that she had heard the words. On the after deck between the Cage and the deckhouse Lingard waited, lantern in hand. Nobody else was visible about; but d'Alcacer felt in the air the presence of

silent and excited beings hovering outside the circle of light. Lingard raised the lantern as Mrs. Travers approached and d'Alcacer heard him say:

"I have had news which you ought to know. Let us go into the deckhouse."

D'Alcacer saw their heads lighted up by the raised lantern surrounded by the depths of shadow with an effect of a marvellous and symbolic vision. He heard Mrs. Travers say "I would rather not hear your news," in a tone that made that sensitive observer purse up his lips in wonder. He thought that she was over-wrought, that the situation had grown too much for her nerves. But this was not the tone of a frightened person. It flashed through his mind that she had become self-conscious, and there he stopped in his speculation. That friend of women remained discreet even in his thoughts. He stepped backward further into the Cage and without surprise saw Mrs. Travers follow Lingard into the deckhouse.

Chapter 4

Lingard stood the lantern on the table. Its light was very poor. He dropped on to the sea-chest heavily. He, too, was over-wrought. His flannel shirt was open at the neck. He had a broad belt round his waist and was without his jacket. Before him, Mrs. Travers, straight and tall in the gay silks, cottons, and muslins of her outlandish dress, with the ends of the scarf thrown over her head, hanging down in front of her, looked dimly splendid and with a black glance out of her white face. He said:

"Do you, too, want to throw me over? I tell you you can't do that now."

"I wasn't thinking of throwing you over, but I don't even know what you mean. There seem to be no end of things I can't do. Hadn't you better tell me of something that I could do? Have you any idea yourself what you want from me?"

"You can let me look at you. You can listen to me. You can speak to me."

"Frankly, I have never shirked doing all those things, whenever you wanted me to. You have led me . . ."

"I led you!" cried Lingard.

"Oh! It was my fault," she said, without anger. "I must have dreamed then that it was you who came to me in the dark with the tale of your impossible life. Could I have sent you away?"

"I wish you had. Why didn't you?"

"Do you want me to tell you that you were irresistible? How could I have sent you away? But you! What made you come back to me with your very heart on your lips?"

When Lingard spoke after a time it was in jerky sentences.

"I didn't stop to think. I had been hurt. I didn't think of you people as ladies and gentlemen. I thought of you as people whose lives I held in my hand. How was it possible to forget you in my trouble? It is your face that I brought back with me on board my brig. I don't know why. I didn't look at you more than at anybody else. It took me all my time to keep my temper down lest it should burn you all up. I didn't

want to be rude to you people, but I found it wasn't very easy because threats were the only argument I had. Was I very offensive, Mrs. Travers?"

She had listened tense and very attentive, almost stern. And it was without the slightest change of expression that she said:

"I think that you bore yourself appropriately to the state of life to which it has pleased God to call you."

"What state?" muttered Lingard to himself. "I am what I am. They call me Rajah Laut, King Tom, and such like. I think it amused you to hear it, but I can tell you it is no joke to have such names fastened on one, even in fun. And those very names have in them something which makes all this affair here no small matter to anybody."

She stood before him with a set, severe face. — "Did you call me out in this alarming manner only to quarrel with me?" — "No, but why do you choose this time to tell me that my coming for help to you was nothing but impudence in your sight? Well, I beg your pardon for intruding on your dignity." — "You misunderstood me," said Mrs. Travers, without relaxing for a moment her contemplative severity. "Such a flattering thing had never happened to me before and it will never happen to me again. But believe me, King Tom, you did me too much honour. Jorgenson is perfectly right in being angry with you for having taken a woman in tow." — "He didn't mean to be rude," protested Lingard, earnestly. Mrs. Travers didn't even smile at this intrusion of a point of manners into the atmosphere of anguish and suspense that seemed always to arise between her and this man who, sitting on the sea-chest, had raised his eyes to her with an air of extreme candour and seemed unable to take them off again. She continued to look at him sternly by a tremendous effort of will.

"How changed you are," he murmured.

He was lost in the depths of the simplest wonder. She appeared to him vengeful and as if turned forever into stone before his bewildered remorse. Forever. Suddenly Mrs. Travers looked round and sat down in the chair. Her strength failed her but she remained austere with her hands resting on the arms of her seat. Lingard sighed deeply and dropped his eyes. She did not dare relax her muscles for fear of breaking down altogether and betraying a reckless impulse which lurked at the bottom of her dismay, to seize the head of d'Alcacer's Man of Fate, press it to her breast once, fling it far away, and vanish herself, vanish out of life like a wraith. The Man of Fate sat silent and bowed, yet with a suggestion of strength in his dejection. "If I don't speak," Mrs. Travers said to herself, with great inward calmness, "I shall burst into tears." She said aloud, "What could have happened? What have you dragged me in here for? Why don't you tell me your news?"

"I thought you didn't want to hear. I believe you really don't want to. What is all this to you? I believe that you don't care anything about what I feel, about what I do and how I end. I verily believe that you don't care how you end yourself. I believe you never cared for your own or anybody's feelings. I don't think it is because you are hard, I think it is because you don't know, and don't want to know, and are angry with life."

He flourished an arm recklessly, and Mrs. Travers noticed for the first time that he held a sheet of paper in his hand.

"Is that your news there?" she asked, significantly. "It's difficult to imagine that in this wilderness writing can have any significance. And who on earth here could send you news on paper? Will you let me see it? Could I understand it? Is it in English? Come, King Tom, don't look at me in this awful way."

She got up suddenly, not in indignation, but as if at the end of her endurance. The jewelled clasps, the gold embroideries, gleamed elusively amongst the folds of her draperies which emitted a mysterious rustle.

"I can't stand this," she cried. "I can't stand being looked at like this. No woman could stand it. No woman has ever been looked at like this. What can you see? Hatred I could understand. What is it you think me capable of?"

"You are very extraordinary," murmured Lingard, who had regained his self-possession before that outburst.

"Very well, and you are extraordinary, too. That's understood — here we are both under that curse and having to face together whatever may turn up. But who on earth could have sent you this writing?"

"Who?" repeated Lingard. "Why, that young fellow that blundered on my brig in the dark, bringing a boatload of trouble alongside on that quiet night in Carimata Straits. The darkest night I have ever known. An accursed night."

Mrs. Travers bit her lip, waited a little, then asked quietly:

"What difficulty has he got into now?"

"Difficulty!" cried Lingard. "He is immensely pleased with himself, the young fool. You know, when you sent him to talk to me that evening you left the yacht, he came with a loaded pistol in his pocket. And now he has gone and done it."

"Done it?" repeated Mrs. Travers blankly. "Done what?"

She snatched from Lingard's unresisting palm the sheet of paper. While she was smoothing it Lingard moved round and stood close at her elbow. She ran quickly over the first lines, then her eyes steadied. At the end she drew a quick breath and looked up at Lingard. Their faces had never been so close together before and Mrs. Travers had a surprising second of a perfectly new sensation. She looked away. — "Do you understand what this news means?" he murmured. Mrs. Travers let her hand fall by her side. "Yes," she said in a low tone. "The compact is broken."

Carter had begun his letter without any preliminaries:

You cleared out in the middle of the night and took the lady away with you. You left me no proper orders. But as a sailorman I looked upon myself as left in charge of two ships while within half a mile on that sandbank there were more than a hundred piratical cut-throats watching me as closely as so many tigers about to leap. Days went by without a word of you or the lady. To leave the ships outside and go inland to look for you was not to be thought of with all those pirates within springing distance. Put yourself in my place. Can't you imagine my anxiety, my sleepless nights? Each night worse than the night before. And still no word from you. I couldn't sit still and worry

my head off about things I couldn't understand. I am a sailorman. My first duty was to the ships. I had to put an end to this impossible situation and I hope you will agree that I have done it in a seamanlike way. One misty morning I moved the brig nearer the sandbank and directly the mist cleared I opened fire on the praus of those savages which were anchored in the channel. We aimed wide at first to give those vagabonds that were on board a chance to clear out and join their friends camped on the sands. I didn't want to kill people. Then we got the long gun to bear and in about an hour we had the bottom knocked out of the two praus. The savages on the bank howled and screamed at every shot. They are mighty angry but I don't care for their anger now, for by sinking their praus I have made them as harmless as a flock of lambs. They needn't starve on their sandbank because they have two or three dugouts hauled up on the sand and they may ferry themselves and their women to the mainland whenever they like.

I fancy I have acted as a seaman and as a seaman I intend to go on acting. Now I have made the ships safe I shall set about without loss of time trying to get the yacht off the mud. When that's done I shall arm the boats and proceed inshore to look for you and the yacht's gentry, and shan't rest till I know whether any or all of you are above the earth yet.

I hope these words will reach you. Just as we had done the business of those praus the man you sent off that night in Carimata to stop our chief officer came sailing in from the west with our first gig in tow and the boat's crew all well. Your serang tells me he is a most trustworthy messenger and that his name is Jaffir. He seems only too anxious to try to get to you as soon as possible. I repeat, ships and men have been made safe and I don't mean to give you up dead or alive.

"You are quick in taking the point," said Lingard in a dull voice, while Mrs. Travers, with the sheet of paper gripped in her hand, looked into his face with anxious eyes. "He has been smart and no mistake."

"He didn't know," murmured Mrs. Travers.

"No, he didn't know. But could I take everybody into my confidence?" protested Lingard in the same low tone. "And yet who else could I trust? It seemed to me that he must have understood without being told. But he is too young. He may well be proud according to his lights. He has done that job outside very smartly — damn his smartness! And here we are with all our lives depending on my word — which is broken now, Mrs. Travers. It is broken."

Mrs. Travers nodded at him slightly.

"They would sooner have expected to see the sun and the moon fall out of the sky," Lingard continued with repressed fire. Next moment it seemed to have gone out of him and Mrs. Travers heard him mutter a disconnected phrase. . . . "The world down about my ears."

"What will you do?" she whispered.

"What will I do?" repeated Lingard, gently. "Oh, yes — do. Mrs. Travers, do you see that I am nothing now? Just nothing."

He had lost himself in the contemplation of her face turned to him with an expression of awed curiosity. The shock of the world coming down about his ears in consequence of Carter's smartness was so terrific that it had dulled his sensibilities in the manner of a great pain or of a great catastrophe. What was there to look at but that woman's face, in a world which had lost its consistency, its shape, and its promises in a moment?

Mrs. Travers looked away. She understood that she had put to Lingard an impossible question. What was presenting itself to her as a problem was to that man a crisis of feeling. Obviously Carter's action had broken the compact entered into with Daman, and she was intelligent enough to understand that it was the sort of thing that could not be explained away. It wasn't horror that she felt, but a sort of consternation, something like the discomfiture of people who have just missed their train. It was only more intense. The real dismay had yet to make its way into her comprehension. To Lingard it was a blow struck straight at his heart.

He was not angry with Carter. The fellow had acted like a seaman. Carter's concern was for the ships. In this fatality Carter was a mere incident. The real cause of the disaster was somewhere else, was other, and more remote. And at the same time Lingard could not defend himself from a feeling that it was in himself, too, somewhere in the unexplored depths of his nature, something fatal and unavoidable. He muttered to himself:

"No. I am not a lucky man."

This was but a feeble expression of the discovery of the truth that suddenly had come home to him as if driven into his breast by a revealing power which had decided that this was to be the end of his fling. But he was not the man to give himself up to the examination of his own sensations. His natural impulse was to grapple with the circumstances and that was what he was trying to do; but he missed now that sense of mastery which is half the battle. Conflict of some sort was the very essence of his life. But this was something he had never known before. This was a conflict within himself. He had to face unsuspected powers, foes that he could not go out to meet at the gate. They were within, as though he had been betrayed by somebody, by some secret enemy. He was ready to look round for that subtle traitor. A sort of blankness fell on his mind and he suddenly thought: "Why! It's myself."

Immediately afterward he had a clear, merciless recollection of Hassim and Immada. He saw them far off beyond the forests. Oh, yes, they existed — within his breast!

"That was a night!" he muttered, looking straight at Mrs. Travers. He had been looking at her all the time. His glance had held her under a spell, but for a whole interminable minute he had not been aware of her at all. At the murmur of his words she made a slight movement and he saw her again. — "What night?" she whispered, timidly, like an intruder. She was astonished to see him smile. — "Not like this one," he said. "You made me notice how quiet and still it was. Yes. Listen how still it is."

Both moved their heads slightly and seemed to lend an ear. There was not a murmur, sigh, rustle, splash, or footfall. No whispers, no tremors, not a sound of any kind. They might have been alone on board the Emma, abandoned even by the ghost of Captain

Jorgenson departed to rejoin the Barque Wild Rose on the shore of the Cimmerian sea. — "It's like the stillness of the end," said Mrs. Travers in a low, equable voice. — "Yes, but that, too, is false," said Lingard in the same tone. — "I don't understand," Mrs. Travers began, hurriedly, after a short silence. "But don't use that word. Don't use it, King Tom! It frightens me by its mere sound."

Lingard made no sign. His thoughts were back with Hassim and Immada. The young chief and his sister had gone up country on a voluntary mission to persuade Belarab to return to his stockade and to take up again the direction of affairs. They carried urgent messages from Lingard, who for Belarab was the very embodiment of truth and force, that unquestioned force which had permitted Belarab to indulge in all his melancholy hesitations. But those two young people had also some personal prestige. They were Lingard's heart's friends. They were like his children. But beside that, their high birth, their warlike story, their wanderings, adventures, and prospects had given them a glamour of their own.

Chapter 5

The very day that Travers and d'Alcacer had come on board the Emma Hassim and Immada had departed on their mission; for Lingard, of course, could not think of leaving the white people alone with Jorgenson. Jorgenson was all right, but his ineradicable habit of muttering in his moustache about "throwing a lighted match amongst the powder barrels" had inspired Lingard with a certain amount of mistrust. And, moreover, he did not want to go away from Mrs. Travers.

It was the only correct inspiration on Carter's part to send Jaffir with his report to Lingard. That stout-hearted fighter, swimmer, and devoted follower of the princely misfortunes of Hassim and Immada, had looked upon his mission to catch the chief officer of the yacht (which he had received from Lingard in Carimata) as a trifling job. It took him a little longer than he expected but he had got back to the brig just in time to be sent on to Lingard with Carter's letter after a couple of hours' rest. He had the story of all the happenings from Wasub before he left and though his face preserved its grave impassivity, in his heart he did not like it at all.

Fearless and wily, Jaffir was the man for difficult missions and a born messenger — as he expressed it himself — "to bear weighty words between great men." With his unflinching memory he was able to reproduce them exactly, whether soft or hard, in council or in private; for he knew no fear. With him there was no need for writing which might fall into the hands of the enemy. If he died on the way the message would die with him. He had also the gift of getting at the sense of any situation and an observant eye. He was distinctly one of those men from whom trustworthy information can be obtained by the leaders of great enterprises. Lingard did put several questions to him, but in this instance, of course, Jaffir could have only very little to say. Of Carter, whom he called the "young one," he said that he looked as white men look when they are

pleased with themselves; then added without waiting for a definite question — "The ships out there are now safe enough, O, Rajah Laut!" There was no elation in his tone.

Lingard looked at him blankly. When the Greatest of White Men remarked that there was yet a price to be paid for that safety, Jaffir assented by a "Yes, by Allah!" without losing for a moment his grim composure. When told that he would be required to go and find his master and the lady Immada who were somewhere in the back country, in Belarab's travelling camp, he declared himself ready to proceed at once. He had eaten his fill and had slept three hours on board the brig and he was not tired. When he was young he used to get tired sometimes; but for many years now he had known no such weakness. He did not require the boat with paddlers in which he had come up into the lagoon. He would go alone in a small canoe. This was no time, he remarked, for publicity and ostentation. His pent-up anxiety burst through his lips. "It is in my mind, Tuan, that death has not been so near them since that night when you came sailing in a black cloud and took us all out of the stockade."

Lingard said nothing but there was in Jaffir a faith in that white man which was not easily shaken.

"How are you going to save them this time, O Rajah Laut?" he asked, simply.

"Belarab is my friend," murmured Lingard.

In his anxiety Jaffir was very outspoken. "A man of peace!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "Who could be safe with a man like that?" he asked, contemptuously.

"There is no war," said Lingard

"There is suspicion, dread, and revenge, and the anger of armed men," retorted Jaffir. "You have taken the white prisoners out of their hands by the force of your words alone. Is that so, Tuan?"

"Yes," said Lingard.

"And you have them on board here?" asked Jaffir, with a glance over his shoulder at the white and misty structure within which by the light of a small oil flame d'Alcacer and Mrs. Travers were just then conversing.

"Yes, I have them here."

"Then, Rajah Laut," whispered Jaffir, "you can make all safe by giving them back."

"Can I do that?" were the words breathed out through Lingard's lips to the faithful follower of Hassim and Immada.

"Can you do anything else?" was the whispered retort of Jaffir the messenger accustomed to speak frankly to the great of the earth. "You are a white man and you can have only one word. And now I go."

A small, rough dug-out belonging to the Emma had been brought round to the ladder. A shadowy calash hovering respectfully in the darkness of the deck had already cleared his throat twice in a warning manner.

"Yes, Jaffir, go," said Lingard, "and be my friend."

"I am the friend of a great prince," said the other, sturdily. "But you, Rajah Laut, were even greater. And great you will remain while you are with us, people of this sea and of this land. But what becomes of the strength of your arms before your own

white people? Where does it go to, I say? Well, then, we must trust in the strength of your heart."

"I hope that will never fail," said Lingard, and Jaffir emitted a grunt of satisfaction. "But God alone sees into men's hearts."

"Yes. Our refuge is with Allah," assented Jaffir, who had acquired the habit of pious turns of speech in the frequentation of professedly religious men, of whom there were many in Belarab's stockade. As a matter of fact, he reposed all his trust in Lingard who had with him the prestige of a providential man sent at the hour of need by heaven itself. He waited a while, then: "What is the message I am to take?" he asked.

"Tell the whole tale to the Rajah Hassim," said Lingard. "And tell him to make his way here with the lady his sister secretly and with speed. The time of great trouble has come. Let us, at least, be together."

"Right! Right!" Jaffir approved, heartily. "To die alone under the weight of one's enemies is a dreadful fate."

He stepped back out of the sheen of the lamp by which they had been talking and making his way down into the small canoe he took up a paddle and without a splash vanished on the dark lagoon.

It was then that Mrs. Travers and d'Alcacer heard Lingard call aloud for Jorgenson. Instantly the familiar shadow stood at Lingard's elbow and listened in detached silence. Only at the end of the tale it marvelled audibly: "Here's a mess for you if you like." But really nothing in the world could astonish or startle old Jorgenson. He turned away muttering in his moustache. Lingard remained with his chin in his hand and Jaffir's last words took gradual possession of his mind. Then brusquely he picked up the lamp and went to seek Mrs. Travers. He went to seek her because he actually needed her bodily presence, the sound of her voice, the dark, clear glance of her eyes. She could do nothing for him. On his way he became aware that Jorgenson had turned out the few Malays on board the Emma and was disposing them about the decks to watch the lagoon in all directions. On calling Mrs. Travers out of the Cage Lingard was, in the midst of his mental struggle, conscious of a certain satisfaction in taking her away from d'Alcacer. He couldn't spare any of her attention to any other man, not the least crumb of her time, not the least particle of her thought! He needed it all. To see it withdrawn from him for the merest instant was irritating — seemed a disaster.

D'Alcacer, left alone, wondered at the imperious tone of Lingard's call. To this observer of shades the fact seemed considerable. "Sheer nerves," he concluded, to himself. "The man is overstrung. He must have had some sort of shock." But what could it be — he wondered to himself. In the tense stagnation of those days of waiting the slightest tremor had an enormous importance. D'Alcacer did not seek his camp bedstead. He didn't even sit down. With the palms of his hands against the edge of the table he leaned back against it. In that negligent attitude he preserved an alert mind which for a moment wondered whether Mrs. Travers had not spoiled Lingard a little. Yet in the suddenness of the forced association, where, too, d'Alcacer was sure there was some moral problem in the background, he recognized the extreme difficulty of weighing

accurately the imperious demands against the necessary reservations, the exact proportions of boldness and caution. And d'Alcacer admired upon the whole Mrs. Travers' cleverness.

There could be no doubt that she had the situation in her hands. That, of course, did not mean safety. She had it in her hands as one may hold some highly explosive and uncertain compound. D'Alcacer thought of her with profound sympathy and with a quite unselfish interest. Sometimes in a street we cross the path of personalities compelling sympathy and wonder but for all that we don't follow them home. D'Alcacer refrained from following Mrs. Travers any further. He had become suddenly aware that Mr. Travers was sitting up on his camp bedstead. He must have done it very suddenly. Only a moment before he had appeared plunged in the deepest slumber, and the stillness for a long time now had been perfectly unbroken. D'Alcacer was startled enough for an exclamation and Mr. Travers turned his head slowly in his direction. D'Alcacer approached the bedstead with a certain reluctance.

"Awake?" he said.

"A sudden chill," said Mr. Travers. "But I don't feel cold now. Strange! I had the impression of an icy blast."

"Ah!" said d'Alcacer.

"Impossible, of course!" went on Mr. Travers. "This stagnating air never moves. It clings odiously to one. What time is it?"

"Really, I don't know."

"The glass of my watch was smashed on that night when we were so treacherously assailed by the savages on the sandbank," grumbled Mr. Travers.

"I must say I was never so surprised in my life," confessed d'Alcacer. "We had stopped and I was lighting a cigar, you may remember."

"No," said Mr. Travers. "I had just then pulled out my watch. Of course it flew out of my hand but it hung by the chain. Somebody trampled on it. The hands are broken off short. It keeps on ticking but I can't tell the time. It's absurd. Most provoking."

"Do you mean to say," asked d'Alcacer, "that you have been winding it up every evening?"

Mr. Travers looked up from his bedstead and he also seemed surprised. "Why! I suppose I have." He kept silent for a while. "It isn't so much blind habit as you may think. My habits are the outcome of strict method. I had to order my life methodically. You know very well, my dear d'Alcacer, that without strict method I would not have been able to get through my work and would have had no time at all for social duties, which, of course, are of very great importance. I may say that, materially, method has been the foundation of my success in public life. There were never any empty moments in my day. And now this! . . ." He looked all round the Cage. . . . "Where's my wife?" he asked.

"I was talking to her only a moment ago," answered d'Alcacer. "I don't know the time. My watch is on board the yacht; but it isn't late, you know."

Mr. Travers flung off with unwonted briskness the light cotton sheet which covered him. He buttoned hastily the tunic which he had unfastened before lying down, and just as d'Alcacer was expecting him to swing his feet to the deck impetuously, he lay down again on the pillow and remained perfectly still.

D'Alcacer waited awhile and then began to pace the Cage. After a couple of turns he stopped and said, gently:

"I am afraid, Travers, you are not very well."

"I don't know what illness is," answered the voice from the pillow to the great relief of d'Alcacer who really had not expected an answer. "Good health is a great asset in public life. Illness may make you miss a unique opportunity. I was never ill."

All this came out deadened in tone, as if the speaker's face had been buried in the pillow. D'Alcacer resumed his pacing.

"I think I asked you where my wife was," said the muffled voice.

With great presence of mind d'Alcacer kept on pacing the Cage as if he had not heard. — "You know, I think she is mad," went on the muffled voice. "Unless I am."

Again d'Alcacer managed not to interrupt his regular pacing. "Do you know what I think?" he said, abruptly. "I think, Travers, that you don't want to talk about her. I think that you don't want to talk about anything. And to tell you the truth I don't want to, either."

D'Alcacer caught a faint sigh from the pillow and at the same time saw a small, dim flame appear outside the Cage. And still he kept on his pacing. Mrs. Travers and Lingard coming out of the deckhouse stopped just outside the door and Lingard stood the deck-lamp on its roof. They were too far from d'Alcacer to be heard, but he could make them out: Mrs. Travers, as straight as an arrow, and the heavy bulk of the man who faced her with a lowered head. He saw it in profile against the light and as if deferential in its slight droop. They were looking straight at each other. Neither of them made the slightest gesture.

"There is that in me," Lingard murmured, deeply, "which would set my heart harder than a stone. I am King Tom, Rajah Laut, and fit to look any man hereabouts in the face. I have my name to take care of. Everything rests on that."

"Mr. d'Alcacer would express this by saying that everything rested on honour," commented Mrs. Travers with lips that did not tremble, though from time to time she could feel the accelerated beating of her heart.

"Call it what you like. It's something that a man needs to draw a free breath. And look! — as you see me standing before you here I care for it no longer."

"But I do care for it," retorted Mrs. Travers. "As you see me standing here — I do care. This is something that is your very own. You have a right to it. And I repeat I do care for it."

"Care for something of my own," murmured Lingard, very close to her face. "Why should you care for my rights?"

“Because,” she said, holding her ground though their foreheads were nearly touching, “because if I ever get back to my life I don’t want to make it more absurd by real remorse.”

Her tone was soft and Lingard received the breath of those words like a caress on his face. D’Alcacer, in the Cage, made still another effort to keep up his pacing. He didn’t want to give Mr. Travers the slightest excuse for sitting up again and looking round.

“That I should live to hear anybody say they cared anything for what was mine!” whispered Lingard. “And that it should be you — you, who have taken all hardness out of me.”

“I don’t want your heart to be made hard. I want it to be made firm.”

“You couldn’t have said anything better than what you have said just now to make it steady,” flowed the murmur of Lingard’s voice with something tender in its depth. “Has anybody ever had a friend like this?” he exclaimed, raising his head as if taking the starry night to witness.

“And I ask myself is it possible that there should be another man on earth that I could trust as I trust you. I say to you: Yes! Go and save what you have a right to and don’t forget to be merciful. I will not remind you of our perfect innocence. The earth must be small indeed that we should have blundered like this into your life. It’s enough to make one believe in fatality. But I can’t find it in me to behave like a fatalist, to sit down with folded hands. Had you been another kind of man I might have been too hopeless or too disdainful. Do you know what Mr. d’Alcacer calls you?”

Inside the Cage d’Alcacer, casting curious glances in their direction, saw Lingard shake his head and thought with slight uneasiness: “He is refusing her something.”

“Mr. d’Alcacer’s name for you is the ‘Man of Fate,’” said Mrs. Travers, a little breathlessly.

“A mouthful. Never mind, he is a gentleman. It’s what you. . . .”

“I call you all but by your Christian name,” said Mrs. Travers, hastily. “Believe me, Mr. d’Alcacer understands you.”

“He is all right,” interjected Lingard.

“And he is innocent. I remember what you have said — that the innocent must take their chance. Well, then, do what is right.”

“You think it would be right? You believe it? You feel it?”

“At this time, in this place, from a man like you — Yes, it is right.”

Lingard thought that woman wonderfully true to him and wonderfully fearless with herself. The necessity to take back the two captives to the stockade was so clear and unavoidable now, that he believed nothing on earth could have stopped him from doing so, but where was there another woman in the world who would have taken it like this? And he reflected that in truth and courage there is found wisdom. It seemed to him that till Mrs. Travers came to stand by his side he had never known what truth and courage and wisdom were. With his eyes on her face and having been told that in her

eyes he appeared worthy of being both commanded and entreated, he felt an instant of complete content, a moment of, as it were, perfect emotional repose.

During the silence Mrs. Travers with a quick side-glance noticed d'Alcacer as one sees a man in a mist, his mere dark shape arrested close to the muslin screen. She had no doubt that he was looking in their direction and that he could see them much more plainly than she could see him. Mrs. Travers thought suddenly how anxious he must be; and she remembered that he had begged her for some sign, for some warning, beforehand, at the moment of crisis. She had understood very well his hinted request for time to get prepared. If he was to get more than a few minutes, this was the moment to make him a sign — the sign he had suggested himself. Mrs. Travers moved back the least bit so as to let the light fall in front of her and with a slow, distinct movement she put her left hand to her forehead.

"Well, then," she heard Lingard's forcible murmur, "well, then, Mrs. Travers, it must be done to-night."

One may be true, fearless, and wise, and yet catch one's breath before the simple finality of action. Mrs. Travers caught her breath: "To-night! To-night!" she whispered. D'Alcacer's dark and misty silhouette became more blurred. He had seen her sign and had retreated deeper within the Cage.

"Yes, to-night," affirmed Lingard. "Now, at once, within the hour, this moment," he murmured, fiercely, following Mrs. Travers in her recoiling movement. She felt her arm being seized swiftly. "Don't you see that if it is to do any good, that if they are not to be delivered to mere slaughter, it must be done while all is dark ashore, before an armed mob in boats comes clamouring alongside? Yes. Before the night is an hour older, so that I may be hammering at Belarab's gate while all the Settlement is still asleep."

Mrs. Travers didn't dream of protesting. For the moment she was unable to speak. This man was very fierce and just as suddenly as it had been gripped (making her think incongruously in the midst of her agitation that there would be certainly a bruise there in the morning) she felt her arm released and a penitential tone come into Lingard's murmuring voice.

"And even now it's nearly too late! The road was plain, but I saw you on it and my heart failed me. I was there like an empty man and I dared not face you. You must forgive me. No, I had no right to doubt you for a moment. I feel as if I ought to go on my knees and beg your pardon for forgetting what you are, for daring to forget."

"Why, King Tom, what is it?"

"It seems as if I had sinned," she heard him say. He seized her by the shoulders, turned her about, moved her forward a step or two. His hands were heavy, his force irresistible, though he himself imagined he was handling her gently. "Look straight before you," he growled into her ear. "Do you see anything?" Mrs. Travers, passive between the rigid arms, could see nothing but, far off, the massed, featureless shadows of the shore.

"No, I see nothing," she said.

"You can't be looking the right way," she heard him behind her. And now she felt her head between Lingard's hands. He moved it the least bit to the right. "There! See it?"

"No. What am I to look for?"

"A gleam of light," said Lingard, taking away his hands suddenly. "A gleam that will grow into a blaze before our boat can get half way across the lagoon."

Even as Lingard spoke Mrs. Travers caught sight of a red spark far away. She had looked often enough at the Settlement, as on the face of a painting on a curtain, to have its configuration fixed in her mind, to know that it was on the beach at its end furthest from Belarab's stockade.

"The brushwood is catching," murmured Lingard in her ear. "If they had some dry grass the whole pile would be blazing by now."

"And this means. . . ."

"It means that the news has spread. And it is before Tengga's enclosure on his end of the beach. That's where all the brains of the Settlement are. It means talk and excitement and plenty of crafty words. Tengga's fire! I tell you, Mrs. Travers, that before half an hour has passed Daman will be there to make friends with the fat Tengga, who is ready to say to him, 'I told you so'."

"I see," murmured Mrs. Travers. Lingard drew her gently to the rail.

"And now look over there at the other end of the beach where the shadows are heaviest. That is Belarab's fort, his houses, his treasure, his dependents. That's where the strength of the Settlement is. I kept it up. I made it last. But what is it now? It's like a weapon in the hand of a dead man. And yet it's all we have to look to, if indeed there is still time. I swear to you I wouldn't dare land them in daylight for fear they should be slaughtered on the beach."

"There is no time to lose," whispered Mrs. Travers, and Lingard, too, spoke very low.

"No, not if I, too, am to keep what is my right. It's you who have said it."

"Yes, I have said it," she whispered, without lifting her head. Lingard made a brusque movement at her elbow and bent his head close to her shoulder.

"And I who mistrusted you! Like Arabs do to their great men, I ought to kiss the hem of your robe in repentance for having doubted the greatness of your heart."

"Oh! my heart!" said Mrs. Travers, lightly, still gazing at the fire, which had suddenly shot up to a tall blaze. "I can assure you it has been of very little account in the world." She paused for a moment to steady her voice, then said, firmly, "Let's get this over."

"To tell you the truth the boat has been ready for some time."

"Well, then. . . ."

"Mrs. Travers," said Lingard with an effort, "they are people of your own kind." And suddenly he burst out: "I cannot take them ashore bound hand and foot."

"Mr. d'Alcacer knows. You will find him ready. Ever since the beginning he has been prepared for whatever might happen."

“He is a man,” said Lingard with conviction. “But it’s of the other that I am thinking.”

“Ah, the other,” she repeated. “Then, what about my thoughts? Luckily we have Mr. d’Alcacer. I shall speak to him first.”

She turned away from the rail and moved toward the Cage.

“Jorgenson,” the voice of Lingard resounded all along the deck, “get a light on the gangway.” Then he followed Mrs. Travers slowly.

Chapter 6

D’Alcacer, after receiving his warning, stepped back and leaned against the edge of the table. He could not ignore in himself a certain emotion. And indeed, when he had asked Mrs. Travers for a sign he expected to be moved — but he had not expected the sign to come so soon. He expected this night to pass like other nights, in broken slumbers, bodily discomfort, and the unrest of disconnected thinking. At the same time he was surprised at his own emotion. He had flattered himself on the possession of more philosophy. He thought that this famous sense of self-preservation was a queer thing, a purely animal thing. “For, as a thinking man,” he reflected, “I really ought not to care.” It was probably the unusual that affected him. Clearly. If he had been lying seriously ill in a room in a hotel and had overheard some ominous whispers he would not have cared in the least. Ah, but then he would have been ill — and in illness one grows so indifferent. Illness is a great help to unemotional behaviour, which of course is the correct behaviour for a man of the world. He almost regretted he was not very ill. But, then, Mr. Travers was obviously ill and it did not seem to help him much. D’Alcacer glanced at the bedstead where Mr. Travers preserved an immobility which struck d’Alcacer as obviously affected. He mistrusted it. Generally he mistrusted Mr. Travers. One couldn’t tell what he would do next. Not that he could do much one way or another, but that somehow he threatened to rob the situation of whatever dignity it may have had as a stroke of fate, as a call on courage. Mr. d’Alcacer, acutely observant and alert for the slightest hints, preferred to look upon himself as the victim not of a swindle but of a rough man naively engaged in a contest with heaven’s injustice. D’Alcacer did not examine his heart, but some lines of a French poet came into his mind, to the effect that in all times those who fought with an unjust heaven had possessed the secret admiration and love of men. He didn’t go so far as love but he could not deny to himself that his feeling toward Lingard was secretly friendly and — well, appreciative. Mr. Travers sat up suddenly. What a horrible nuisance, thought d’Alcacer, fixing his eyes on the tips of his shoes with the hope that perhaps the other would lie down again. Mr. Travers spoke.

“Still up, d’Alcacer?”

"I assure you it isn't late. It's dark at six, we dined before seven, that makes the night long and I am not a very good sleeper; that is, I cannot go to sleep till late in the night."

"I envy you," said Mr. Travers, speaking with a sort of drowsy apathy. "I am always dropping off and the awakenings are horrible."

D'Alcacer, raising his eyes, noticed that Mrs. Travers and Lingard had vanished from the light. They had gone to the rail where d'Alcacer could not see them. Some pity mingled with his vexation at Mr. Travers' snatchy wakefulness. There was something weird about the man, he reflected. "Jorgenson," he began aloud.

"What's that?" snapped Mr. Travers.

"It's the name of that lanky old store-keeper who is always about the decks."

"I haven't seen him. I don't see anybody. I don't know anybody. I prefer not to notice."

"I was only going to say that he gave me a pack of cards; would you like a game of piquet?"

"I don't think I could keep my eyes open," said Mr. Travers in an unexpectedly confidential tone. "Isn't it funny, d'Alcacer? And then I wake up. It's too awful."

D'Alcacer made no remark and Mr. Travers seemed not to have expected any.

"When I said my wife was mad," he began, suddenly, causing d'Alcacer to start, "I didn't mean it literally, of course." His tone sounded slightly dogmatic and he didn't seem to be aware of any interval during which he had appeared to sleep. D'Alcacer was convinced more than ever that he had been shamming, and resigned himself wearily to listen, folding his arms across his chest. "What I meant, really," continued Mr. Travers, "was that she is the victim of a craze. Society is subject to crazes, as you know very well. They are not reprehensible in themselves, but the worst of my wife is that her crazes are never like those of the people with whom she naturally associates. They generally run counter to them. This peculiarity has given me some anxiety, you understand, in the position we occupy. People will begin to say that she is eccentric. Do you see her anywhere, d'Alcacer?"

D'Alcacer was thankful to be able to say that he didn't see Mrs. Travers. He didn't even hear any murmurs, though he had no doubt that everybody on board the Emma was wide awake by now. But Mr. Travers inspired him with invincible mistrust and he thought it prudent to add:

"You forget that your wife has a room in the deckhouse."

This was as far as he would go, for he knew very well that she was not in the deckhouse. Mr. Travers, completely convinced by the statement, made no sound. But neither did he lie down again. D'Alcacer gave himself up to meditation. The night seemed extremely oppressive. At Lingard's shout for Jorgenson, that in the profound silence struck his ears ominously, he raised his eyes and saw Mrs. Travers outside the door of the Cage. He started forward but she was already within. He saw she was moved. She seemed out of breath and as if unable to speak at first.

"Hadn't we better shut the door?" suggested d'Alcacer.

“Captain Lingard’s coming in,” she whispered to him. “He has made up his mind.”

“That’s an excellent thing,” commented d’Alcacer, quietly. “I conclude from this that we shall hear something.”

“You shall hear it all from me,” breathed out Mrs. Travers.

“Ah!” exclaimed d’Alcacer very low.

By that time Lingard had entered, too, and the decks of the Emma were all astir with moving figures. Jorgenson’s voice was also heard giving directions. For nearly a minute the four persons within the Cage remained motionless. A shadowy Malay in the gangway said suddenly: “Sudah, Tuan,” and Lingard murmured, “Ready, Mrs. Travers.”

She seized d’Alcacer’s arm and led him to the side of the Cage furthest from the corner in which Mr. Travers’ bed was placed, while Lingard busied himself in pricking up the wick of the Cage lantern as if it had suddenly occurred to him that this, whatever happened, should not be a deed of darkness. Mr. Travers did nothing but turn his head to look over his shoulder.

“One moment,” said d’Alcacer, in a low tone and smiling at Mrs. Travers’ agitation. “Before you tell me anything let me ask you: ‘Have you made up your mind?’” He saw with much surprise a widening of her eyes. Was it indignation? A pause as of suspicion fell between those two people. Then d’Alcacer said apologetically: “Perhaps I ought not to have asked that question,” and Lingard caught Mrs. Travers’ words, “Oh, I am not afraid to answer that question.”

Then their voices sank. Lingard hung the lamp up again and stood idle in the revived light; but almost immediately he heard d’Alcacer calling him discreetly.

“Captain Lingard!”

He moved toward them at once. At the same instant Mr. Travers’ head pivoted away from the group to its frontal position.

D’Alcacer, very serious, spoke in a familiar undertone.

“Mrs. Travers tells me that we must be delivered up to those Moors on shore.”

“Yes, there is nothing else for it,” said Lingard.

“I confess I am a bit startled,” said d’Alcacer; but except for a slightly hurried utterance nobody could have guessed at anything resembling emotion.

“I have a right to my good name,” said Lingard, also very calm, while Mrs. Travers near him, with half-veiled eyes, listened impassive like a presiding genius.

“I wouldn’t question that for a moment,” conceded d’Alcacer. “A point of honour is not to be discussed. But there is such a thing as humanity, too. To be delivered up helplessly. . . .”

“Perhaps!” interrupted Lingard. “But you needn’t feel hopeless. I am not at liberty to give up my life for your own. Mrs. Travers knows why. That, too, is engaged.”

“Always on your honour?”

“I don’t know. A promise is a promise.”

“Nobody can be held to the impossible,” remarked d’Alcacer.

“Impossible! What is impossible? I don’t know it. I am not a man to talk of the impossible or dodge behind it. I did not bring you here.”

D'Alcacer lowered his head for a moment. "I have finished," he said, gravely. "That much I had to say. I hope you don't think I have appeared unduly anxious."

"It's the best policy, too." Mrs. Travers made herself heard suddenly. Nothing of her moved but her lips, she did not even raise her eyes. "It's the only possible policy. You believe me, Mr. d'Alcacer? . . ." He made an almost imperceptible movement of the head. . . . "Well, then, I put all my hope in you, Mr. d'Alcacer, to get this over as easily as possible and save us all from some odious scene. You think perhaps that it is I who ought to. . . ."

"No, no! I don't think so," interrupted d'Alcacer. "It would be impossible."

"I am afraid it would," she admitted, nervously.

D'Alcacer made a gesture as if to beg her to say no more and at once crossed over to Mr. Travers' side of the Cage. He did not want to give himself time to think about his task. Mr. Travers was sitting up on the camp bedstead with a light cotton sheet over his legs. He stared at nothing, and on approaching him d'Alcacer disregarded the slight sinking of his own heart at this aspect which seemed to be that of extreme terror. "This is awful," he thought. The man kept as still as a hare in its form.

The impressed d'Alcacer had to make an effort to bring himself to tap him lightly on the shoulder.

"The moment has come, Travers, to show some fortitude," he said with easy intimacy. Mr. Travers looked up swiftly. "I have just been talking to your wife. She had a communication from Captain Lingard for us both. It remains for us now to preserve as much as possible our dignity. I hope that if necessary we will both know how to die."

In a moment of profound stillness, d'Alcacer had time to wonder whether his face was as stony in expression as the one upturned to him. But suddenly a smile appeared on it, which was certainly the last thing d'Alcacer expected to see. An indubitable smile. A slightly contemptuous smile.

"My wife has been stuffing your head with some more of her nonsense." Mr. Travers spoke in a voice which astonished d'Alcacer as much as the smile, a voice that was not irritable nor peevish, but had a distinct note of indulgence. "My dear d'Alcacer, that craze has got such a hold of her that she would tell you any sort of tale. Social impostors, mediums, fortune-tellers, charlatans of all sorts do obtain a strange influence over women. You have seen that sort of thing yourself. I had a talk with her before dinner. The influence that bandit has got over her is incredible. I really believe the fellow is half crazy himself. They often are, you know. I gave up arguing with her. Now, what is it you have got to tell me? But I warn you that I am not going to take it seriously."

He rejected briskly the cotton sheet, put his feet to the ground and buttoned his jacket. D'Alcacer, as he talked, became aware by the slight noise behind him that Mrs. Travers and Lingard were leaving the Cage, but he went on to the end and then waited anxiously for the answer.

"See! She has followed him out on deck," were Mr. Travers' first words. "I hope you understand that it is a mere craze. You can't help seeing that. Look at her costume. She

simply has lost her head. Luckily the world needn't know. But suppose that something similar had happened at home. It would have been extremely awkward. Oh! yes, I will come. I will go anywhere. I can't stand this hulk, those people, this infernal Cage. I believe I should fall ill if I were to remain here."

The inward detached voice of Jorgenson made itself heard near the gangway saying: "The boat has been waiting for this hour past, King Tom."

"Let us make a virtue of necessity and go with a good grace," said d'Alcacer, ready to take Mr. Travers under the arm persuasively, for he did not know what to make of that gentleman.

But Mr. Travers seemed another man. "I am afraid, d'Alcacer, that you, too, are not very strong-minded. I am going to take a blanket off this bedstead. . . ." He flung it hastily over his arm and followed d'Alcacer closely. "What I suffer mostly from, strange to say, is cold."

Mrs. Travers and Lingard were waiting near the gangway. To everybody's extreme surprise Mr. Travers addressed his wife first.

"You were always laughing at people's crazes," was what he said, "and now you have a craze of your own. But we won't discuss that."

D'Alcacer passed on, raising his cap to Mrs. Travers, and went down the ship's side into the boat. Jorgenson had vanished in his own manner like an exorcised ghost, and Lingard, stepping back, left husband and wife face to face.

"Did you think I was going to make a fuss?" asked Mr. Travers in a very low voice. "I assure you I would rather go than stay here. You didn't think that? You have lost all sense of reality, of probability. I was just thinking this evening that I would rather be anywhere than here looking on at you. At your folly. . . ."

Mrs. Travers' loud, "Martin!" made Lingard wince, caused d'Alcacer to lift his head down there in the boat, and even Jorgenson, forward somewhere out of sight, ceased mumbling in his moustache. The only person who seemed not to have heard that exclamation was Mr. Travers himself, who continued smoothly:

". . . at the aberration of your mind, you who seemed so superior to common credulities. You are not yourself, not at all, and some day you will admit to me that . . . No, the best thing will be to forget it, as you will soon see yourself. We shall never mention that subject in the future. I am certain you will be only too glad to agree with me on that point."

"How far ahead are you looking?" asked Mrs. Travers, finding her voice and even the very tone in which she would have addressed him had they been about to part in the hall of their town house. She might have been asking him at what time he expected to be home, while a footman held the door open and the brougham waited in the street.

"Not very far. This can't last much longer." Mr. Travers made a movement as if to leave her exactly as though he were rather pressed to keep an appointment. "By the by," he said, checking himself, "I suppose the fellow understands thoroughly that we are wealthy. He could hardly doubt that."

"It's the last thought that would enter his head," said Mrs. Travers.

“Oh, yes, just so,” Mr. Travers allowed a little impatience to pierce under his casual manner. “But I don’t mind telling you that I have had enough of this. I am prepared to make — ah! — to make concessions. A large pecuniary sacrifice. Only the whole position is so absurd! He might conceivably doubt my good faith. Wouldn’t it be just as well if you, with your particular influence, would hint to him that with me he would have nothing to fear? I am a man of my word.”

“That is the first thing he would naturally think of any man,” said Mrs. Travers.

“Will your eyes never be opened?” Mr. Travers began, irritably, then gave it up. “Well, so much the better then. I give you a free hand.”

“What made you change your attitude like this?” asked Mrs. Travers, suspiciously.

“My regard for you,” he answered without hesitation.

“I intended to join you in your captivity. I was just trying to persuade him. . . .”

“I forbid you absolutely,” whispered Mr. Travers, forcibly. “I am glad to get away. I don’t want to see you again till your craze is over.”

She was confounded by his secret vehemence. But instantly succeeding his fierce whisper came a short, inane society laugh and a much louder, “Not that I attach any importance . . .”

He sprang away, as it were, from his wife, and as he went over the gangway waved his hand to her amiably.

Lighted dimly by the lantern on the roof of the deckhouse Mrs. Travers remained very still with lowered head and an aspect of profound meditation. It lasted but an instant before she moved off and brushing against Lingard passed on with downcast eyes to her deck cabin. Lingard heard the door shut. He waited awhile, made a movement toward the gangway but checked himself and followed Mrs. Travers into her cabin.

It was pitch dark in there. He could see absolutely nothing and was oppressed by the profound stillness unstirred even by the sound of breathing.

“I am going on shore,” he began, breaking the black and deathlike silence enclosing him and the invisible woman. “I wanted to say good-bye.”

“You are going on shore,” repeated Mrs. Travers. Her voice was emotionless, blank, unringing.

“Yes, for a few hours, or for life,” Lingard said in measured tones. “I may have to die with them or to die maybe for others. For you, if I only knew how to manage it, I would want to live. I am telling you this because it is dark. If there had been a light in here I wouldn’t have come in.”

“I wish you had not,” uttered the same unringing woman’s voice. “You are always coming to me with those lives and those deaths in your hand.”

“Yes, it’s too much for you,” was Lingard’s undertoned comment. “You could be no other than true. And you are innocent! Don’t wish me life, but wish me luck, for you are innocent — and you will have to take your chance.”

“All luck to you, King Tom,” he heard her say in the darkness in which he seemed now to perceive the gleam of her hair. “I will take my chance. And try not to come near me again for I am weary of you.”

"I can well believe it," murmured Lingard, and stepped out of the cabin, shutting the door after him gently. For half a minute, perhaps, the stillness continued, and then suddenly the chair fell over in the darkness. Next moment Mrs. Travers' head appeared in the light of the lamp left on the roof of the deckhouse. Her bare arms grasped the door posts.

"Wait a moment," she said, loudly, into the shadows of the deck. She heard no footsteps, saw nothing moving except the vanishing white shape of the late Captain H. C. Jorgenson, who was indifferent to the life of men. "Wait, King Tom!" she insisted, raising her voice; then, "I didn't mean it. Don't believe me!" she cried, recklessly.

For the second time that night a woman's voice startled the hearts of men on board the Emma. All except the heart of old Jorgenson. The Malays in the boat looked up from their thwarts. D'Alcacer, sitting in the stern sheets beside Lingard, felt a sinking of his heart.

"What's this?" he exclaimed. "I heard your name on deck. You are wanted, I think."

"Shove off," ordered Lingard, inflexibly, without even looking at d'Alcacer. Mr. Travers was the only one who didn't seem to be aware of anything. A long time after the boat left the Emma's side he leaned toward d'Alcacer.

"I have a most extraordinary feeling," he said in a cautious undertone. "I seem to be in the air — I don't know. Are we on the water, d'Alcacer? Are you quite sure? But of course, we are on the water."

"Yes," said d'Alcacer, in the same tone. "Crossing the Styx — perhaps." He heard Mr. Travers utter an unmoved "Very likely," which he did not expect. Lingard, his hand on the tiller, sat like a man of stone.

"Then your point of view has changed," whispered d'Alcacer.

"I told my wife to make an offer," went on the earnest whisper of the other man. "A sum of money. But to tell you the truth I don't believe very much in its success."

D'Alcacer made no answer and only wondered whether he didn't like better Mr. Travers' other, unreasonable mood. There was no denying the fact that Mr. Travers was a troubling person. Now he suddenly gripped d'Alcacer's fore-arm and added under his breath: "I doubt everything. I doubt whether the offer will ever be made."

All this was not very impressive. There was something pitiful in it: whisper, grip, shudder, as of a child frightened in the dark. But the emotion was deep. Once more that evening, but this time aroused by the husband's distress, d'Alcacer's wonder approached the borders of awe.

Part 6 — The Claim of Life and the Toll of Death

Chapter 1

“Have you got King Tom’s watch in there?” said a voice that seemed not to attach the slightest importance to the question. Jorgenson, outside the door of Mrs. Travers’ part of the deckhouse, waited for the answer. He heard a low cry very much like a moan, the startled sound of pain that may be sometimes heard in sick rooms. But it moved him not at all. He would never have dreamt of opening the door unless told to do so, in which case he would have beheld, with complete indifference, Mrs. Travers extended on the floor with her head resting on the edge of the camp bedstead (on which Lingard had never slept), as though she had subsided there from a kneeling posture which is the attitude of prayer, supplication, or defeat. The hours of the night had passed Mrs. Travers by. After flinging herself on her knees, she didn’t know why, since she could think of nothing to pray for, had nothing to invoke, and was too far gone for such a futile thing as despair, she had remained there till the sense of exhaustion had grown on her to the point in which she lost her belief in her power to rise. In a half-sitting attitude, her head resting against the edge of the couch and her arms flung above her head, she sank into an indifference, the mere resignation of a worn-out body and a worn-out mind which often is the only sort of rest that comes to people who are desperately ill and is welcome enough in a way. The voice of Jorgenson roused her out of that state. She sat up, aching in every limb and cold all over.

Jorgenson, behind the door, repeated with lifeless obstinacy:

“Do you see King Tom’s watch in there?”

Mrs. Travers got up from the floor. She tottered, snatching at the air, and found the back of the armchair under her hand.

“Who’s there?”

She was also ready to ask: “Where am I?” but she remembered and at once became the prey of that active dread which had been lying dormant for a few hours in her uneasy and prostrate body. “What time is it?” she faltered out.

“Dawn,” pronounced the imperturbable voice at the door. It seemed to her that it was a word that could make any heart sink with apprehension. Dawn! She stood appalled. And the toneless voice outside the door insisted:

“You must have Tom’s watch there!”

"I haven't seen it," she cried as if tormented by a dream.

"Look in that desk thing. If you push open the shutter you will be able to see."

Mrs. Travers became aware of the profound darkness of the cabin. Jorgenson heard her staggering in there. After a moment a woman's voice, which struck even him as strange, said in faint tones:

"I have it. It's stopped."

"It doesn't matter. I don't want to know the time. There should be a key about. See it anywhere?"

"Yes, it's fastened to the watch," the dazed voice answered from within. Jorgenson waited before making his request. "Will you pass it out to me? There's precious little time left now!"

The door flew open, which was certainly something Jorgenson had not expected. He had expected but a hand with the watch protruded through a narrow crack, But he didn't start back or give any other sign of surprise at seeing Mrs. Travers fully dressed. Against the faint clearness in the frame of the open shutter she presented to him the dark silhouette of her shoulders surmounted by a sleek head, because her hair was still in the two plaits. To Jorgenson Mrs. Travers in her un-European dress had always been displeasing, almost monstrous. Her stature, her gestures, her general carriage struck his eye as absurdly incongruous with a Malay costume, too ample, too free, too bold — offensive. To Mrs. Travers, Jorgenson, in the dusk of the passage, had the aspect of a dim white ghost, and he chilled her by his ghost's aloofness.

He picked up the watch from her outspread palm without a word of thanks, only mumbling in his moustache, "H'm, yes, that's it. I haven't yet forgotten how to count seconds correctly, but it's better to have a watch."

She had not the slightest notion what he meant. And she did not care. Her mind remained confused and the sense of bodily discomfort oppressed her. She whispered, shamefacedly, "I believe I've slept."

"I haven't," mumbled Jorgenson, growing more and more distinct to her eyes. The brightness of the short dawn increased rapidly as if the sun were impatient to look upon the Settlement. "No fear of that," he added, boastfully.

It occurred to Mrs. Travers that perhaps she had not slept either. Her state had been more like an imperfect, half-conscious, quivering death. She shuddered at the recollection.

"What an awful night," she murmured, drearily.

There was nothing to hope for from Jorgenson. She expected him to vanish, indifferent, like a phantom of the dead carrying off the appropriately dead watch in his hand for some unearthly purpose. Jorgenson didn't move. His was an insensible, almost a senseless presence! Nothing could be extorted from it. But a wave of anguish as confused as all her other sensations swept Mrs. Travers off her feet.

"Can't you tell me something?" she cried.

For half a minute perhaps Jorgenson made no sound; then: "For years I have been telling anybody who cared to ask," he mumbled in his moustache. "Telling Tom, too. And Tom knew what he wanted to do. How's one to know what you are after?"

She had never expected to hear so many words from that rigid shadow. Its monotonous mumble was fascinating, its sudden loquacity was shocking. And in the profound stillness that reigned outside it was as if there had been no one left in the world with her but the phantom of that old adventurer. He was heard again: "What I could tell you would be worse than poison."

Mrs. Travers was not familiar with Jorgenson's consecrated phrases. The mechanical voice, the words themselves, his air of abstraction appalled her. And he hadn't done yet; she caught some more of his unconcerned mumbling: "There is nothing I don't know," and the absurdity of the statement was also appalling. Mrs. Travers gasped and with a wild little laugh:

"Then you know why I called after King Tom last night."

He glanced away along his shoulder through the door of the deckhouse at the growing brightness of the day. She did so, too. It was coming. It had come! Another day! And it seemed to Mrs. Travers a worse calamity than any discovery she had made in her life, than anything she could have imagined to come to her. The very magnitude of horror steadied her, seemed to calm her agitation as some kinds of fatal drugs do before they kill. She laid a steady hand on Jorgenson's sleeve and spoke quietly, distinctly, urgently.

"You were on deck. What I want to know is whether I was heard?"

"Yes," said Jorgenson, absently, "I heard you." Then, as if roused a little, he added less mechanically: "The whole ship heard you."

Mrs. Travers asked herself whether perchance she had not simply screamed. It had never occurred to her before that perhaps she had. At the time it seemed to her she had no strength for more than a whisper. Had she been really so loud? And the deadly chill, the night that had gone by her had left in her body, vanished from her limbs, passed out of her in a flush. Her face was turned away from the light, and that fact gave her courage to continue. Moreover, the man before her was so detached from the shames and prides and schemes of life that he seemed not to count at all, except that somehow or other he managed at times to catch the mere literal sense of the words addressed to him — and answer them. And answer them! Answer unfailingly, impersonally, without any feeling.

"You saw Tom — King Tom? Was he there? I mean just then, at the moment. There was a light at the gangway. Was he on deck?"

"No. In the boat."

"Already? Could I have been heard in the boat down there? You say the whole ship heard me — and I don't care. But could he hear me?"

"Was it Tom you were after?" said Jorgenson in the tone of a negligent remark.

"Can't you answer me?" she cried, angrily.

“Tom was busy. No child’s play. The boat shoved off,” said Jorgenson, as if he were merely thinking aloud.

“You won’t tell me, then?” Mrs. Travers apostrophized him, fearlessly. She was not afraid of Jorgenson. Just then she was afraid of nothing and nobody. And Jorgenson went on thinking aloud.

“I guess he will be kept busy from now on and so shall I.”

Mrs. Travers seemed ready to take by the shoulders and shake that dead-voiced spectre till it begged for mercy. But suddenly her strong white arms fell down by her side, the arms of an exhausted woman.

“I shall never, never find out,” she whispered to herself.

She cast down her eyes in intolerable humiliation, in intolerable desire, as though she had veiled her face. Not a sound reached the loneliness of her thought. But when she raised her eyes again Jorgenson was no longer standing before her.

For an instant she saw him all black in the brilliant and narrow doorway, and the next moment he had vanished outside, as if devoured by the hot blaze of light. The sun had risen on the Shore of Refuge.

When Mrs. Travers came out on deck herself it was as it were with a boldly unveiled face, with wide-open and dry, sleepless eyes. Their gaze, undismayed by the sunshine, sought the innermost heart of things each day offered to the passion of her dread and of her impatience. The lagoon, the beach, the colours and the shapes struck her more than ever as a luminous painting on an immense cloth hiding the movements of an inexplicable life. She shaded her eyes with her hand. There were figures on the beach, moving dark dots on the white semicircle bounded by the stockades, backed by roof ridges above the palm groves. Further back the mass of carved white coral on the roof of the mosque shone like a white day-star. Religion and politics — always politics! To the left, before Tengga’s enclosure, the loom of fire had changed into a pillar of smoke. But there were some big trees over there and she couldn’t tell whether the night council had prolonged its sitting. Some vague forms were still moving there and she could picture them to herself: Daman, the supreme chief of sea-robbers, with a vengeful heart and the eyes of a gazelle; Sentot, the sour fanatic with the big turban, that other saint with a scanty loin cloth and ashes in his hair, and Tengga whom she could imagine from hearsay, fat, good-tempered, crafty, but ready to spill blood on his ambitious way and already bold enough to flaunt a yellow state umbrella at the very gate of Belarab’s stockade — so they said.

She saw, she imagined, she even admitted now the reality of those things no longer a mere pageant marshalled for her vision with barbarous splendour and savage emphasis. She questioned it no longer — but she did not feel it in her soul any more than one feels the depth of the sea under its peaceful glitter or the turmoil of its grey fury. Her eyes ranged afar, unbelieving and fearful — and then all at once she became aware of the empty Cage with its interior in disorder, the camp bedsteads not taken away, a pillow lying on the deck, the dying flame like a shred of dull yellow stuff inside the lamp left hanging over the table. The whole struck her as squalid and as if already decayed, a

fimsy and idle phantasy. But Jorgenson, seated on the deck with his back to it, was not idle. His occupation, too, seemed fantastic and so truly childish that her heart sank at the man's utter absorption in it. Jorgenson had before him, stretched on the deck, several bits of rather thin and dirty-looking rope of different lengths from a couple of inches to about a foot. He had (an idiot might have amused himself in that way) set fire to the ends of them. They smouldered with amazing energy, emitting now and then a splutter, and in the calm air within the bulwarks sent up very slender, exactly parallel threads of smoke, each with a vanishing curl at the end; and the absorption with which Jorgenson gave himself up to that pastime was enough to shake all confidence in his sanity.

In one half-opened hand he was holding the watch. He was also provided with a scrap of paper and the stump of a pencil. Mrs. Travers was confident that he did not either hear or see her.

"Captain Jorgenson, you no doubt think. . . ."

He tried to wave her away with the stump of the pencil. He did not want to be interrupted in his strange occupation. He was playing very gravely indeed with those bits of string. "I lighted them all together," he murmured, keeping one eye on the dial of the watch. Just then the shortest piece of string went out, utterly consumed. Jorgenson made a hasty note and remained still while Mrs. Travers looked at him with stony eyes thinking that nothing in the world was any use. The other threads of smoke went on vanishing in spirals before the attentive Jorgenson.

"What are you doing?" asked Mrs. Travers, drearily.

"Timing match . . . precaution. . . ."

He had never in Mrs. Travers' experience been less spectral than then. He displayed a weakness of the flesh. He was impatient at her intrusion. He divided his attention between the threads of smoke and the face of the watch with such interest that the sudden reports of several guns breaking for the first time for days the stillness of the lagoon and the illusion of the painted scene failed to make him raise his head. He only jerked it sideways a little. Mrs. Travers stared at the wisps of white vapour floating above Belarab's stockade. The series of sharp detonations ceased and their combined echoes came back over the lagoon like a long-drawn and rushing sigh.

"What's this?" cried Mrs. Travers.

"Belarab's come home," said Jorgenson.

The last thread of smoke disappeared and Jorgenson got up. He had lost all interest in the watch and thrust it carelessly into his pocket, together with the bit of paper and the stump of pencil. He had resumed his aloofness from the life of men, but approaching the bulwark he condescended to look toward Belarab's stockade.

"Yes, he is home," he said very low.

"What's going to happen?" cried Mrs. Travers. "What's to be done?" Jorgenson kept up his appearance of communing with himself.

"I know what to do," he mumbled.

"You are lucky," said Mrs. Travers, with intense bitterness.

It seemed to her that she was abandoned by all the world. The opposite shore of the lagoon had resumed its aspect of a painted scene that would never roll up to disclose the truth behind its blinding and soulless splendour. It seemed to her that she had said her last words to all of them: to d'Alcacer, to her husband, to Lingard himself — and that they had all gone behind the curtain forever out of her sight. Of all the white men Jorgenson alone was left, that man who had done with life so completely that his mere presence robbed it of all heat and mystery, leaving nothing but its terrible, its revolting insignificance. And Mrs. Travers was ready for revolt. She cried with suppressed passion:

“Are you aware, Captain Jorgenson, that I am alive?”

He turned his eyes on her, and for a moment she was daunted by their cold glassiness. But before they could drive her away, something like the gleam of a spark gave them an instant's animation.

“I want to go and join them. I want to go ashore,” she said, firmly. “There!”

Her bare and extended arm pointed across the lagoon, and Jorgenson's resurrected eyes glided along the white limb and wandered off into space.

“No boat,” he muttered.

“There must be a canoe. I know there is a canoe. I want it.”

She stepped forward compelling, commanding, trying to concentrate in her glance all her will power, the sense of her own right to dispose of herself and her claim to be served to the last moment of her life. It was as if she had done nothing. Jorgenson didn't flinch.

“Which of them are you after?” asked his blank, unringing voice.

She continued to look at him; her face had stiffened into a severe mask; she managed to say distinctly:

“I suppose you have been asking yourself that question for some time, Captain Jorgenson?”

“No. I am asking you now.”

His face disclosed nothing to Mrs. Travers' bold and weary eyes. “What could you do over there?” Jorgenson added as merciless, as irrepressible, and sincere as though he were the embodiment of that inner voice that speaks in all of us at times and, like Jorgenson, is offensive and difficult to answer.

“Remember that I am not a shadow but a living woman still, Captain Jorgenson. I can live and I can die. Send me over to share their fate.”

“Sure you would like?” asked the roused Jorgenson in a voice that had an unexpected living quality, a faint vibration which no man had known in it for years. “There may be death in it,” he mumbled, relapsing into indifference.

“Who cares?” she said, recklessly. “All I want is to ask Tom a question and hear his answer. That's what I would like. That's what I must have.”

Chapter 2

Along the hot and gloomy forest path, neglected, overgrown and strangled in the fierce life of the jungle, there came a faint rustle of leaves. Jaffir, the servant of princes, the messenger of great men, walked, stooping, with a broad chopper in his hand. He was naked from the waist upward, his shoulders and arms were scratched and bleeding. A multitude of biting insects made a cloud about his head. He had lost his costly and ancient head-kerchief, and when in a slightly wider space he stopped in a listening attitude anybody would have taken him for a fugitive.

He waved his arms about, slapping his shoulders, the sides of his head, his heaving flanks; then, motionless, listened again for a while. A sound of firing, not so much made faint by distance as muffled by the masses of foliage, reached his ears, dropping shots which he could have counted if he had cared to. "There is fighting in the forest already," he thought. Then putting his head low in the tunnel of vegetation he dashed forward out of the horrible cloud of flies, which he actually managed for an instant to leave behind him. But it was not from the cruelty of insects that he was flying, for no man could hope to drop that escort, and Jaffir in his life of a faithful messenger had been accustomed, if such an extravagant phrase may be used, to be eaten alive. Bent nearly double he glided and dodged between the trees, through the undergrowth, his brown body streaming with sweat, his firm limbs gleaming like limbs of imperishable bronze through the mass of green leaves that are forever born and forever dying. For all his desperate haste he was no longer a fugitive; he was simply a man in a tremendous hurry. His flight, which had begun with a bound and a rush and a general display of great presence of mind, was a simple issue from a critical situation. Issues from critical situations are generally simple if one is quick enough to think of them in time. He became aware very soon that the attempt to pursue him had been given up, but he had taken the forest path and had kept up his pace because he had left his Rajah and the lady Immada beset by enemies on the edge of the forest, as good as captives to a party of Tengga's men.

Belarab's hesitation had proved too much even for Hassim's hereditary patience in such matters. It is but becoming that weighty negotiations should be spread over many days, that the same requests and arguments should be repeated in the same words, at many successive interviews, and receive the same evasive answers. Matters of state demand the dignity of such a procedure as if time itself had to wait on the power and wisdom of rulers. Such are the proceedings of embassies and the dignified patience of envoys. But at this time of crisis Hassim's impatience obtained the upper hand; and though he never departed from the tradition of soft speech and restrained bearing while following with his sister in the train of the pious Belarab, he had his moments of anger, of anxiety, of despondency. His friendships, his future, his country's destinies were at stake, while Belarab's camp wandered deviously over the back country as if influenced by the vacillation of the ruler's thought, the very image of uncertain fate.

Often no more than the single word "Good" was all the answer vouchsafed to Hassim's daily speeches. The lesser men, companions of the Chief, treated him with deference; but Hassim could feel the opposition from the women's side of the camp working against his cause in subservience to the mere caprice of the new wife, a girl quite gentle and kind to her dependents, but whose imagination had run away with her completely and had made her greedy for the loot of the yacht from mere simplicity and innocence. What could Hassim, that stranger, wandering and poor, offer for her acceptance? Nothing. The wealth of his far-off country was but an idle tale, the talk of an exile looking for help.

At night Hassim had to listen to the anguished doubts of Immada, the only companion of his life, child of the same mother, brave as a man, but in her fears a very woman. She whispered them to him far into the night while the camp of the great Belarab was hushed in sleep and the fires had sunk down to mere glowing embers. Hassim soothed her gravely. But he, too, was a native of Wajo where men are more daring and quicker of mind than other Malays. More energetic, too, and energy does not go without an inner fire. Hassim lost patience and one evening he declared to his sister Immada: "To-morrow we leave this ruler without a mind and go back to our white friend."

Therefore next morning, letting the camp move on the direct road to the settlement, Hassim and Immada took a course of their own. It was a lonely path between the jungle and the clearings. They had two attendants with them, Hassim's own men, men of Wajo; and so the lady Immada, when she had a mind to, could be carried, after the manner of the great ladies of Wajo who need not put foot to the ground unless they like. The lady Immada, accustomed to the hardships that are the lot of exiles, preferred to walk, but from time to time she let herself be carried for a short distance out of regard for the feelings of her attendants. The party made good time during the early hours, and Hassim expected confidently to reach before evening the shore of the lagoon at a spot very near the stranded Emma. At noon they rested in the shade near a dark pool within the edge of the forest; and it was there that Jaffir met them, much to his and their surprise. It was the occasion of a long talk. Jaffir, squatting on his heels, discoursed in measured tones. He had entranced listeners. The story of Carter's exploit amongst the Shoals had not reached Belarab's camp. It was a great shock to Hassim, but the sort of half smile with which he had been listening to Jaffir never altered its character. It was the Princess Immada who cried out in distress and wrung her hands. A deep silence fell.

Indeed, before the fatal magnitude of the fact it seemed even to those Malays that there was nothing to say and Jaffir, lowering his head, respected his Prince's consternation. Then, before that feeling could pass away from that small group of people seated round a few smouldering sticks, the noisy approach of a large party of men made them all leap to their feet. Before they could make another movement they perceived themselves discovered. The men were armed as if bound on some warlike expedition. Amongst them Sentot, in his loin cloth and with unbound wild locks,

capered and swung his arms about like the lunatic he was. The others' astonishment made them halt, but their attitude was obviously hostile. In the rear a portly figure flanked by two attendants carrying swords was approaching prudently. Rajah Hassim resumed quietly his seat on the trunk of a fallen tree, Immada rested her hand lightly on her brother's shoulder, and Jaffir, squatting down again, looked at the ground with all his faculties and every muscle of his body tensely on the alert.

"Tengga's fighters," he murmured, scornfully.

In the group somebody shouted, and was answered by shouts from afar. There could be no thought of resistance. Hassim slipped the emerald ring from his finger stealthily and Jaffir got hold of it by an almost imperceptible movement. The Rajah did not even look at the trusty messenger.

"Fail not to give it to the white man," he murmured. "Thy servant hears, O Rajah. It's a charm of great power."

The shadows were growing to the westward. Everybody was silent, and the shifting group of armed men seemed to have drifted closer. Immada, drawing the end of a scarf across her face, confronted the advance with only one eye exposed. On the flank of the armed men Sentot was performing a slow dance but he, too, seemed to have gone dumb.

"Now go," breathed out Rajah Hassim, his gaze levelled into space immovably.

For a second or more Jaffir did not stir, then with a sudden leap from his squatting posture he flew through the air and struck the jungle in a great commotion of leaves, vanishing instantly like a swimmer diving from on high. A deep murmur of surprise arose in the armed party, a spear was thrown, a shot was fired, three or four men dashed into the forest, but they soon returned crestfallen with apologetic smiles; while Jaffir, striking an old path that seemed to lead in the right direction, ran on in solitude, raising a rustle of leaves, with a naked parang in his hand and a cloud of flies about his head. The sun declining to the westward threw shafts of light across his dark path. He ran at a springy half-trot, his eyes watchful, his broad chest heaving, and carrying the emerald ring on the forefinger of a clenched hand as though he were afraid it should slip off, fly off, be torn from him by an invisible force, or spirited away by some enchantment. Who could tell what might happen? There were evil forces at work in the world, powerful incantations, horrible apparitions. The messenger of princes and of great men, charged with the supreme appeal of his master, was afraid in the deepening shade of the forest. Evil presences might have been lurking in that gloom. Still the sun had not set yet. He could see its face through the leaves as he skirted the shore of the lagoon. But what if Allah's call should come to him suddenly and he die as he ran!

He drew a long breath on the shore of the lagoon within about a hundred yards from the stranded bows of the Emma. The tide was out and he walked to the end of a submerged log and sent out a hail for a boat. Jorgenson's voice answered. The sun had sunk behind the forest belt of the coast. All was still as far as the eye could reach over the black water. A slight breeze came along it and Jaffir on the brink, waiting for a canoe, shivered a little.

At the same moment Carter, exhausted by thirty hours of uninterrupted toil at the head of whites and Malays in getting the yacht afloat, dropped into Mrs. Travers' deck chair, on board the Hermit, said to the devoted Wasub: "Let a good watch be kept to-night, old man," glanced contentedly at the setting sun and fell asleep.

Chapter 3

There was in the bows of the Emma an elevated grating over the heel of her bowsprit whence the eye could take in the whole range of her deck and see every movement of her crew. It was a spot safe from eaves-droppers, though, of course, exposed to view. The sun had just set on the supreme content of Carter when Jorgenson and Jaffir sat down side by side between the knighthoods of the Emma and, public but unapproachable, impressive and secret, began to converse in low tones.

Every Wajo fugitive who manned the hulk felt the approach of a decisive moment. Their minds were made up and their hearts beat steadily. They were all desperate men determined to fight and to die and troubling not about the manner of living or dying. This was not the case with Mrs. Travers who, having shut herself up in the deckhouse, was profoundly troubled about those very things, though she, too, felt desperate enough to welcome almost any solution.

Of all the people on board she alone did not know anything of that conference. In her deep and aimless thinking she had only become aware of the absence of the slightest sound on board the Emma. Not a rustle, not a footfall. The public view of Jorgenson and Jaffir in deep consultation had the effect of taking all wish to move from every man.

Twilight enveloped the two figures forward while they talked, looking in the stillness of their pose like carved figures of European and Asiatic contrasted in intimate contact. The deepening dusk had nearly effaced them when at last they rose without warning, as if were, and thrilling the heart of the beholders by the sudden movement. But they did not separate at once. They lingered in their high place as if awaiting the fall of complete darkness, a fit ending to their mysterious communion. Jaffir had given Jorgenson the whole story of the ring, the symbol of a friendship matured and confirmed on the night of defeat, on the night of flight from a far-distant land sleeping unmoved under the wrath and fire of heaven.

"Yes, Tuan," continued Jaffir, "it was first sent out to the white man, on a night of mortal danger, a present to remember a friend by. I was the bearer of it then even as I am now. Then, as now, it was given to me and I was told to save myself and hand the ring over in confirmation of my message. I did so and that white man seemed to still the very storm to save my Rajah. He was not one to depart and forget him whom he had once called his friend. My message was but a message of good-bye, but the charm of the ring was strong enough to draw all the power of that white man to the help of my master. Now I have no words to say. Rajah Hassim asks for nothing. But what

of that? By the mercy of Allah all things are the same, the compassion of the Most High, the power of the ring, the heart of the white man. Nothing is changed, only the friendship is a little older and love has grown because of the shared dangers and long companionship. Therefore, Tuan, I have no fear. But how am I to get the ring to the Rajah Laut? Just hand it to him. The last breath would be time enough if they were to spear me at his feet. But alas! the bush is full of Tengga's men, the beach is open and I could never even hope to reach the gate."

Jorgenson, with his hands deep in the pockets of his tunic, listened, looking down. Jaffir showed as much consternation as his nature was capable of.

"Our refuge is with God," he murmured. "But what is to be done? Has your wisdom no stratagem, O Tuan?"

Jorgenson did not answer. It appeared as though he had no stratagem. But God is great and Jaffir waited on the other's immobility, anxious but patient, perplexed yet hopeful in his grim way, while the night flowing on from the dark forest near by hid their two figures from the sight of observing men. Before the silence of Jorgenson Jaffir began to talk practically. Now that Tengga had thrown off the mask Jaffir did not think that he could land on the beach without being attacked, captured, nay killed, since a man like he, though he could save himself by taking flight at the order of his master, could not be expected to surrender without a fight. He mentioned that in the exercise of his important functions he knew how to glide like a shadow, creep like a snake, and almost burrow his way underground. He was Jaffir who had never been foiled. No bog, morass, great river or jungle could stop him. He would have welcomed them. In many respects they were the friends of a crafty messenger. But that was an open beach, and there was no other way, and as things stood now every bush around, every tree trunk, every deep shadow of house or fence would conceal Tengga's men or such of Daman's infuriated partisans as had already made their way to the Settlement. How could he hope to traverse the distance between the water's edge and Belarab's gate which now would remain shut night and day? Not only himself but anybody from the Emma would be sure to be rushed upon and speared in twenty places.

He reflected for a moment in silence.

"Even you, Tuan, could not accomplish the feat."

"True," muttered Jorgenson.

When, after a period of meditation, he looked round, Jaffir was no longer by his side. He had descended from the high place and was probably squatting on his heels in some dark nook on the fore deck. Jorgenson knew Jaffir too well to suppose that he would go to sleep. He would sit there thinking himself into a state of fury, then get away from the Emma in some way or other, go ashore and perish fighting. He would, in fact, run amok; for it looked as if there could be no way out of the situation. Then, of course, Lingard would know nothing of Hassim and Immada's captivity for the ring would never reach him — the ring that could tell its own tale. No, Lingard would know nothing. He would know nothing about anybody outside Belarab's stockade till the end came, whatever the end might be, for all those people that lived the life of

men. Whether to know or not to know would be good for Lingard Jorgenson could not tell. He admitted to himself that here there was something that he, Jorgenson, could not tell. All the possibilities were wrapped up in doubt, uncertain, like all things pertaining to the life of men. It was only when giving a short thought to himself that Jorgenson had no doubt. He, of course, would know what to do.

On the thin face of that old adventurer hidden in the night not a feature moved, not a muscle twitched, as he descended in his turn and walked aft along the decks of the Emma. His faded eyes, which had seen so much, did not attempt to explore the night, they never gave a glance to the silent watchers against whom he brushed. Had a light been flashed on him suddenly he would have appeared like a man walking in his sleep: the somnambulist of an eternal dream. Mrs. Travers heard his footsteps pass along the side of the deckhouse. She heard them — and let her head fall again on her bare arms thrown over the little desk before which she sat.

Jorgenson, standing by the taffrail, noted the faint reddish glow in the massive blackness of the further shore. Jorgenson noted things quickly, cursorily, perfunctorily, as phenomena unrelated to his own apparitional existence of a visiting ghost. They were but passages in the game of men who were still playing at life. He knew too well how much that game was worth to be concerned about its course. He had given up the habit of thinking for so long that the sudden resumption of it irked him exceedingly, especially as he had to think on toward a conclusion. In that world of eternal oblivion, of which he had tasted before Lingard made him step back into the life of men, all things were settled once for all. He was irritated by his own perplexity which was like a reminder of that mortality made up of questions and passions from which he had fancied he had freed himself forever. By a natural association his contemptuous annoyance embraced the existence of Mrs. Travers, too, for how could he think of Tom Lingard, of what was good or bad for King Tom, without thinking also of that woman who had managed to put the ghost of a spark even into his own extinguished eyes? She was of no account; but Tom's integrity was. It was of Tom that he had to think, of what was good or bad for Tom in that absurd and deadly game of his life. Finally he reached the conclusion that to be given the ring would be good for Tom Lingard. Just to be given the ring and no more. The ring and no more.

"It will help him to make up his mind," muttered Jorgenson in his moustache, as if compelled by an obscure conviction. It was only then that he stirred slightly and turned away from the loom of the fires on the distant shore. Mrs. Travers heard his footsteps passing again along the side of the deckhouse — and this time never raised her head. That man was sleepless, mad, childish, and inflexible. He was impossible. He haunted the decks of that hulk aimlessly. . . .

It was, however, in pursuance of a very distinct aim that Jorgenson had gone forward again to seek Jaffir.

The first remark he had to offer to Jaffir's consideration was that the only person in the world who had the remotest chance of reaching Belarab's gate on that night was that tall white woman the Rajah Laut had brought on board, the wife of one of

the captive white chiefs. Surprise made Jaffir exclaim, but he wasn't prepared to deny that. It was possible that for many reasons, some quite simple and others very subtle, those sons of the Evil One belonging to Tengga and Daman would refrain from killing a white woman walking alone from the water's edge to Belarab's gate. Yes, it was just possible that she might walk unharmed.

"Especially if she carried a blazing torch," muttered Jorgenson in his moustache. He told Jaffir that she was sitting now in the dark, mourning silently in the manner of white women. She had made a great outcry in the morning to be allowed to join the white men on shore. He, Jorgenson, had refused her the canoe. Ever since she had secluded herself in the deckhouse in great distress.

Jaffir listened to it all without particular sympathy. And when Jorgenson added, "It is in my mind, O Jaffir, to let her have her will now," he answered by a "Yes, by Allah! let her go. What does it matter?" of the greatest unconcern, till Jorgenson added:

"Yes. And she may carry the ring to the Rajah Laut."

Jorgenson saw Jaffir, the grim and impassive Jaffir, give a perceptible start. It seemed at first an impossible task to persuade Jaffir to part with the ring. The notion was too monstrous to enter his mind, to move his heart. But at last he surrendered in an awed whisper, "God is great. Perhaps it is her destiny."

Being a Wajo man he did not regard women as untrustworthy or unequal to a task requiring courage and judgment. Once he got over the personal feeling he handed the ring to Jorgenson with only one reservation, "You know, Tuan, that she must on no account put it on her finger."

"Let her hang it round her neck," suggested Jorgenson, readily.

As Jorgenson moved toward the deckhouse it occurred to him that perhaps now that woman Tom Lingard had taken in tow might take it into her head to refuse to leave the Emma. This did not disturb him very much. All those people moved in the dark. He himself at that particular moment was moving in the dark. Beyond the simple wish to guide Lingard's thought in the direction of Hassim and Immada, to help him to make up his mind at last to a ruthless fidelity to his purpose Jorgenson had no other aim. The existence of those whites had no meaning on earth. They were the sort of people that pass without leaving footprints. That woman would have to act in ignorance. And if she refused to go then in ignorance she would have to stay on board. He would tell her nothing.

As a matter of fact, he discovered that Mrs. Travers would simply have nothing to do with him. She would not listen to what he had to say. She desired him, a mere weary voice confined in the darkness of the deck cabin, to go away and trouble her no more. But the ghost of Jorgenson was not easily exorcised. He, too, was a mere voice in the outer darkness, inexorable, insisting that she should come out on deck and listen. At last he found the right words to say.

"It is something about Tom that I want to tell you. You wish him well, don't you?"

After this she could not refuse to come out on deck, and once there she listened patiently to that white ghost muttering and mumbling above her drooping head.

"It seems to me, Captain Jorgenson," she said after he had ceased, "that you are simply trifling with me. After your behaviour to me this morning, I can have nothing to say to you."

"I have a canoe for you now," mumbled Jorgenson.

"You have some new purpose in view now," retorted Mrs. Travers with spirit. "But you won't make it clear to me. What is it that you have in your mind?"

"Tom's interest."

"Are you really his friend?"

"He brought me here. You know it. He has talked a lot to you."

"He did. But I ask myself whether you are capable of being anybody's friend."

"You ask yourself!" repeated Jorgenson, very quiet and morose. "If I am not his friend I should like to know who is."

Mrs. Travers asked, quickly: "What's all this about a ring? What ring?"

"Tom's property. He has had it for years."

"And he gave it to you? Doesn't he care for it?"

"Don't know. It's just a thing."

"But it has a meaning as between you and him. Is that so?"

"Yes. It has. He will know what it means."

"What does it mean?"

"I am too much his friend not to hold my tongue."

"What! To me!"

"And who are you?" was Jorgenson's unexpected remark. "He has told you too much already."

"Perhaps he has," whispered Mrs. Travers, as if to herself. "And you want that ring to be taken to him?" she asked, in a louder tone.

"Yes. At once. For his good."

"Are you certain it is for his good? Why can't you. . . ."

She checked herself. That man was hopeless. He would never tell anything and there was no means of compelling him. He was invulnerable, unapproachable. . . . He was dead.

"Just give it to him," mumbled Jorgenson as though pursuing a mere fixed idea. "Just slip it quietly into his hand. He will understand."

"What is it? Advice, warning, signal for action?"

"It may be anything," uttered Jorgenson, morosely, but as it were in a mollified tone. "It's meant for his good."

"Oh, if I only could trust that man!" mused Mrs. Travers, half aloud.

Jorgenson's slight noise in the throat might have been taken for an expression of sympathy. But he remained silent.

"Really, this is most extraordinary!" cried Mrs. Travers, suddenly aroused. "Why did you come to me? Why should it be my task? Why should you want me specially to take it to him?"

“I will tell you why,” said Jorgenson’s blank voice. “It’s because there is no one on board this hulk that can hope to get alive inside that stockade. This morning you told me yourself that you were ready to die — for Tom — or with Tom. Well, risk it then. You are the only one that has half a chance to get through — and Tom, maybe, is waiting.”

“The only one,” repeated Mrs. Travers with an abrupt movement forward and an extended hand before which Jorgenson stepped back a pace. “Risk it! Certainly! Where’s that mysterious ring?”

“I have got it in my pocket,” said Jorgenson, readily; yet nearly half a minute elapsed before Mrs. Travers felt the characteristic shape being pressed into her half-open palm. “Don’t let anybody see it,” Jorgenson admonished her in a murmur. “Hide it somewhere about you. Why not hang it round your neck?”

Mrs. Travers’ hand remained firmly closed on the ring. “Yes, that will do,” she murmured, hastily. “I’ll be back in a moment. Get everything ready.” With those words she disappeared inside the deckhouse and presently threads of light appeared in the interstices of the boards. Mrs. Travers had lighted a candle in there. She was busy hanging that ring round her neck. She was going. Yes — taking the risk for Tom’s sake.

“Nobody can resist that man,” Jorgenson muttered to himself with increasing moroseness. “I couldn’t.”

Chapter 4

Jorgenson, after seeing the canoe leave the ship’s side, ceased to live intellectually. There was no need for more thinking, for any display of mental ingenuity. He had done with it all. All his notions were perfectly fixed and he could go over them in the same ghostly way in which he haunted the deck of the Emma. At the sight of the ring Lingard would return to Hassim and Immada, now captives, too, though Jorgenson certainly did not think them in any serious danger. What had happened really was that Tenggara was now holding hostages, and those Jorgenson looked upon as Lingard’s own people. They were his. He had gone in with them deep, very deep. They had a hold and a claim on King Tom just as many years ago people of that very race had had a hold and a claim on him, Jorgenson. Only Tom was a much bigger man. A very big man. Nevertheless, Jorgenson didn’t see why he should escape his own fate — Jorgenson’s fate — to be absorbed, captured, made their own either in failure or in success. It was an unavoidable fatality and Jorgenson felt certain that the ring would compel Lingard to face it without flinching. What he really wanted Lingard to do was to cease to take the slightest interest in those whites — who were the sort of people that left no footprints.

Perhaps at first sight, sending that woman to Lingard was not the best way toward that end. Jorgenson, however, had a distinct impression in which his morning talk

with Mrs. Travers had only confirmed him, that those two had quarrelled for good. As, indeed, was unavoidable. What did Tom Lingard want with any woman? The only woman in Jorgenson's life had come in by way of exchange for a lot of cotton stuffs and several brass guns. This fact could not but affect Jorgenson's judgment since obviously in this case such a transaction was impossible. Therefore the case was not serious. It didn't exist. What did exist was Lingard's relation to the Wajo exiles, a great and warlike adventure such as no rover in those seas had ever attempted.

That Tengga was much more ready to negotiate than to fight, the old adventurer had not the slightest doubt. How Lingard would deal with him was not a concern of Jorgenson's. That would be easy enough. Nothing prevented Lingard from going to see Tengga and talking to him with authority. All that ambitious person really wanted was to have a share in Lingard's wealth, in Lingard's power, in Lingard's friendship. A year before Tengga had once insinuated to Jorgenson, "In what way am I less worthy of being a friend than Belarab?"

It was a distinct overture, a disclosure of the man's innermost mind. Jorgenson, of course, had met it with a profound silence. His task was not diplomacy but the care of stores.

After the effort of connected mental processes in order to bring about Mrs. Travers' departure he was anxious to dismiss the whole matter from his mind. The last thought he gave to it was severely practical. It occurred to him that it would be advisable to attract in some way or other Lingard's attention to the lagoon. In the language of the sea a single rocket is properly a signal of distress, but, in the circumstances, a group of three sent up simultaneously would convey a warning. He gave his orders and watched the rockets go up finely with a trail of red sparks, a bursting of white stars high up in the air, and three loud reports in quick succession. Then he resumed his pacing of the whole length of the hulk, confident that after this Tom would guess that something was up and set a close watch over the lagoon. No doubt these mysterious rockets would have a disturbing effect on Tengga and his friends and cause a great excitement in the Settlement; but for that Jorgenson did not care. The Settlement was already in such a turmoil that a little more excitement did not matter. What Jorgenson did not expect, however, was the sound of a musket-shot fired from the jungle facing the bows of the Emma. It caused him to stop dead short. He had heard distinctly the bullet strike the curve of the bow forward. "Some hot-headed ass fired that," he said to himself, contemptuously. It simply disclosed to him the fact that he was already besieged on the shore side and set at rest his doubts as to the length Tengga was prepared to go. Any length! Of course there was still time for Tom to put everything right with six words, unless . . . Jorgenson smiled, grimly, in the dark and resumed his tireless pacing.

What amused him was to observe the fire which had been burning night and day before Tengga's residence suddenly extinguished. He pictured to himself the wild rush with bamboo buckets to the lagoon shore, the confusion, the hurry and jostling in a great hissing of water midst clouds of steam. The image of the fat Tengga's consterna-

tion appealed to Jorgenson's sense of humour for about five seconds. Then he took up the binoculars from the roof of the deckhouse.

The bursting of the three white stars over the lagoon had given him a momentary glimpse of the black speck of the canoe taking over Mrs. Travers. He couldn't find it again with the glass, it was too dark; but the part of the shore for which it was steered would be somewhere near the angle of Belarab's stockade nearest to the beach. This Jorgenson could make out in the faint rosy glare of fires burning inside. Jorgenson was certain that Lingard was looking toward the Emma through the most convenient loophole he could find.

As obviously Mrs. Travers could not have paddled herself across, two men were taking her over; and for the steersman she had Jaffir. Though he had assented to Jorgenson's plan Jaffir was anxious to accompany the ring as near as possible to its destination. Nothing but dire necessity had induced him to part with the talisman. Crouching in the stern and flourishing his paddle from side to side he glared at the back of the canvas deck-chair which had been placed in the middle for Mrs. Travers. Wrapped up in the darkness she reclined in it with her eyes closed, faintly aware of the ring hung low on her breast. As the canoe was rather large it was moving very slowly. The two men dipped their paddles without a splash: and surrendering herself passively, in a temporary relaxation of all her limbs, to this adventure Mrs. Travers had no sense of motion at all. She, too, like Jorgenson, was tired of thinking. She abandoned herself to the silence of that night full of roused passions and deadly purposes. She abandoned herself to an illusory feeling; to the impression that she was really resting. For the first time in many days she could taste the relief of being alone. The men with her were less than nothing. She could not speak to them; she could not understand them; the canoe might have been moving by enchantment — if it did move at all. Like a half-conscious sleeper she was on the verge of saying to herself, "What a strange dream I am having."

The low tones of Jaffir's voice stole into it quietly telling the men to cease paddling, and the long canoe came to a rest slowly, no more than ten yards from the beach. The party had been provided with a torch which was to be lighted before the canoe touched the shore, thus giving a character of openness to this desperate expedition. "And if it draws fire on us," Jaffir had commented to Jorgenson, "well, then, we shall see whose fate it is to die on this night."

"Yes," had muttered Jorgenson. "We shall see."

Jorgenson saw at last the small light of the torch against the blackness of the stockade. He strained his hearing for a possible volley of musketry fire but no sound came to him over the broad surface of the lagoon. Over there the man with the torch, the other paddler, and Jaffir himself impelling with a gentle motion of his paddle the canoe toward the shore, had the glistening eyeballs and the tense faces of silent excitement. The ruddy glare smote Mrs. Travers' closed eyelids but she didn't open her eyes till she felt the canoe touch the strand. The two men leaped instantly out of it. Mrs. Travers rose, abruptly. Nobody made a sound. She stumbled out of the canoe on to the beach and almost before she had recovered her balance the torch was

thrust into her hand. The heat, the nearness of the blaze confused and blinded her till, instinctively, she raised the torch high above her head. For a moment she stood still, holding aloft the fierce flame from which a few sparks were falling slowly.

A naked bronze arm lighted from above pointed out the direction and Mrs. Travers began to walk toward the featureless black mass of the stockade. When after a few steps she looked back over her shoulder, the lagoon, the beach, the canoe, the men she had just left had become already invisible. She was alone bearing up a blazing torch on an earth that was a dumb shadow shifting under her feet. At last she reached firmer ground and the dark length of the palisade untouched as yet by the light of the torch seemed to her immense, intimidating. She felt ready to drop from sheer emotion. But she moved on.

“A little more to the left,” shouted a strong voice.

It vibrated through all her fibres, rousing like the call of a trumpet, went far beyond her, filled all the space. Mrs. Travers stood still for a moment, then casting far away from her the burning torch ran forward blindly with her hands extended toward the great sound of Lingard’s voice, leaving behind her the light flaring and spluttering on the ground. She stumbled and was only saved from a fall by her hands coming in contact with the rough stakes. The stockade rose high above her head and she clung to it with widely open arms, pressing her whole body against the rugged surface of that enormous and unscalable palisade. She heard through it low voices inside, heavy thuds; and felt at every blow a slight vibration of the ground under her feet. She glanced fearfully over her shoulder and saw nothing in the darkness but the expiring glow of the torch she had thrown away and the sombre shimmer of the lagoon bordering the opaque darkness of the shore. Her strained eyeballs seemed to detect mysterious movements in the darkness and she gave way to irresistible terror, to a shrinking agony of apprehension. Was she to be transfixed by a broad blade, to the high, immovable wall of wood against which she was flattening herself desperately, as though she could hope to penetrate it by the mere force of her fear? She had no idea where she was, but as a matter of fact she was a little to the left of the principal gate and almost exactly under one of the loopholes of the stockade. Her excessive anguish passed into insensibility. She ceased to hear, to see, and even to feel the contact of the surface to which she clung. Lingard’s voice somewhere from the sky above her head was directing her, distinct, very close, full of concern.

“You must stoop low. Lower yet.”

The stagnant blood of her body began to pulsate languidly. She stooped low — lower yet — so low that she had to sink on her knees, and then became aware of a faint smell of wood smoke mingled with the confused murmur of agitated voices. This came to her through an opening no higher than her head in her kneeling posture, and no wider than the breadth of two stakes. Lingard was saying in a tone of distress:

“I couldn’t get any of them to unbar the gate.”

She was unable to make a sound. — “Are you there?” Lingard asked, anxiously, so close to her now that she seemed to feel the very breath of his words on her face. It

revived her completely; she understood what she had to do. She put her head and shoulders through the opening, was at once seized under the arms by an eager grip and felt herself pulled through with an irresistible force and with such haste that her scarf was dragged off her head, its fringes having caught in the rough timber. The same eager grip lifted her up, stood her on her feet without her having to make any exertion toward that end. She became aware that Lingard was trying to say something, but she heard only a confused stammering expressive of wonder and delight in which she caught the words "You . . . you . . ." deliriously repeated. He didn't release his hold of her; his helpful and irresistible grip had changed into a close clasp, a crushing embrace, the violent taking possession by an embodied force that had broken loose and was not to be controlled any longer. As his great voice had done a moment before, his great strength, too, seemed able to fill all space in its enveloping and undeniable authority. Every time she tried instinctively to stiffen herself against its might, it reacted, affirming its fierce will, its uplifting power. Several times she lost the feeling of the ground and had a sensation of helplessness without fear, of triumph without exultation. The inevitable had come to pass. She had foreseen it — and all the time in that dark place and against the red glow of camp fires within the stockade the man in whose arms she struggled remained shadowy to her eyes — to her half-closed eyes. She thought suddenly, "He will crush me to death without knowing it."

He was like a blind force. She closed her eyes altogether. Her head fell back a little. Not instinctively but with wilful resignation and as it were from a sense of justice she abandoned herself to his arms. The effect was as though she had suddenly stabbed him to the heart. He let her go so suddenly and completely that she would have fallen down in a heap if she had not managed to catch hold of his forearm. He seemed prepared for it and for a moment all her weight hung on it without moving its rigidity by a hair's breadth. Behind her Mrs. Travers heard the heavy thud of blows on wood, the confused murmurs and movements of men.

A voice said suddenly, "It's done," with such emphasis that though, of course, she didn't understand the words it helped her to regain possession of herself; and when Lingard asked her very little above a whisper: "Why don't you say something?" she answered readily, "Let me get my breath first."

Round them all sounds had ceased. The men had secured again the opening through which those arms had snatched her into a moment of self-forgetfulness which had left her out of breath but uncrushed. As if something imperative had been satisfied she had a moment of inward serenity, a period of peace without thought while, holding to that arm that trembled no more than an arm of iron, she felt stealthily over the ground for one of the sandals which she had lost. Oh, yes, there was no doubt of it, she had been carried off the earth, without shame, without regret. But she would not have let him know of that dropped sandal for anything in the world. That lost sandal was as symbolic as a dropped veil. But he did not know of it. He must never know. Where was that thing? She felt sure that they had not moved an inch from that spot. Presently her foot found it and still gripping Lingard's forearm she stooped to secure

it properly. When she stood up, still holding his arm, they confronted each other, he rigid in an effort of self-command but feeling as if the surges of the heaviest sea that he could remember in his life were running through his heart; and the woman as if emptied of all feeling by her experience, without thought yet, but beginning to regain her sense of the situation and the memory of the immediate past.

"I have been watching at that loophole for an hour, ever since they came running to me with that story of the rockets," said Lingard. "I was shut up with Belarab then. I was looking out when the torch blazed and you stepped ashore. I thought I was dreaming. But what could I do? I felt I must rush to you but I dared not. That clump of palms is full of men. So are the houses you saw that time you came ashore with me. Full of men. Armed men. A trigger is soon pulled and when once shooting begins. . . . And you walking in the open with that light above your head! I didn't dare. You were safer alone. I had the strength to hold myself in and watch you come up from the shore. No! No man that ever lived had seen such a sight. What did you come for?"

"Didn't you expect somebody? I don't mean me, I mean a messenger?"

"No!" said Lingard, wondering at his own self-control. "Why did he let you come?"

"You mean Captain Jorgenson? Oh, he refused at first. He said that he had your orders."

"How on earth did you manage to get round him?" said Lingard in his softest tones.

"I did not try," she began and checked herself. Lingard's question, though he really didn't seem to care much about an answer, had aroused afresh her suspicion of Jorgenson's change of front. "I didn't have to say very much at the last," she continued, gasping yet a little and feeling her personality, crushed to nothing in the hug of those arms, expand again to its full significance before the attentive immobility of that man. "Captain Jorgenson has always looked upon me as a nuisance. Perhaps he had made up his mind to get rid of me even against your orders. Is he quite sane?"

She released her firm hold of that iron forearm which fell slowly by Lingard's side. She had regained fully the possession of her personality. There remained only a fading, slightly breathless impression of a short flight above that earth on which her feet were firmly planted now. "And is that all?" she asked herself, not bitterly, but with a sort of tender contempt.

"He is so sane," sounded Lingard's voice, gloomily, "that if I had listened to him you would not have found me here."

"What do you mean by here? In this stockade?"

"Anywhere," he said.

"And what would have happened then?"

"God knows," he answered. "What would have happened if the world had not been made in seven days? I have known you for just about that time. It began by me coming to you at night — like a thief in the night. Where the devil did I hear that? And that man you are married to thinks I am no better than a thief."

"It ought to be enough for you that I never made a mistake as to what you are, that I come to you in less than twenty-four hours after you left me contemptuously to

my distress. Don't pretend you didn't hear me call after you. Oh, yes, you heard. The whole ship heard me for I had no shame."

"Yes, you came," said Lingard, violently. "But have you really come? I can't believe my eyes! Are you really here?"

"This is a dark spot, luckily," said Mrs. Travers. "But can you really have any doubt?" she added, significantly.

He made a sudden movement toward her, betraying so much passion that Mrs. Travers thought, "I shan't come out alive this time," and yet he was there, motionless before her, as though he had never stirred. It was more as though the earth had made a sudden movement under his feet without being able to destroy his balance. But the earth under Mrs. Travers' feet had made no movement and for a second she was overwhelmed by wonder not at this proof of her own self-possession but at the man's immense power over himself. If it had not been for her strange inward exhaustion she would perhaps have surrendered to that power. But it seemed to her that she had nothing in her worth surrendering, and it was in a perfectly even tone that she said, "Give me your arm, Captain Lingard. We can't stay all night on this spot."

As they moved on she thought, "There is real greatness in that man." He was great even in his behaviour. No apologies, no explanations, no abasement, no violence, and not even the slightest tremor of the frame holding that bold and perplexed soul. She knew that for certain because her fingers were resting lightly on Lingard's arm while she walked slowly by his side as though he were taking her down to dinner. And yet she couldn't suppose for a moment, that, like herself, he was emptied of all emotion. She never before was so aware of him as a dangerous force. "He is really ruthless," she thought. They had just left the shadow of the inner defences about the gate when a slightly hoarse, apologetic voice was heard behind them repeating insistently, what even Mrs. Travers' ear detected to be a sort of formula. The words were: "There is this thing — there is this thing — there is this thing." They turned round.

"Oh, my scarf," said Mrs. Travers.

A short, squat, broad-faced young fellow having for all costume a pair of white drawers was offering the scarf thrown over both his arms, as if they had been sticks, and holding it respectfully as far as possible from his person. Lingard took it from him and Mrs. Travers claimed it at once. "Don't forget the proprieties," she said. "This is also my face veil."

She was arranging it about her head when Lingard said, "There is no need. I am taking you to those gentlemen." — "I will use it all the same," said Mrs. Travers. "This thing works both ways, as a matter of propriety or as a matter of precaution. Till I have an opportunity of looking into a mirror nothing will persuade me that there isn't some change in my face." Lingard swung half round and gazed down at her. Veiled now she confronted him boldly. "Tell me, Captain Lingard, how many eyes were looking at us a little while ago?"

"Do you care?" he asked.

“Not in the least,” she said. “A million stars were looking on, too, and what did it matter? They were not of the world I know. And it’s just the same with the eyes. They are not of the world I live in.”

Lingard thought: “Nobody is.” Never before had she seemed to him more unapproachable, more different and more remote. The glow of a number of small fires lighted the ground only, and brought out the black bulk of men lying down in the thin drift of smoke. Only one of these fires, rather apart and burning in front of the house which was the quarter of the prisoners, might have been called a blaze and even that was not a great one. It didn’t penetrate the dark space between the piles and the depth of the verandah above where only a couple of heads and the glint of a spearhead could be seen dimly in the play of the light. But down on the ground outside, the black shape of a man seated on a bench had an intense relief. Another intensely black shadow threw a handful of brushwood on the fire and went away. The man on the bench got up. It was d’Alcacer. He let Lingard and Mrs. Travers come quite close up to him. Extreme surprise seemed to have made him dumb.

“You didn’t expect . . .” began Mrs. Travers with some embarrassment before that mute attitude.

“I doubted my eyes,” struck in d’Alcacer, who seemed embarrassed, too. Next moment he recovered his tone and confessed simply: “At the moment I wasn’t thinking of you, Mrs. Travers.” He passed his hand over his forehead. “I hardly know what I was thinking of.”

In the light of the shooting-up flame Mrs. Travers could see d’Alcacer’s face. There was no smile on it. She could not remember ever seeing him so grave and, as it were, so distant. She abandoned Lingard’s arm and moved closer to the fire.

“I fancy you were very far away, Mr. d’Alcacer,” she said.

“This is the sort of freedom of which nothing can deprive us,” he observed, looking hard at the manner in which the scarf was drawn across Mrs. Travers’ face. “It’s possible I was far away,” he went on, “but I can assure you that I don’t know where I was. Less than an hour ago we had a great excitement here about some rockets, but I didn’t share in it. There was no one I could ask a question of. The captain here was, I understood, engaged in a most momentous conversation with the king or the governor of this place.”

He addressed Lingard, directly. “May I ask whether you have reached any conclusion as yet? That Moor is a very dilatory person, I believe.”

“Any direct attack he would, of course, resist,” said Lingard. “And, so far, you are protected. But I must admit that he is rather angry with me. He’s tired of the whole business. He loves peace above anything in the world. But I haven’t finished with him yet.”

“As far as I understood from what you told me before,” said Mr. d’Alcacer, with a quick side glance at Mrs. Travers’ uncovered and attentive eyes, “as far as I can see he may get all the peace he wants at once by driving us two, I mean Mr. Travers and myself, out of the gate on to the spears of those other enraged barbarians. And there

are some of his counsellors who advise him to do that very thing no later than the break of day I understand.”

Lingard stood for a moment perfectly motionless.

“That’s about it,” he said in an unemotional tone, and went away with a heavy step without giving another look at d’Alcacer and Mrs. Travers, who after a moment faced each other.

“You have heard?” said d’Alcacer. “Of course that doesn’t affect your fate in any way, and as to him he is much too prestigious to be killed light-heartedly. When all this is over you will walk triumphantly on his arm out of this stockade; for there is nothing in all this to affect his greatness, his absolute value in the eyes of those people — and indeed in any other eyes.” D’Alcacer kept his glance averted from Mrs. Travers and as soon as he had finished speaking busied himself in dragging the bench a little way further from the fire. When they sat down on it he kept his distance from Mrs. Travers. She made no sign of unveiling herself and her eyes without a face seemed to him strangely unknown and disquieting.

“The situation in a nutshell,” she said. “You have arranged it all beautifully, even to my triumphal exit. Well, and what then? No, you needn’t answer, it has no interest. I assure you I came here not with any notion of marching out in triumph, as you call it. I came here, to speak in the most vulgar way, to save your skin — and mine.”

Her voice came muffled to d’Alcacer’s ears with a changed character, even to the very intonation. Above the white and embroidered scarf her eyes in the firelight transfixed him, black and so steady that even the red sparks of the reflected glare did not move in them. He concealed the strong impression she made. He bowed his head a little.

“I believe you know perfectly well what you are doing.”

“No! I don’t know,” she said, more quickly than he had ever heard her speak before. “First of all, I don’t think he is so safe as you imagine. Oh, yes, he has prestige enough, I don’t question that. But you are apportioning life and death with too much assurance. . . .”

“I know my portion,” murmured d’Alcacer, gently. A moment of silence fell in which Mrs. Travers’ eyes ended by intimidating d’Alcacer, who looked away. The flame of the fire had sunk low. In the dark agglomeration of buildings, which might have been called Belarab’s palace, there was a certain animation, a flitting of people, voices calling and answering, the passing to and fro of lights that would illuminate suddenly a heavy pile, the corner of a house, the eaves of a low-pitched roof, while in the open parts of the stockade the armed men slept by the expiring fires.

Mrs. Travers said, suddenly, “That Jorgenson is not friendly to us.”

“Possibly.”

With clasped hands and leaning over his knees d’Alcacer had assented in a very low tone. Mrs. Travers, unobserved, pressed her hands to her breast and felt the shape of the ring, thick, heavy, set with a big stone. It was there, secret, hung against her heart, and enigmatic. What did it mean? What could it mean? What was the feeling it could arouse or the action it could provoke? And she thought with compunction that she

ought to have given it to Lingard at once, without thinking, without hesitating. "There! This is what I came for. To give you this." Yes, but there had come an interval when she had been able to think of nothing, and since then she had had the time to reflect — unfortunately. To remember Jorgenson's hostile, contemptuous glance enveloping her from head to foot at the break of a day after a night of lonely anguish. And now while she sat there veiled from his keen sight there was that other man, that d'Alcacer, prophesying. O yes, triumphant. She knew already what that was. Mrs. Travers became afraid of the ring. She felt ready to pluck it from her neck and cast it away.

"I mistrust him," she said. — "You do!" exclaimed d'Alcacer, very low. — "I mean that Jorgenson. He seems a merciless sort of creature." — "He is indifferent to everything," said d'Alcacer. — "It may be a mask." — "Have you some evidence, Mrs. Travers?"

"No," said Mrs. Travers without hesitation. "I have my instinct."

D'Alcacer remained silent for a while as though he were pursuing another train of thought altogether, then in a gentle, almost playful tone: "If I were a woman," he said, turning to Mrs. Travers, "I would always trust my intuition." — "If you were a woman, Mr. d'Alcacer, I would not be speaking to you in this way because then I would be suspect to you."

The thought that before long perhaps he would be neither man nor woman but a lump of cold clay, crossed d'Alcacer's mind, which was living, alert, and unsubdued by the danger. He had welcomed the arrival of Mrs. Travers simply because he had been very lonely in that stockade, Mr. Travers having fallen into a phase of sulks complicated with shivering fits. Of Lingard d'Alcacer had seen almost nothing since they had landed, for the Man of Fate was extremely busy negotiating in the recesses of Belarab's main hut; and the thought that his life was being a matter of arduous bargaining was not agreeable to Mr. d'Alcacer. The Chief's dependents and the armed men garrisoning the stockade paid very little attention to him apparently, and this gave him the feeling of his captivity being very perfect and hopeless. During the afternoon, while pacing to and fro in the bit of shade thrown by the glorified sort of hut inside which Mr. Travers shivered and sulked misanthropically, he had been aware of the more distant verandahs becoming filled now and then by the muffled forms of women of Belarab's household taking a distant and curious view of the white man. All this was irksome. He found his menaced life extremely difficult to get through. Yes, he welcomed the arrival of Mrs. Travers who brought with her a tragic note into the empty gloom.

"Suspicion is not in my nature, Mrs. Travers, I assure you, and I hope that you on your side will never suspect either my reserve or my frankness. I respect the mysterious nature of your conviction but hasn't Jorgenson given you some occasion to. . ."

"He hates me," said Mrs. Travers, and frowned at d'Alcacer's incipient smile. "It isn't a delusion on my part. The worst is that he hates me not for myself. I believe he is completely indifferent to my existence. Jorgenson hates me because as it were I represent you two who are in danger, because it is you two that are the trouble and I . . . Well!"

“Yes, yes, that’s certain,” said d’Alcacer, hastily. “But Jorgenson is wrong in making you the scapegoat. For if you were not here cool reason would step in and would make Lingard pause in his passion to make a king out of an exile. If we were murdered it would certainly make some stir in the world in time and he would fall under the suspicion of complicity with those wild and inhuman Moors. Who would regard the greatness of his day-dreams, his engaged honour, his chivalrous feelings? Nothing could save him from that suspicion. And being what he is, you understand me, Mrs. Travers (but you know him much better than I do), it would morally kill him.”

“Heavens!” whispered Mrs. Travers. “This has never occurred to me.” Those words seemed to lose themselves in the folds of the scarf without reaching d’Alcacer, who continued in his gentle tone:

“However, as it is, he will be safe enough whatever happens. He will have your testimony to clear him.”

Mrs. Travers stood up, suddenly, but still careful to keep her face covered, she threw the end of the scarf over her shoulder.

“I fear that Jorgenson,” she cried with suppressed passion. “One can’t understand what that man means to do. I think him so dangerous that if I were, for instance, entrusted with a message bearing on the situation, I would . . . suppress it.”

D’Alcacer was looking up from the seat, full of wonder. Mrs. Travers appealed to him in a calm voice through the folds of the scarf:

“Tell me, Mr. d’Alcacer, you who can look on it calmly, wouldn’t I be right?”

“Why, has Jorgenson told you anything?”

“Directly — nothing, except a phrase or two which really I could not understand. They seemed to have a hidden sense and he appeared to attach some mysterious importance to them that he dared not explain to me.”

“That was a risk on his part,” exclaimed d’Alcacer. “And he trusted you. Why you, I wonder!”

“Who can tell what notions he has in his head? Mr. d’Alcacer, I believe his only object is to call Captain Lingard away from us. I understood it only a few minutes ago. It has dawned upon me. All he wants is to call him off.”

“Call him off,” repeated d’Alcacer, a little bewildered by the aroused fire of her conviction. “I am sure I don’t want him called off any more than you do; and, frankly, I don’t believe Jorgenson has any such power. But upon the whole, and if you feel that Jorgenson has the power, I would — yes, if I were in your place I think I would suppress anything I could not understand.”

Mrs. Travers listened to the very end. Her eyes — they appeared incredibly sombre to d’Alcacer — seemed to watch the fall of every deliberate word and after he had ceased they remained still for an appreciable time. Then she turned away with a gesture that seemed to say: “So be it.”

D’Alcacer raised his voice suddenly after her. “Stay! Don’t forget that not only your husband’s but my head, too, is being played at that game. My judgment is not . . .”

She stopped for a moment and freed her lips. In the profound stillness of the courtyard her clear voice made the shadows at the nearest fires stir a little with low murmurs of surprise.

“Oh, yes, I remember whose heads I have to save,” she cried. “But in all the world who is there to save that man from himself?”

Chapter 5

D’Alcacer sat down on the bench again. “I wonder what she knows,” he thought, “and I wonder what I have done.” He wondered also how far he had been sincere and how far affected by a very natural aversion from being murdered obscurely by ferocious Moors with all the circumstances of barbarity. It was a very naked death to come upon one suddenly. It was robbed of all helpful illusions, such as the free will of a suicide, the heroism of a warrior, or the exaltation of a martyr. “Hadn’t I better make some sort of fight of it?” he debated with himself. He saw himself rushing at the naked spears without any enthusiasm. Or wouldn’t it be better to go forth to meet his doom (somewhere outside the stockade on that horrible beach) with calm dignity. “Pah! I shall be probably speared through the back in the beastliest possible fashion,” he thought with an inward shudder. It was certainly not a shudder of fear, for Mr. d’Alcacer attached no high value to life. It was a shudder of disgust because Mr. d’Alcacer was a civilized man and though he had no illusions about civilization he could not but admit the superiority of its methods. It offered to one a certain refinement of form, a comeliness of proceedings and definite safeguards against deadly surprises. “How idle all this is,” he thought, finally. His next thought was that women were very resourceful. It was true, he went on meditating with unwonted cynicism, that strictly speaking they had only one resource but, generally, it served — it served.

He was surprised by his supremely shameless bitterness at this juncture. It was so uncalled for. This situation was too complicated to be entrusted to a cynical or shameless hope. There was nothing to trust to. At this moment of his meditation he became aware of Lingard’s approach. He raised his head eagerly. D’Alcacer was not indifferent to his fate and even to Mr. Travers’ fate. He would fain learn. . . . But one look at Lingard’s face was enough. “It’s no use asking him anything,” he said to himself, “for he cares for nothing just now.”

Lingard sat down heavily on the other end of the bench, and d’Alcacer, looking at his profile, confessed to himself that this was the most masculinely good-looking face he had ever seen in his life. It was an expressive face, too, but its present expression was also beyond d’Alcacer’s past experience. At the same time its quietness set up a barrier against common curiosities and even common fears. No, it was no use asking him anything. Yet something should be said to break the spell, to call down again this man to the earth. But it was Lingard who spoke first. “Where has Mrs. Travers gone?”

“She has gone . . . where naturally she would be anxious to go first of all since she has managed to come to us,” answered d’Alcacer, wording his answer with the utmost regard for the delicacy of the situation.

The stillness of Lingard seemed to have grown even more impressive. He spoke again.

“I wonder what those two can have to say to each other.”

He might have been asking that of the whole darkened part of the globe, but it was d’Alcacer who answered in his courteous tones.

“Would it surprise you very much, Captain Lingard, if I were to tell you that those two people are quite fit to understand each other thoroughly? Yes? It surprises you! Well, I assure you that seven thousand miles from here nobody would wonder.”

“I think I understand,” said Lingard, “but don’t you know the man is light-headed? A man like that is as good as mad.”

“Yes, he had been slightly delirious since seven o’clock,” said d’Alcacer. “But believe me, Captain Lingard,” he continued, earnestly, and obeying a perfectly disinterested impulse, “that even in his delirium he is far more understandable to her and better able to understand her than . . . anybody within a hundred miles from here.”

“Ah!” said Lingard without any emotion, “so you don’t wonder. You don’t see any reason for wonder.”

“No, for, don’t you see, I do know.”

“What do you know?”

“Men and women, Captain Lingard, which you. . . .”

“I don’t know any woman.”

“You have spoken the strictest truth there,” said d’Alcacer, and for the first time Lingard turned his head slowly and looked at his neighbour on the bench.

“Do you think she is as good as mad, too?” asked Lingard in a startled voice.

D’Alcacer let escape a low exclamation. No, certainly he did not think so. It was an original notion to suppose that lunatics had a sort of common logic which made them understandable to each other. D’Alcacer tried to make his voice as gentle as possible while he pursued: “No, Captain Lingard, I believe the woman of whom we speak is and will always remain in the fullest possession of herself.”

Lingard, leaning back, clasped his hands round his knees. He seemed not to be listening and d’Alcacer, pulling a cigarette case out of his pocket, looked for a long time at the three cigarettes it contained. It was the last of the provision he had on him when captured. D’Alcacer had put himself on the strictest allowance. A cigarette was only to be lighted on special occasions; and now there were only three left and they had to be made to last till the end of life. They calmed, they soothed, they gave an attitude. And only three left! One had to be kept for the morning, to be lighted before going through the gate of doom — the gate of Belarab’s stockade. A cigarette soothed, it gave an attitude. Was this the fitting occasion for one of the remaining two? D’Alcacer, a true Latin, was not afraid of a little introspection. In the pause he descended into the innermost depths of his being, then glanced up at the night sky.

Sportsman, traveller, he had often looked up at the stars before to see how time went. It was going very slowly. He took out a cigarette, snapped-to the case, bent down to the embers. Then he sat up and blew out a thin cloud of smoke. The man by his side looked with his bowed head and clasped knee like a masculine rendering of mournful meditation. Such attitudes are met with sometimes on the sculptures of ancient tombs. D'Alcacer began to speak:

“She is a representative woman and yet one of those of whom there are but very few at any time in the world. Not that they are very rare but that there is but little room on top. They are the iridescent gleams on a hard and dark surface. For the world is hard, Captain Lingard, it is hard, both in what it will remember and in what it will forget. It is for such women that people toil on the ground and underground and artists of all sorts invoke their inspiration.”

Lingard seemed not to have heard a word. His chin rested on his breast. D'Alcacer appraised the remaining length of his cigarette and went on in an equable tone through which pierced a certain sadness:

“No, there are not many of them. And yet they are all. They decorate our life for us. They are the gracious figures on the drab wall which lies on this side of our common grave. They lead a sort of ritual dance, that most of us have agreed to take seriously. It is a very binding agreement with which sincerity and good faith and honour have nothing to do. Very binding. Woe to him or her who breaks it. Directly they leave the pageant they get lost.”

Lingard turned his head sharply and discovered d'Alcacer looking at him with profound attention.

“They get lost in a maze,” continued d'Alcacer, quietly. “They wander in it lamenting over themselves. I would shudder at that fate for anything I loved. Do you know, Captain Lingard, how people lost in a maze end?” he went on holding Lingard by a steadfast stare. “No? . . . I will tell you then. They end by hating their very selves, and they die in disillusion and despair.”

As if afraid of the force of his words d'Alcacer laid a soothing hand lightly on Lingard's shoulder. But Lingard continued to look into the embers at his feet and remained insensible to the friendly touch. Yet d'Alcacer could not imagine that he had not been heard. He folded his arms on his breast.

“I don't know why I have been telling you all this,” he said, apologetically. “I hope I have not been intruding on your thoughts.”

“I can think of nothing,” Lingard declared, unexpectedly. “I only know that your voice was friendly; and for the rest — ”

“One must get through a night like this somehow,” said d'Alcacer. “The very stars seem to lag on their way. It's a common belief that a drowning man is irresistibly compelled to review his past experience. Just now I feel quite out of my depth, and whatever I have said has come from my experience. I am sure you will forgive me. All that it amounts to is this: that it is natural for us to cry for the moon but it would be

very fatal to have our cries heard. For what could any one of us do with the moon if it were given to him? I am speaking now of us — common mortals.”

It was not immediately after d’Alcacer had ceased speaking but only after a moment that Lingard unclasped his fingers, got up, and walked away. D’Alcacer followed with a glance of quiet interest the big, shadowy form till it vanished in the direction of an enormous forest tree left in the middle of the stockade. The deepest shade of the night was spread over the ground of Belarab’s fortified courtyard. The very embers of the fires had turned black, showing only here and there a mere spark; and the forms of the prone sleepers could hardly be distinguished from the hard ground on which they rested, with their arms lying beside them on the mats. Presently Mrs. Travers appeared quite close to d’Alcacer, who rose instantly.

“Martin is asleep,” said Mrs. Travers in a tone that seemed to have borrowed something of the mystery and quietness of the night.

“All the world’s asleep,” observed d’Alcacer, so low that Mrs. Travers barely caught the words, “Except you and me, and one other who has left me to wander about in the night.”

“Was he with you? Where has he gone?”

“Where it’s darkest I should think,” answered d’Alcacer, secretly. “It’s no use going to look for him; but if you keep perfectly still and hold your breath you may presently hear his footsteps.”

“What did he tell you?” breathed out Mrs. Travers.

“I didn’t ask him anything. I only know that something has happened which has robbed him of his power of thinking . . . Hadn’t I better go to the hut? Don Martin ought to have someone with him when he wakes up.” Mrs. Travers remained perfectly still and even now and then held her breath with a vague fear of hearing those footsteps wandering in the dark. D’Alcacer had disappeared. Again Mrs. Travers held her breath. No. Nothing. Not a sound. Only the night to her eyes seemed to have grown darker. Was that a footstep? “Where could I hide myself?” she thought. But she didn’t move.

After leaving d’Alcacer, Lingard threading his way between the fires found himself under the big tree, the same tree against which Daman had been leaning on the day of the great talk when the white prisoners had been surrendered to Lingard’s keeping on definite conditions. Lingard passed through the deep obscurity made by the outspread boughs of the only witness left there of a past that for endless ages had seen no mankind on this shore defended by the Shallows, around this lagoon overshadowed by the jungle. In the calm night the old giant, without shudders or murmurs in its enormous limbs, saw the restless man drift through the black shade into the starlight.

In that distant part of the courtyard there were only a few sentries who, themselves invisible, saw Lingard’s white figure pace to and fro endlessly. They knew well who that was. It was the great white man. A very great man. A very rich man. A possessor of fire-arms, who could dispense valuable gifts and deal deadly blows, the friend of their Ruler, the enemy of his enemies, known to them for years and always mysterious. At

their posts, flattened against the stakes near convenient loopholes, they cast backward glances and exchanged faint whispers from time to time.

Lingard might have thought himself alone. He had lost touch with the world. What he had said to d'Alcacer was perfectly true. He had no thought. He was in the state of a man who, having cast his eyes through the open gates of Paradise, is rendered insensible by that moment's vision to all the forms and matters of the earth; and in the extremity of his emotion ceases even to look upon himself but as the subject of a sublime experience which exalts or unfits, sanctifies or damns — he didn't know which. Every shadowy thought, every passing sensation was like a base intrusion on that supreme memory. He couldn't bear it.

When he had tried to resume his conversation with Belarab after Mrs. Travers' arrival he had discovered himself unable to go on. He had just enough self-control to break off the interview in measured terms. He pointed out the lateness of the hour, a most astonishing excuse to people to whom time is nothing and whose life and activities are not ruled by the clock. Indeed Lingard hardly knew what he was saying or doing when he went out again leaving everybody dumb with astonishment at the change in his aspect and in his behaviour. A suspicious silence reigned for a long time in Belarab's great audience room till the Chief dismissed everybody by two quiet words and a slight gesture.

With her chin in her hand in the pose of a sybil trying to read the future in the glow of dying embers, Mrs. Travers, without holding her breath, heard quite close to her the footsteps which she had been listening for with mingled alarm, remorse, and hope.

She didn't change her attitude. The deep red glow lighted her up dimly, her face, the white hand hanging by her side, her feet in their sandals. The disturbing footsteps stopped close to her.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked, without looking round.

"I don't know," answered Lingard. He was speaking the exact truth. He didn't know. Ever since he had released that woman from his arms everything but the vaguest notions had departed from him. Events, necessities, things — he had lost his grip on them all. And he didn't care. They were futile and impotent; he had no patience with them. The offended and astonished Belarab, d'Alcacer with his kindly touch and friendly voice, the sleeping men, the men awake, the Settlement full of unrestful life and the restless Shallows of the coast, were removed from him into an immensity of pitying contempt. Perhaps they existed. Perhaps all this waited for him. Well, let all this wait; let everything wait, till to-morrow or to the end of time, which could now come at any moment for all he cared — but certainly till to-morrow.

"I only know," he went on with an emphasis that made Mrs. Travers raise her head, "that wherever I go I shall carry you with me — against my breast."

Mrs. Travers' fine ear caught the mingled tones of suppressed exultation and dawning fear, the ardour and the faltering of those words. She was feeling still the physical truth at the root of them so strongly that she couldn't help saying in a dreamy whisper:

“Did you mean to crush the life out of me?”

He answered in the same tone:

“I could not have done it. You are too strong. Was I rough? I didn’t mean to be. I have been often told I didn’t know my own strength. You did not seem able to get through that opening and so I caught hold of you. You came away in my hands quite easily. Suddenly I thought to myself, ‘now I will make sure.’”

He paused as if his breath had failed him. Mrs. Travers dared not make the slightest movement. Still in the pose of one in quest of hidden truth she murmured, “Make sure?”

“Yes. And now I am sure. You are here — here! Before I couldn’t tell.”

“Oh, you couldn’t tell before,” she said.

“No.”

“So it was reality that you were seeking.”

He repeated as if speaking to himself: “And now I am sure.”

Her sandalled foot, all rosy in the glow, felt the warmth of the embers. The tepid night had enveloped her body; and still under the impression of his strength she gave herself up to a momentary feeling of quietude that came about her heart as soft as the night air penetrated by the feeble clearness of the stars. “This is a limpid soul,” she thought.

“You know I always believed in you,” he began again. “You know I did. Well. I never believed in you so much as I do now, as you sit there, just as you are, and with hardly enough light to make you out by.”

It occurred to her that she had never heard a voice she liked so well — except one. But that had been a great actor’s voice; whereas this man was nothing in the world but his very own self. He persuaded, he moved, he disturbed, he soothed by his inherent truth. He had wanted to make sure and he had made sure apparently; and too weary to resist the waywardness of her thoughts Mrs. Travers reflected with a sort of amusement that apparently he had not been disappointed. She thought, “He believes in me. What amazing words. Of all the people that might have believed in me I had to find this one here. He believes in me more than in himself.” A gust of sudden remorse tore her out from her quietness, made her cry out to him:

“Captain Lingard, we forget how we have met, we forget what is going on. We mustn’t. I won’t say that you placed your belief wrongly but I have to confess something to you. I must tell you how I came here to-night. Jorgenson . . .”

He interrupted her forcibly but without raising his voice.

“Jorgenson. Who’s Jorgenson? You came to me because you couldn’t help yourself.”

This took her breath away. “But I must tell you. There is something in my coming which is not clear to me.”

“You can tell me nothing that I don’t know already,” he said in a pleading tone. “Say nothing. Sit still. Time enough to-morrow. To-morrow! The night is drawing to an end and I care for nothing in the world but you. Let me be. Give me the rest that is in you.”

She had never heard such accents on his lips and she felt for him a great and tender pity. Why not humour this mood in which he wanted to preserve the moments that would never come to him again on this earth? She hesitated in silence. She saw him stir in the darkness as if he could not make up his mind to sit down on the bench. But suddenly he scattered the embers with his foot and sank on the ground against her feet, and she was not startled in the least to feel the weight of his head on her knee. Mrs. Travers was not startled but she felt profoundly moved. Why should she torment him with all those questions of freedom and captivity, of violence and intrigue, of life and death? He was not in a state to be told anything and it seemed to her that she did not want to speak, that in the greatness of her compassion she simply could not speak. All she could do for him was to rest her hand lightly on his head and respond silently to the slight movement she felt, sigh or sob, but a movement which suddenly immobilized her in an anxious emotion.

About the same time on the other side of the lagoon Jorgenson, raising his eyes, noted the stars and said to himself that the night would not last long now. He wished for daylight. He hoped that Lingard had already done something. The blaze in Tengga's compound had been re-lighted. Tom's power was unbounded, practically unbounded. And he was invulnerable.

Jorgenson let his old eyes wander amongst the gleams and shadows of the great sheet of water between him and that hostile shore and fancied he could detect a floating shadow having the characteristic shape of a man in a small canoe.

"O! Ya! Man!" he hailed. "What do you want?" Other eyes, too, had detected that shadow. Low murmurs arose on the deck of the Emma. "If you don't speak at once I shall fire," shouted Jorgenson, fiercely.

"No, white man," returned the floating shape in a solemn drawl. "I am the bearer of friendly words. A chief's words. I come from Tengga."

"There was a bullet that came on board not a long time ago — also from Tengga," said Jorgenson.

"That was an accident," protested the voice from the lagoon. "What else could it be? Is there war between you and Tengga? No, no, O white man! All Tengga desires is a long talk. He has sent me to ask you to come ashore."

At these words Jorgenson's heart sank a little. This invitation meant that Lingard had made no move. Was Tom asleep or altogether mad?

"The talk would be of peace," declared impressively the shadow which had drifted much closer to the hulk now.

"It isn't for me to talk with great chiefs," Jorgenson returned, cautiously.

"But Tengga is a friend," argued the nocturnal messenger. "And by that fire there are other friends — your friends, the Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada, who send you their greetings and who expect their eyes to rest on you before sunrise."

"That's a lie," remarked Jorgenson, perfunctorily, and fell into thought, while the shadowy bearer of words preserved a scandalized silence, though, of course, he had not expected to be believed for a moment. But one could never tell what a white man

would believe. He had wanted to produce the impression that Hassim and Immada were the honoured guests of Tengga. It occurred to him suddenly that perhaps Jorgenson didn't know anything of the capture. And he persisted.

"My words are all true, Tuan. The Rajah of Wajo and his sister are with my master. I left them sitting by the fire on Tengga's right hand. Will you come ashore to be welcomed amongst friends?"

Jorgenson had been reflecting profoundly. His object was to gain as much time as possible for Lingard's interference which indeed could not fail to be effective. But he had not the slightest wish to entrust himself to Tengga's friendliness. Not that he minded the risk; but he did not see the use of taking it.

"No!" he said, "I can't go ashore. We white men have ways of our own and I am chief of this hulk. And my chief is the Rajah Laut, a white man like myself. All the words that matter are in him and if Tengga is such a great chief let him ask the Rajah Laut for a talk. Yes, that's the proper thing for Tengga to do if he is such a great chief as he says."

"The Rajah Laut has made his choice. He dwells with Belarab, and with the white people who are huddled together like trapped deer in Belarab's stockade. Why shouldn't you meantime go over where everything is lighted up and open and talk in friendship with Tengga's friends, whose hearts have been made sick by many doubts; Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada and Daman, the chief of the men of the sea, who do not know now whom they can trust unless it be you, Tuan, the keeper of much wealth?"

The diplomatist in the small dugout paused for a moment to give special weight to the final argument:

"Which you have no means to defend. We know how many armed men there are with you."

"They are great fighters," Jorgenson observed, unconcernedly, spreading his elbows on the rail and looking over at the floating black patch of characteristic shape whence proceeded the voice of the wily envoy of Tengga. "Each man of them is worth ten of such as you can find in the Settlement."

"Yes, by Allah. Even worth twenty of these common people. Indeed, you have enough with you to make a great fight but not enough for victory."

"God alone gives victory," said suddenly the voice of Jaffir, who, very still at Jorgenson's elbow, had been listening to the conversation.

"Very true," was the answer in an extremely conventional tone. "Will you come ashore, O white man; and be the leader of chiefs?"

"I have been that before," said Jorgenson, with great dignity, "and now all I want is peace. But I won't come ashore amongst people whose minds are so much troubled, till Rajah Hassim and his sister return on board this ship and tell me the tale of their new friendship with Tengga."

His heart was sinking with every minute, the very air was growing heavier with the sense of oncoming disaster, on that night that was neither war nor peace and whose

only voice was the voice of Tengga's envoy, insinuating in tone though menacing in words.

"No, that cannot be," said that voice. "But, Tuan, verily Tengga himself is ready to come on board here to talk with you. He is very ready to come and indeed, Tuan, he means to come on board here before very long."

"Yes, with fifty war-canoes filled with the ferocious rabble of the Shore of Refuge," Jaffir was heard commenting, sarcastically, over the rail; and a sinister muttered "It may be so," ascended alongside from the black water.

Jorgenson kept silent as if waiting for a supreme inspiration and suddenly he spoke in his other-world voice: "Tell Tengga from me that as long as he brings with him Rajah Hassim and the Rajah's sister, he and his chief men will be welcome on deck here, no matter how many boats come along with them. For that I do not care. You may go now."

A profound silence succeeded. It was clear that the envoy was gone, keeping in the shadow of the shore. Jorgenson turned to Jaffir.

"Death amongst friends is but a festival," he quoted, mumbling in his moustache.

"It is, by Allah," assented Jaffir with sombre fervour.

Chapter 6

Thirty-six hours later Carter, alone with Lingard in the cabin of the brig, could almost feel during a pause in his talk the oppressive, the breathless peace of the Shallows awaiting another sunset.

"I never expected to see any of you alive," Carter began in his easy tone, but with much less carelessness in his bearing as though his days of responsibility amongst the Shoals of the Shore of Refuge had matured his view of the external world and of his own place therein.

"Of course not," muttered Lingard.

The listlessness of that man whom he had always seen acting under the stress of a secret passion seemed perfectly appalling to Carter's youthful and deliberate energy. Ever since he had found himself again face to face with Lingard he had tried to conceal the shocking impression with a delicacy which owed nothing to training but was as intuitive as a child's.

While justifying to Lingard his manner of dealing with the situation on the Shore of Refuge, he could not for the life of him help asking himself what was this new mystery. He was also young enough to long for a word of commendation.

"Come, Captain," he argued; "how would you have liked to come out and find nothing but two half-burnt wrecks stuck on the sands — perhaps?"

He waited for a moment, then in sheer compassion turned away his eyes from that fixed gaze, from that harassed face with sunk cheeks, from that figure of indomitable

strength robbed of its fire. He said to himself: "He doesn't hear me," and raised his voice without altering its self-contained tone:

"I was below yesterday morning when we felt the shock, but the noise came to us only as a deep rumble. I made one jump for the companion but that precious Shaw was before me yelling, 'Earthquake! Earthquake!' and I am hanged if he didn't miss his footing and land down on his head at the bottom of the stairs. I had to stop to pick him up but I got on deck in time to see a mighty black cloud that seemed almost solid pop up from behind the forest like a balloon. It stayed there for quite a long time. Some of our Calashes on deck swore to me that they had seen a red flash above the tree-tops. But that's hard to believe. I guessed at once that something had blown up on shore. My first thought was that I would never see you any more and I made up my mind at once to find out all the truth you have been keeping away from me. No, sir! Don't you make a mistake! I wasn't going to give you up, dead or alive."

He looked hard at Lingard while saying these words and saw the first sign of animation pass over that ravaged face. He saw even its lips move slightly; but there was no sound, and Carter looked away again.

"Perhaps you would have done better by telling me everything; but you left me behind on my own to be your man here. I put my hand to the work I could see before me. I am a sailor. There were two ships to look after. And here they are both for you, fit to go or to stay, to fight or to run, as you choose." He watched with bated breath the effort Lingard had to make to utter the two words of the desired commendation:

"Well done!"

"And I am your man still," Carter added, impulsively, and hastened to look away from Lingard, who had tried to smile at him and had failed. Carter didn't know what to do next, remain in the cabin or leave that unsupported strong man to himself. With a shyness completely foreign to his character and which he could not understand himself, he suggested in an engaging murmur and with an embarrassed assumption of his right to give advice:

"Why not lie down for a bit, sir? I can attend to anything that may turn up. You seem done up, sir."

He was facing Lingard, who stood on the other side of the table in a leaning forward attitude propped up on rigid arms and stared fixedly at him — perhaps? Carter felt on the verge of despair. This couldn't last. He was relieved to see Lingard shake his head slightly.

"No, Mr. Carter. I think I will go on deck," said the Captain of the famous brig *Lightning*, while his eyes roamed all over the cabin. Carter stood aside at once, but it was some little time before Lingard made a move.

The sun had sunk already, leaving that evening no trace of its glory on a sky clear as crystal and on the waters without a ripple. All colour seemed to have gone out of the world. The oncoming shadow rose as subtle as a perfume from the black coast lying athwart the eastern semicircle; and such was the silence within the horizon that one might have fancied oneself come to the end of time. Black and toylike in the clear

depths and the final stillness of the evening the brig and the schooner lay anchored in the middle of the main channel with their heads swung the same way. Lingard, with his chin on his breast and his arms folded, moved slowly here and there about the poop. Close and mute like his shadow, Carter, at his elbow, followed his movements. He felt an anxious solicitude. . . .

It was a sentiment perfectly new to him. He had never before felt this sort of solicitude about himself or any other man. His personality was being developed by new experience, and as he was very simple he received the initiation with shyness and self-mistrust. He had noticed with innocent alarm that Lingard had not looked either at the sky or over the sea, neither at his own ship nor the schooner astern; not along the decks, not aloft, not anywhere. He had looked at nothing! And somehow Carter felt himself more lonely and without support than when he had been left alone by that man in charge of two ships entangled amongst the Shallows and environed by some sinister mystery. Since that man had come back, instead of welcome relief Carter felt his responsibility rest on his young shoulders with tenfold weight. His profound conviction was that Lingard should be roused.

“Captain Lingard,” he burst out in desperation; “you can’t say I have worried you very much since this morning when I received you at the side, but I must be told something. What is it going to be with us? Fight or run?”

Lingard stopped short and now there was no doubt in Carter’s mind that the Captain was looking at him. There was no room for any doubt before that stern and enquiring gaze. “Aha!” thought Carter. “This has startled him”; and feeling that his shyness had departed he pursued his advantage. “For the fact of the matter is, sir, that, whatever happens, unless I am to be your man you will have no officer. I had better tell you at once that I have bundled that respectable, crazy, fat Shaw out of the ship. He was upsetting all hands. Yesterday I told him to go and get his dunnage together because I was going to send him aboard the yacht. He couldn’t have made more uproar about it if I had proposed to chuck him overboard. I warned him that if he didn’t go quietly I would have him tied up like a sheep ready for slaughter. However, he went down the ladder on his own feet, shaking his fist at me and promising to have me hanged for a pirate some day. He can do no harm on board the yacht. And now, sir, it’s for you to give orders and not for me — thank God!”

Lingard turned away, abruptly. Carter didn’t budge. After a moment he heard himself called from the other side of the deck and obeyed with alacrity.

“What’s that story of a man you picked up on the coast last evening?” asked Lingard in his gentlest tone. “Didn’t you tell me something about it when I came on board?”

“I tried to,” said Carter, frankly. “But I soon gave it up. You didn’t seem to pay any attention to what I was saying. I thought you wanted to be left alone for a bit. What can I know of your ways, yet, sir? Are you aware, Captain Lingard, that since this morning I have been down five times at the cabin door to look at you? There you sat. . . .”

He paused and Lingard said: “You have been five times down in the cabin?”

“Yes. And the sixth time I made up my mind to make you take some notice of me. I can’t be left without orders. There are two ships to look after, a lot of things to be done. . . .”

“There is nothing to be done,” Lingard interrupted with a mere murmur but in a tone which made Carter keep silent for a while.

“Even to know that much would have been something to go by,” he ventured at last. “I couldn’t let you sit there with the sun getting pretty low and a long night before us.”

“I feel stunned yet,” said Lingard, looking Carter straight in the face, as if to watch the effect of that confession.

“Were you very near that explosion?” asked the young man with sympathetic curiosity and seeking for some sign on Lingard’s person. But there was nothing. Not a single hair of the Captain’s head seemed to have been singed.

“Near,” muttered Lingard. “It might have been my head.” He pressed it with both hands, then let them fall. “What about that man?” he asked, brusquely. “Where did he come from? . . . I suppose he is dead now,” he added in an envious tone.

“No, sir. He must have as many lives as a cat,” answered Carter. “I will tell you how it was. As I said before I wasn’t going to give you up, dead or alive, so yesterday when the sun went down a little in the afternoon I had two of our boats manned and pulled in shore, taking soundings to find a passage if there was one. I meant to go back and look for you with the brig or without the brig — but that doesn’t matter now. There were three or four floating logs in sight. One of the Calashes in my boat made out something red on one of them. I thought it was worth while to go and see what it was. It was that man’s sarong. It had got entangled among the branches and prevented him rolling off into the water. I was never so glad, I assure you, as when we found out that he was still breathing. If we could only nurse him back to life, I thought, he could perhaps tell me a lot of things. The log on which he hung had come out of the mouth of the creek and he couldn’t have been more than half a day on it by my calculation. I had him taken down the main hatchway and put into a hammock in the ‘tween-decks. He only just breathed then, but some time during the night he came to himself and got out of the hammock to lie down on a mat. I suppose he was more comfortable that way. He recovered his speech only this morning and I went down at once and told you of it, but you took no notice. I told you also who he was but I don’t know whether you heard me or not.”

“I don’t remember,” said Lingard under his breath.

“They are wonderful, those Malays. This morning he was only half alive, if that much, and now I understand he has been talking to Wasub for an hour. Will you go down to see him, sir, or shall I send a couple of men to carry him on deck?”

Lingard looked bewildered for a moment.

“Who on earth is he?” he asked.

“Why, it’s that fellow whom you sent out, that night I met you, to catch our first gig. What do they call him? Jaffir, I think. Hasn’t he been with you ashore, sir? Didn’t

he find you with the letter I gave him for you? A most determined looking chap. I knew him again the moment we got him off the log."

Lingard seized hold of the royal backstay within reach of his hand. Jaffir! Jaffir! Faithful above all others; the messenger of supreme moments; the reckless and devoted servant! Lingard felt a crushing sense of despair. "No, I can't face this," he whispered to himself, looking at the coast black as ink now before his eyes in the world's shadow that was slowly encompassing the grey clearness of the Shallow Waters. "Send Wasub to me. I am going down into the cabin."

He crossed over to the companion, then checking himself suddenly: "Was there a boat from the yacht during the day?" he asked as if struck by a sudden thought. — "No, sir," answered Carter. "We had no communication with the yacht to-day." — "Send Wasub to me," repeated Lingard in a stern voice as he went down the stairs.

The old serang coming in noiselessly saw his Captain as he had seen him many times before, sitting under the gilt thunderbolts, apparently as strong in his body, in his wealth, and in his knowledge of secret words that have a power over men and elements, as ever. The old Malay squatted down within a couple of feet from Lingard, leaned his back against the satinwood panel of the bulkhead, then raising his old eyes with a watchful and benevolent expression to the white man's face, clasped his hands between his knees.

"Wasub, you have learned now everything. Is there no one left alive but Jaffir? Are they all dead?"

"May you live!" answered Wasub; and Lingard whispered an appalled "All dead!" to which Wasub nodded slightly twice. His cracked voice had a lamenting intonation. "It is all true! It is all true! You are left alone, Tuan; you are left alone!"

"It was their destiny," said Lingard at last, with forced calmness. "But has Jaffir told you of the manner of this calamity? How is it that he alone came out alive from it to be found by you?"

"He was told by his lord to depart and he obeyed," began Wasub, fixing his eyes on the deck and speaking just loud enough to be heard by Lingard, who, bending forward in his seat, shrank inwardly from every word and yet would not have missed a single one of them for anything.

For the catastrophe had fallen on his head like a bolt from the blue in the early morning hours of the day before. At the first break of dawn he had been sent for to resume his talk with Belarab. He had felt suddenly Mrs. Travers remove her hand from his head. Her voice speaking intimately into his ear: "Get up. There are some people coming," had recalled him to himself. He had got up from the ground. The light was dim, the air full of mist; and it was only gradually that he began to make out forms above his head and about his feet: trees, houses, men sleeping on the ground. He didn't recognize them. It was but a cruel change of dream. Who could tell what was real in this world? He looked about him, dazedly; he was still drunk with the deep draught of oblivion he had conquered for himself. Yes — but it was she who had let him snatch the cup. He looked down at the woman on the bench. She moved not. She

had remained like that, still for hours, giving him a waking dream of rest without end, in an infinity of happiness without sound and movement, without thought, without joy; but with an infinite ease of content, like a world-embracing reverie breathing the air of sadness and scented with love. For hours she had not moved.

“You are the most generous of women,” he said. He bent over her. Her eyes were wide open. Her lips felt cold. It did not shock him. After he stood up he remained near her. Heat is a consuming thing, but she with her cold lips seemed to him indestructible — and, perhaps, immortal!

Again he stooped, but this time it was only to kiss the fringe of her head scarf. Then he turned away to meet the three men, who, coming round the corner of the hut containing the prisoners, were approaching him with measured steps. They desired his presence in the Council room. Belarab was awake.

They also expressed their satisfaction at finding the white man awake, because Belarab wanted to impart to him information of the greatest importance. It seemed to Lingard that he had been awake ever since he could remember. It was as to being alive that he felt not so sure. He had no doubt of his existence; but was this life — this profound indifference, this strange contempt for what his eyes could see, this distaste for words, this unbelief in the importance of things and men? He tried to regain possession of himself, his old self which had things to do, words to speak as well as to hear. But it was too difficult. He was seduced away by the tense feeling of existence far superior to the mere consciousness of life, and which in its immensity of contradictions, delight, dread, exultation and despair could not be faced and yet was not to be evaded. There was no peace in it. But who wanted peace? Surrender was better, the dreadful ease of slack limbs in the sweep of an enormous tide and in a divine emptiness of mind. If this was existence then he knew that he existed. And he knew that the woman existed, too, in the sweep of the tide, without speech, without movement, without heat! Indestructible — and, perhaps, immortal!

Chapter 7

With the sublime indifference of a man who has had a glimpse through the open doors of Paradise and is no longer careful of mere life, Lingard had followed Belarab's anxious messengers. The stockade was waking up in a subdued resonance of voices. Men were getting up from the ground, fires were being rekindled. Draped figures flitted in the mist amongst the buildings; and through the mat wall of a bamboo house Lingard heard the feeble wailing of a child. A day of mere life was beginning; but in the Chief's great Council room several wax candles and a couple of cheap European lamps kept the dawn at bay, while the morning mist which could not be kept out made a faint reddish halo round every flame.

Belarab was not only awake, but he even looked like a man who had not slept for a long time. The creator of the Shore of Refuge, the weary Ruler of the Settlement,

with his scorn of the unrest and folly of men, was angry with his white friend who was always bringing his desires and his troubles to his very door. Belarab did not want any one to die but neither did he want any one in particular to live. What he was concerned about was to preserve the mystery and the power of his melancholy hesitations. These delicate things were menaced by Lingard's brusque movements, by that passionate white man who believed in more than one God and always seemed to doubt the power of Destiny. Belarab was profoundly annoyed. He was also genuinely concerned, for he liked Lingard. He liked him not only for his strength, which protected his clear-minded scepticism from those dangers that beset all rulers, but he liked him also for himself. That man of infinite hesitations, born from a sort of mystic contempt for Allah's creation, yet believed absolutely both in Lingard's power and in his boldness. Absolutely. And yet, in the marvellous consistency of his temperament, now that the moment had come, he dreaded to put both power and fortitude to the test.

Lingard could not know that some little time before the first break of dawn one of Belarab's spies in the Settlement had found his way inside the stockade at a spot remote from the lagoon, and that a very few moments after Lingard had left the Chief in consequence of Jorgenson's rockets, Belarab was listening to an amazing tale of Hassim and Immada's capture and of Tengga's determination, very much strengthened by that fact, to obtain possession of the Emma, either by force or by negotiation, or by some crafty subterfuge in which the Rajah and his sister could be made to play their part. In his mistrust of the universe, which seemed almost to extend to the will of God himself, Belarab was very much alarmed, for the material power of Daman's piratical crowd was at Tengga's command; and who could tell whether this Wajo Rajah would remain loyal in the circumstances? It was also very characteristic of him whom the original settlers of the Shore of Refuge called the Father of Safety, that he did not say anything of this to Lingard, for he was afraid of rousing Lingard's fierce energy which would even carry away himself and all his people and put the peace of so many years to the sudden hazard of a battle.

Therefore Belarab set himself to persuade Lingard on general considerations to deliver the white men, who really belonged to Daman, to that supreme Chief of the Illanuns and by this simple proceeding detach him completely from Tengga. Why should he, Belarab, go to war against half the Settlement on their account? It was not necessary, it was not reasonable. It would be even in a manner a sin to begin a strife in a community of True Believers. Whereas with an offer like that in his hand he could send an embassy to Tengga who would see there at once the downfall of his purposes and the end of his hopes. At once! That moment! . . . Afterward the question of a ransom could be arranged with Daman in which he, Belarab, would mediate in the fullness of his recovered power, without a rival and in the sincerity of his heart. And then, if need be, he could put forth all his power against the chief of the sea-vagabonds who would, as a matter of fact, be negotiating under the shadow of the sword.

Belarab talked, low-voiced and dignified, with now and then a subtle intonation, a persuasive inflexion or a half-melancholy smile in the course of the argument. What

encouraged him most was the changed aspect of his white friend. The fierce power of his personality seemed to have turned into a dream. Lingard listened, growing gradually inscrutable in his continued silence, but remaining gentle in a sort of rapt patience as if lapped in the wings of the Angel of Peace himself. Emboldened by that transformation, Belarab's counsellors seated on the mats murmured loudly their assent to the views of the Chief. Through the thickening white mist of tropical lands, the light of the tropical day filtered into the hall. One of the wise men got up from the floor and with prudent fingers began extinguishing the waxlights one by one. He hesitated to touch the lamps, the flames of which looked yellow and cold. A puff of the morning breeze entered the great room, faint and chill. Lingard, facing Belarab in a wooden armchair, with slack limbs and in the divine emptiness of a mind enchanted by a glimpse of Paradise, shuddered profoundly.

A strong voice shouted in the doorway without any ceremony and with a sort of jeering accent:

"Tengga's boats are out in the mist."

Lingard half rose from his seat, Belarab himself could not repress a start. Lingard's attitude was a listening one, but after a moment of hesitation he ran out of the hall. The inside of the stockade was beginning to buzz like a disturbed hive.

Outside Belarab's house Lingard slowed his pace. The mist still hung. A great sustained murmur pervaded it and the blurred forms of men were all moving outward from the centre toward the palisades. Somewhere amongst the buildings a gong clanged. D'Alcacer's raised voice was heard:

"What is happening?"

Lingard was passing then close to the prisoners' house. There was a group of armed men below the verandah and above their heads he saw Mrs. Travers by the side of d'Alcacer. The fire by which Lingard had spent the night was extinguished, its embers scattered, and the bench itself lay overturned. Mrs. Travers must have run up on the verandah at the first alarm. She and d'Alcacer up there seemed to dominate the tumult which was now subsiding. Lingard noticed the scarf across Mrs. Travers' face. D'Alcacer was bareheaded. He shouted again:

"What's the matter?"

"I am going to see," shouted Lingard back.

He resisted the impulse to join those two, dominate the tumult, let it roll away from under his feet — the mere life of men, vain like a dream and interfering with the tremendous sense of his own existence. He resisted it, he could hardly have told why. Even the sense of self-preservation had abandoned him. There was a throng of people pressing close about him yet careful not to get in his way. Surprise, concern, doubt were depicted on all those faces; but there were some who observed that the great white man making his way to the lagoon side of the stockade wore a fixed smile. He asked at large:

"Can one see any distance over the water?"

One of Belarab's headmen who was nearest to him answered:

“The mist has thickened. If you see anything, Tuan, it will be but a shadow of things.”

The four sides of the stockade had been manned by that time. Lingard, ascending the banquette, looked out and saw the lagoon shrouded in white, without as much as a shadow on it, and so still that not even the sound of water lapping the shore reached his ears. He found himself in profound accord with this blind and soundless peace.

“Has anything at all been seen?” he asked incredulously.

Four men were produced at once who had seen a dark mass of boats moving in the light of the dawn. Others were sent for. He hardly listened to them. His thought escaped him and he stood motionless, looking out into the unstirring mist pervaded by the perfect silence. Presently Belarab joined him, escorted by three grave, swarthy men, himself dark-faced, stroking his short grey beard with impenetrable composure. He said to Lingard, “Your white man doesn’t fight,” to which Lingard answered, “There is nothing to fight against. What your people have seen, Belarab, were indeed but shadows on the water.” Belarab murmured, “You ought to have allowed me to make friends with Daman last night.”

A faint uneasiness was stealing into Lingard’s breast.

A moment later d’Alcacer came up, inconspicuously watched over by two men with lances, and to his anxious inquiry Lingard said: “I don’t think there is anything going on. Listen how still everything is. The only way of bringing the matter to a test would be to persuade Belarab to let his men march out and make an attack on Tengga’s stronghold this moment. Then we would learn something. But I couldn’t persuade Belarab to march out into this fog. Indeed, an expedition like this might end badly. I myself don’t believe that all Tengga’s people are on the lagoon. . . . Where is Mrs. Travers?”

The question made d’Alcacer start by its abruptness which revealed the woman’s possession of that man’s mind. “She is with Don Martin, who is better but feels very weak. If we are to be given up, he will have to be carried out to his fate. I can depict to myself the scene. Don Martin carried shoulder high surrounded by those barbarians with spears, and Mrs. Travers with myself walking on each side of the stretcher. Mrs. Travers has declared to me her intention to go out with us.”

“Oh, she has declared her intention,” murmured Lingard, absent-mindedly.

D’Alcacer felt himself completely abandoned by that man. And within two paces of him he noticed the group of Belarab and his three swarthy attendants in their white robes, preserving an air of serene detachment. For the first time since the stranding on the coast d’Alcacer’s heart sank within him. “But perhaps,” he went on, “this Moor may not in the end insist on giving us up to a cruel death, Captain Lingard.”

“He wanted to give you up in the middle of the night, a few hours ago,” said Lingard, without even looking at d’Alcacer who raised his hands a little and let them fall. Lingard sat down on the breech of a heavy piece mounted on a naval carriage so as to command the lagoon. He folded his arms on his breast. D’Alcacer asked, gently:

“We have been reprieved then?”

“No,” said Lingard. “It’s I who was reprieved.”

A long silence followed. Along the whole line of the manned stockade the whisperings had ceased. The vibrations of the gong had died out, too. Only the watchers perched in the highest boughs of the big tree made a slight rustle amongst the leaves.

“What are you thinking of, Captain Lingard?” d’Alcacer asked in a low voice. Lingard did not change his position.

“I am trying to keep it off,” he said in the same tone.

“What? Trying to keep thought off?”

“Yes.”

“Is this the time for such experiments?” asked d’Alcacer.

“Why not? It’s my reprieve. Don’t grudge it to me, Mr. d’Alcacer.”

“Upon my word I don’t. But isn’t it dangerous?”

“You will have to take your chance.”

D’Alcacer had a moment of internal struggle. He asked himself whether he should tell Lingard that Mrs. Travers had come to the stockade with some sort of message from Jorgenson. He had it on the tip of his tongue to advise Lingard to go and see Mrs. Travers and ask her point blank whether she had anything to tell him; but before he could make up his mind the voices of invisible men high up in the tree were heard reporting the thinning of the fog. This caused a stir to run along the four sides of the stockade.

Lingard felt the draught of air in his face, the motionless mist began to drive over the palisades and, suddenly, the lagoon came into view with a great blinding glitter of its wrinkled surface and the faint sound of its wash rising all along the shore. A multitude of hands went up to shade the eager eyes, and exclamations of wonder burst out from many men at the sight of a crowd of canoes of various sizes and kinds lying close together with the effect as of an enormous raft, a little way off the side of the Emma. The excited voices rose higher and higher. There was no doubt about Tengga’s being on the lagoon. But what was Jorgenson about? The Emma lay as if abandoned by her keeper and her crew, while the mob of mixed boats seemed to be meditating an attack.

For all his determination to keep thought off to the very last possible moment, Lingard could not defend himself from a sense of wonder and fear. What was Jorgenson about? For a moment Lingard expected the side of the Emma to wreath itself in puffs of smoke, but an age seemed to elapse without the sound of a shot reaching his ears.

The boats were afraid to close. They were hanging off, irresolute; but why did Jorgenson not put an end to their hesitation by a volley or two of musketry if only over their heads? Through the anguish of his perplexity Lingard found himself returning to life, to mere life with its sense of pain and mortality, like a man awakened from a dream by a stab in the breast. What did this silence of the Emma mean? Could she have been already carried in the fog? But that was unthinkable. Some sounds of resistance must have been heard. No, the boats hung off because they knew with what desperate defence they would meet; and perhaps Jorgenson knew very well what he was doing

by holding his fire to the very last moment and letting the craven hearts grow cold with the fear of a murderous discharge that would have to be faced. What was certain was that this was the time for Belarab to open the great gate and let his men go out, display his power, sweep through the further end of the Settlement, destroy Tengga's defences, do away once for all with the absurd rivalry of that intriguing amateur boat-builder. Lingard turned eagerly toward Belarab but saw the Chief busy looking across the lagoon through a long glass resting on the shoulder of a stooping slave. He was motionless like a carving. Suddenly he let go the long glass which some ready hands caught as it fell and said to Lingard:

"No fight."

"How do you know?" muttered Lingard, astounded.

"There are three empty sampans alongside the ladder," said Belarab in a just audible voice. "There is bad talk there."

"Talk? I don't understand," said Lingard, slowly.

But Belarab had turned toward his three attendants in white robes, with shaven polls under skull-caps of plaited grass, with prayer beads hanging from their wrists, and an air of superior calm on their dark faces: companions of his desperate days, men of blood once and now imperturbable in their piety and wisdom of trusted counsellors.

"This white man is being betrayed," he murmured to them with the greatest composure.

D'Alcacer, uncomprehending, watched the scene: the Man of Fate puzzled and fierce like a disturbed lion, the white-robed Moors, the multitude of half-naked barbarians, squatting by the guns, standing by the loopholes in the immobility of an arranged display. He saw Mrs. Travers on the verandah of the prisoners' house, an anxious figure with a white scarf over her head. Mr. Travers was no doubt too weak after his fit of fever to come outside. If it hadn't been for that, all the whites would have been in sight of each other at the very moment of the catastrophe which was to give them back to the claims of their life, at the cost of other lives sent violently out of the world. D'Alcacer heard Lingard asking loudly for the long glass and saw Belarab make a sign with his hand, when he felt the earth receive a violent blow from underneath. While he staggered to it the heavens split over his head with a crash in the lick of a red tongue of flame; and a sudden dreadful gloom fell all round the stunned d'Alcacer, who beheld with terror the morning sun, robbed of its rays, glow dull and brown through the sombre murk which had taken possession of the universe. The Emma had blown up; and when the rain of shattered timbers and mangled corpses falling into the lagoon had ceased, the cloud of smoke hanging motionless under the livid sun cast its shadow afar on the Shore of Refuge where all strife had come to an end.

A great wail of terror ascended from the Settlement and was succeeded by a profound silence. People could be seen bolting in unreasoning panic away from the houses and into the fields. On the lagoon the raft of boats had broken up. Some of them were sinking, others paddling away in all directions. What was left above water of the Emma had burst into a clear flame under the shadow of the cloud, the great smoky

cloud that hung solid and unshifting above the tops of the forest, visible for miles up and down the coast and over the Shallows.

The first person to recover inside the stockade was Belarab himself. Mechanically he murmured the exclamation of wonder, "God is great," and looked at Lingard. But Lingard was not looking at him. The shock of the explosion had robbed him of speech and movement. He stared at the Emma blazing in a distant and insignificant flame under the sinister shadow of the cloud created by Jorgenson's mistrust and contempt for the life of men. Belarab turned away. His opinion had changed. He regarded Lingard no longer as a betrayed man but the effect was the same. He was no longer a man of any importance. What Belarab really wanted now was to see all the white people clear out of the lagoon as soon as possible. Presently he ordered the gate to be thrown open and his armed men poured out to take possession of the Settlement. Later Tengga's houses were set on fire and Belarab, mounting a fiery pony, issued forth to make a triumphal progress surrounded by a great crowd of headmen and guards.

That night the white people left the stockade in a cortege of torch bearers. Mr. Travers had to be carried down to the beach, where two of Belarab's war-boats awaited their distinguished passengers. Mrs. Travers passed through the gate on d'Alcacer's arm. Her face was half veiled. She moved through the throng of spectators displayed in the torchlight looking straight before her. Belarab, standing in front of a group of headmen, pretended not to see the white people as they went by. With Lingard he shook hands, murmuring the usual formulas of friendship; and when he heard the great white man say, "You shall never see me again," he felt immensely relieved. Belarab did not want to see that white man again, but as he responded to the pressure of Lingard's hand he had a grave smile.

"God alone knows the future," he said.

Lingard walked to the beach by himself, feeling a stranger to all men and abandoned by the All-Knowing God. By that time the first boat with Mr. and Mrs. Travers had already got away out of the blood-red light thrown by the torches upon the water. D'Alcacer and Lingard followed in the second. Presently the dark shade of the creek, walled in by the impenetrable forest, closed round them and the splash of the paddles echoed in the still, damp air.

"How do you think this awful accident happened?" asked d'Alcacer, who had been sitting silent by Lingard's side.

"What is an accident?" said Lingard with a great effort. "Where did you hear of such a thing? Accident! Don't disturb me, Mr. d'Alcacer. I have just come back to life and it has closed on me colder and darker than the grave itself. Let me get used . . . I can't bear the sound of a human voice yet."

Chapter 8

And now, stoical in the cold and darkness of his regained life, Lingard had to listen to the voice of Wasub telling him Jaffir's story. The old serang's face expressed a profound dejection and there was infinite sadness in the flowing murmur of his words.

"Yes, by Allah! They were all there: that tyrannical Tengga, noisy like a fool; the Rajah Hassim, a ruler without a country; Daman, the wandering chief, and the three Pangerans of the sea-robbers. They came on board boldly, for Tuan Jorgenson had given them permission, and their talk was that you, Tuan, were a willing captive in Belarab's stockade. They said they had waited all night for a message of peace from you or from Belarab. But there was nothing, and with the first sign of day they put out on the lagoon to make friends with Tuan Jorgenson; for, they said, you, Tuan, were as if you had not been, possessing no more power than a dead man, the mere slave of these strange white people, and Belarab's prisoner. Thus Tengga talked. God had taken from him all wisdom and all fear. And then he must have thought he was safe while Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada were on board. I tell you they sat there in the midst of your enemies, captive! The lady Immada, with her face covered, mourned to herself. The Rajah Hassim made a sign to Jaffir and Jaffir came to stand by his side and talked to his lord. The main hatch was open and many of the Illanuns crowded there to look down at the goods that were inside the ship. They had never seen so much loot in their lives. Jaffir and his lord could hear plainly Tuan Jorgenson and Tengga talking together. Tengga discoursed loudly and his words were the words of a doomed man, for he was asking Tuan Jorgenson to give up the arms and everything that was on board the Emma to himself and to Daman. And then, he said, 'We shall fight Belarab and make friends with these strange white people by behaving generously to them and letting them sail away unharmed to their own country. We don't want them here. You, Tuan Jorgenson, are the only white man I care for.' They heard Tuan Jorgenson say to Tengga: 'Now you have told me everything there is in your mind you had better go ashore with your friends and return to-morrow.' And Tengga asked: 'Why! would you fight me to-morrow rather than live many days in peace with me?' and he laughed and slapped his thigh. And Tuan Jorgenson answered:

"No, I won't fight you. But even a spider will give the fly time to say its prayers.'

"Tuan Jorgenson's voice sounded very strange and louder than ever anybody had heard it before. O Rajah Laut, Jaffir and the white man had been waiting, too, all night for some sign from you; a shot fired or a signal-fire, lighted to strengthen their hearts. There had been nothing. Rajah Hassim, whispering, ordered Jaffir to take the first opportunity to leap overboard and take to you his message of friendship and good-bye. Did the Rajah and Jaffir know what was coming? Who can tell? But what else could they see than calamity for all Wajo men, whatever Tuan Jorgenson had made up his mind to do? Jaffir prepared to obey his lord, and yet with so many enemies' boats in the water he did not think he would ever reach the shore; and as to yourself he was not at all sure that you were still alive. But he said nothing of this to

his Rajah. Nobody was looking their way. Jaffir pressed his lord's hand to his breast and waited his opportunity. The fog began to blow away and presently everything was disclosed to the sight. Jorgenson was on his feet, he was holding a lighted cigar between his fingers. Tengga was sitting in front of him on one of the chairs the white people had used. His followers were pressing round him, with Daman and Sentot, who were muttering incantations; and even the Pangerans had moved closer to the hatchway. Jaffir's opportunity had come but he lingered by the side of his Rajah. In the clear air the sun shone with great force. Tuan Jorgenson looked once more toward Belarab's stockade, O Rajah Laut! But there was nothing there, not even a flag displayed that had not been there before. Jaffir looked that way, too, and as he turned his head he saw Tuan Jorgenson, in the midst of twenty spear-blades that could in an instant have been driven into his breast, put the cigar in his mouth and jump down the hatchway. At that moment Rajah Hassim gave Jaffir a push toward the side and Jaffir leaped overboard.

"He was still in the water when all the world was darkened round him as if the life of the sun had been blown out of it in a crash. A great wave came along and washed him on shore, while pieces of wood, iron, and the limbs of torn men were splashing round him in the water. He managed to crawl out of the mud. Something had hit him while he was swimming and he thought he would die. But life stirred in him. He had a message for you. For a long time he went on crawling under the big trees on his hands and knees, for there is no rest for a messenger till the message is delivered. At last he found himself on the left bank of the creek. And still he felt life stir in him. So he started to swim across, for if you were in this world you were on the other side. While he swam he felt his strength abandoning him. He managed to scramble on to a drifting log and lay on it like one who is dead, till we pulled him into one of our boats."

Wasub ceased. It seemed to Lingard that it was impossible for mortal man to suffer more than he suffered in the succeeding moment of silence crowded by the mute images as of universal destruction. He felt himself gone to pieces as though the violent expression of Jorgenson's intolerable mistrust of the life of men had shattered his soul, leaving his body robbed of all power of resistance and of all fortitude, a prey forever to infinite remorse and endless regrets.

"Leave me, Wasub," he said. "They are all dead — but I would sleep."

Wasub raised his dumb old eyes to the white man's face.

"Tuan, it is necessary that you should hear Jaffir," he said, patiently.

"Is he going to die?" asked Lingard in a low, cautious tone as though he were afraid of the sound of his own voice.

"Who can tell?" Wasub's voice sounded more patient than ever. "There is no wound on his body but, O Tuan, he does not wish to live."

"Abandoned by his God," muttered Lingard to himself.

Wasub waited a little before he went on, "And, Tuan, he has a message for you."

"Of course. Well, I don't want to hear it."

"It is from those who will never speak to you again," Wasub persevered, sadly. "It is a great trust. A Rajah's own words. It is difficult for Jaffir to die. He keeps on muttering about a ring that was for you, and that he let pass out of his care. It was a great talisman!"

"Yes. But it did not work this time. And if I go and tell Jaffir why he will be able to tell his Rajah, O Wasub, since you say that he is going to die. . . . I wonder where they will meet," he muttered to himself.

Once more Wasub raised his eyes to Lingard's face. "Paradise is the lot of all True Believers," he whispered, firm in his simple faith.

The man who had been undone by a glimpse of Paradise exchanged a profound look with the old Malay. Then he got up. On his passage to the main hatchway the commander of the brig met no one on the decks, as if all mankind had given him up except the old man who preceded him and that other man dying in the deepening twilight, who was awaiting his coming. Below, in the light of the hatchway, he saw a young Calash with a broad yellow face and his wiry hair sticking up in stiff wisps through the folds of his head-kerchief, holding an earthenware water-jar to the lips of Jaffir extended on his back on a pile of mats.

A languid roll of the already glazed eyeballs, a mere stir of black and white in the gathering dusk showed that the faithful messenger of princes was aware of the presence of the man who had been so long known to him and his people as the King of the Sea. Lingard knelt down close to Jaffir's head, which rolled a little from side to side and then became still, staring at a beam of the upper deck. Lingard bent his ear to the dark lips. "Deliver your message" he said in a gentle tone.

"The Rajah wished to hold your hand once more," whispered Jaffir so faintly that Lingard had to guess the words rather than hear them. "I was to tell you," he went on — and stopped suddenly.

"What were you to tell me?"

"To forget everything," said Jaffir with a loud effort as if beginning a long speech. After that he said nothing more till Lingard murmured, "And the lady Immada?"

Jaffir collected all his strength. "She hoped no more," he uttered, distinctly. "The order came to her while she mourned, veiled, apart. I didn't even see her face."

Lingard swayed over the dying man so heavily that Wasub, standing near by, hastened to catch him by the shoulder. Jaffir seemed unaware of anything, and went on staring at the beam.

"Can you hear me, O Jaffir?" asked Lingard.

"I hear."

"I never had the ring. Who could bring it to me?"

"We gave it to the white woman — may Jehannum be her lot!"

"No! It shall be my lot," said Lingard with despairing force, while Wasub raised both his hands in dismay. "For, listen, Jaffir, if she had given the ring to me it would have been to one that was dumb, deaf, and robbed of all courage."

It was impossible to say whether Jaffir had heard. He made no sound, there was no change in his awful stare, but his prone body moved under the cotton sheet as if to get further away from the white man. Lingard got up slowly and making a sign to Wasub to remain where he was, went up on deck without giving another glance to the dying man. Again it seemed to him that he was pacing the quarter-deck of a deserted ship. The mulatto steward, watching through the crack of the pantry door, saw the Captain stagger into the cuddy and fling-to the door behind him with a crash. For more than an hour nobody approached that closed door till Carter coming down the companion stairs spoke without attempting to open it.

"Are you there, sir?" The answer, "You may come in," comforted the young man by its strong resonance. He went in.

"Well?"

"Jaffir is dead. This moment. I thought you would want to know."

Lingard looked persistently at Carter, thinking that now Jaffir was dead there was no one left on the empty earth to speak to him a word of reproach; no one to know the greatness of his intentions, the bond of fidelity between him and Hassim and Immada, the depth of his affection for those people, the earnestness of his visions, and the unbounded trust that was his reward. By the mad scorn of Jorgenson flaming up against the life of men, all this was as if it had never been. It had become a secret locked up in his own breast forever.

"Tell Wasub to open one of the long-cloth bales in the hold, Mr. Carter, and give the crew a cotton sheet to bury him decently according to their faith. Let it be done to-night. They must have the boats, too. I suppose they will want to take him on the sandbank."

"Yes, sir," said Carter.

"Let them have what they want, spades, torches. . . . Wasub will chant the right words. Paradise is the lot of all True Believers. Do you understand me, Mr. Carter? Paradise! I wonder what it will be for him! Unless he gets messages to carry through the jungle, avoiding ambushes, swimming in storms and knowing no rest, he won't like it."

Carter listened with an unmoved face. It seemed to him that the Captain had forgotten his presence.

"And all the time he will be sleeping on that sandbank," Lingard began again, sitting in his old place under the gilt thunderbolts suspended over his head with his elbows on the table and his hands to his temples. "If they want a board to set up at the grave let them have a piece of an oak plank. It will stay there — till the next monsoon. Perhaps."

Carter felt uncomfortable before that tense stare which just missed him and in that confined cabin seemed awful in its piercing and far-off expression. But as he had not been dismissed he did not like to go away.

"Everything will be done as you wish it, sir," he said. "I suppose the yacht will be leaving the first thing to-morrow morning, sir."

"If she doesn't we must give her a solid shot or two to liven her up — eh, Mr. Carter?"

Carter did not know whether to smile or to look horrified. In the end he did both, but as to saying anything he found it impossible. But Lingard did not expect an answer.

"I believe you are going to stay with me, Mr. Carter?"

"I told you, sir, I am your man if you want me."

"The trouble is, Mr. Carter, that I am no longer the man to whom you spoke that night in Carimata."

"Neither am I, sir, in a manner of speaking."

Lingard, relaxing the tenseness of his stare, looked at the young man, thoughtfully.

"After all, it is the brig that will want you. She will never change. The finest craft afloat in these seas. She will carry me about as she did before, but . . ."

He unclasped his hands, made a sweeping gesture.

Carter gave all his naive sympathy to that man who had certainly rescued the white people but seemed to have lost his own soul in the attempt. Carter had heard something from Wasub. He had made out enough of this story from the old serang's pidgin English to know that the Captain's native friends, one of them a woman, had perished in a mysterious catastrophe. But the why of it, and how it came about, remained still quite incomprehensible to him. Of course, a man like the Captain would feel terribly cut up.

. . .

"You will be soon yourself again, sir," he said in the kindest possible tone.

With the same simplicity Lingard shook his head. He was thinking of the dead Jaffir with his last message delivered and untroubled now by all these matters of the earth. He had been ordered to tell him to forget everything. Lingard had an inward shudder. In the dismay of his heart he might have believed his brig to lie under the very wing of the Angel of Desolation — so oppressive, so final, and hopeless seemed the silence in which he and Carter looked at each other, wistfully.

Lingard reached for a sheet of paper amongst several lying on the table, took up a pen, hesitated a moment, and then wrote:

"Meet me at day-break on the sandbank."

He addressed the envelope to Mrs. Travers, Yacht Hermit, and pushed it across the table.

"Send this on board the schooner at once, Mr. Carter. Wait a moment. When our boats shove off for the sandbank have the fore-castle gun fired. I want to know when that dead man has left the ship."

He sat alone, leaning his head on his hand, listening, listening endlessly, for the report of the gun. Would it never come? When it came at last muffled, distant, with a slight shock through the body of the brig he remained still with his head leaning on his hand but with a distinct conviction, with an almost physical certitude, that under the cotton sheet shrouding the dead man something of himself, too, had left the ship.

Chapter 9

In a roomy cabin, furnished and fitted with austere comfort, Mr. Travers reposed at ease in a low bed-place under a snowy white sheet and a light silk coverlet, his head sunk in a white pillow of extreme purity. A faint scent of lavender hung about the fresh linen. Though lying on his back like a person who is seriously ill Mr. Travers was conscious of nothing worse than a great fatigue. Mr. Travers' restfulness had something faintly triumphant in it. To find himself again on board his yacht had soothed his vanity and had revived his sense of his own importance. He contemplated it in a distant perspective, restored to its proper surroundings and unaffected by an adventure too extraordinary to trouble a superior mind or even to remain in one's memory for any length of time. He was not responsible. Like many men ambitious of directing the affairs of a nation, Mr. Travers disliked the sense of responsibility. He would not have been above evading it in case of need, but with perverse loftiness he really, in his heart, scorned it. That was the reason why he was able to lie at rest and enjoy a sense of returning vigour. But he did not care much to talk as yet, and that was why the silence in the stateroom had lasted for hours. The bulkhead lamp had a green silk shade. It was unnecessary to admit for a moment the existence of impudence or ruffianism. A discreet knocking at the cabin door sounded deferential.

Mrs. Travers got up to see what was wanted, and returned without uttering a single word to the folding armchair by the side of the bed-place, with an envelope in her hand which she tore open in the greenish light. Mr. Travers remained incurious but his wife handed to him an unfolded sheet of paper which he condescended to hold up to his eyes. It contained only one line of writing. He let the paper fall on the coverlet and went on reposing as before. It was a sick man's repose. Mrs. Travers in the armchair, with her hands on the arm-rests, had a great dignity of attitude.

"I intend to go," she declared after a time.

"You intend to go," repeated Mr. Travers in a feeble, deliberate voice. "Really, it doesn't matter what you decide to do. All this is of so little importance. It seems to me that there can be no possible object."

"Perhaps not," she admitted. "But don't you think that the uttermost farthing should always be paid?"

Mr. Travers' head rolled over on the pillow and gave a covertly scared look at that outspoken woman. But it rolled back again at once and the whole man remained passive, the very embodiment of helpless exhaustion. Mrs. Travers noticed this, and had the unexpected impression that Mr. Travers was not so ill as he looked. "He's making the most of it. It's a matter of diplomacy," she thought. She thought this without irony, bitterness, or disgust. Only her heart sank a little lower and she felt that she could not remain in the cabin with that man for the rest of the evening. For all life — yes! But not for that evening.

"It's simply monstrous," murmured the man, who was either very diplomatic or very exhausted, in a languid manner. "There is something abnormal in you."

Mrs. Travers got up swiftly.

“One comes across monstrous things. But I assure you that of all the monsters that wait on what you would call a normal existence the one I dread most is tediousness. A merciless monster without teeth or claws. Impotent. Horrible!”

She left the stateroom, vanishing out of it with noiseless resolution. No power on earth could have kept her in there for another minute. On deck she found a moonless night with a velvety tepid feeling in the air, and in the sky a mass of blurred starlight, like the tarnished tinsel of a worn-out, very old, very tedious firmament. The usual routine of the yacht had been already resumed, the awnings had been stretched aft, a solitary round lamp had been hung as usual under the main boom. Out of the deep gloom behind it d’Alcacer, a long, loose figure, lounged in the dim light across the deck. D’Alcacer had got promptly in touch with the store of cigarettes he owed to the Governor General’s generosity. A large, pulsating spark glowed, illuminating redly the design of his lips under the fine dark moustache, the tip of his nose, his lean chin. D’Alcacer reproached himself for an unwonted light-heartedness which had somehow taken possession of him. He had not experienced that sort of feeling for years. Reprehensible as it was he did not want anything to disturb it. But as he could not run away openly from Mrs. Travers he advanced to meet her.

“I do hope you have nothing to tell me,” he said with whimsical earnestness.

“I? No! Have you?”

He assured her he had not, and proffered a request. “Don’t let us tell each other anything, Mrs. Travers. Don’t let us think of anything. I believe it will be the best way to get over the evening.” There was real anxiety in his jesting tone.

“Very well,” Mrs. Travers assented, seriously. “But in that case we had better not remain together.” She asked, then, d’Alcacer to go below and sit with Mr. Travers who didn’t like to be left alone. “Though he, too, doesn’t seem to want to be told anything,” she added, parenthetically, and went on: “But I must ask you something else, Mr. d’Alcacer. I propose to sit down in this chair and go to sleep — if I can. Will you promise to call me about five o’clock? I prefer not to speak to any one on deck, and, moreover, I can trust you.”

He bowed in silence and went away slowly. Mrs. Travers, turning her head, perceived a steady light at the brig’s yard-arm, very bright among the tarnished stars. She walked aft and looked over the taffrail. It was exactly like that other night. She half expected to hear presently the low, rippling sound of an advancing boat. But the universe remained without a sound. When she at last dropped into the deck chair she was absolutely at the end of her power of thinking. “I suppose that’s how the condemned manage to get some sleep on the night before the execution,” she said to herself a moment before her eyelids closed as if under a leaden hand.

She woke up, with her face wet with tears, out of a vivid dream of Lingard in chain-mail armour and vaguely recalling a Crusader, but bare-headed and walking away from her in the depths of an impossible landscape. She hurried on to catch up with him but a throng of barbarians with enormous turbans came between them at the last moment

and she lost sight of him forever in the flurry of a ghastly sand-storm. What frightened her most was that she had not been able to see his face. It was then that she began to cry over her hard fate. When she woke up the tears were still rolling down her cheeks and she perceived in the light of the deck-lamp d'Alcacer arrested a little way off.

"Did you have to speak to me?" she asked.

"No," said d'Alcacer. "You didn't give me time. When I came as far as this I fancied I heard you sobbing. It must have been a delusion."

"Oh, no. My face is wet yet. It was a dream. I suppose it is five o'clock. Thank you for being so punctual. I have something to do before sunrise."

D'Alcacer moved nearer. "I know. You have decided to keep an appointment on the sandbank. Your husband didn't utter twenty words in all these hours but he managed to tell me that piece of news."

"I shouldn't have thought," she murmured, vaguely.

"He wanted me to understand that it had no importance," stated d'Alcacer in a very serious tone.

"Yes. He knows what he is talking about," said Mrs. Travers in such a bitter tone as to disconcert d'Alcacer for a moment. "I don't see a single soul about the decks," Mrs. Travers continued, almost directly.

"The very watchmen are asleep," said d'Alcacer.

"There is nothing secret in this expedition, but I prefer not to call any one. Perhaps you wouldn't mind pulling me off yourself in our small boat."

It seemed to her that d'Alcacer showed some hesitation. She added: "It has no importance, you know."

He bowed his assent and preceded her down the side in silence. When she entered the boat he had the sculls ready and directly she sat down he shoved off. It was so dark yet that but for the brig's yard-arm light he could not have kept his direction. He pulled a very deliberate stroke, looking over his shoulder frequently. It was Mrs. Travers who saw first the faint gleam of the uncovered sandspit on the black, quiet water.

"A little more to the left," she said. "No, the other way. . . ." D'Alcacer obeyed her directions but his stroke grew even slower than before. She spoke again. "Don't you think that the uttermost farthing should always be paid, Mr. d'Alcacer?"

D'Alcacer glanced over his shoulder, then: "It would be the only honourable way. But it may be hard. Too hard for our common fearful hearts."

"I am prepared for anything."

He ceased pulling for a moment . . . "Anything that may be found on a sandbank," Mrs. Travers went on. "On an arid, insignificant, and deserted sandbank."

D'Alcacer gave two strokes and ceased again.

"There is room for a whole world of suffering on a sandbank, for all the bitterness and resentment a human soul may be made to feel."

"Yes, I suppose you would know," she whispered while he gave a stroke or two and again glanced over his shoulder. She murmured the words:

“Bitterness, resentment,” and a moment afterward became aware of the keel of the boat running up on the sand. But she didn’t move, and d’Alcacer, too, remained seated on the thwart with the blades of his sculls raised as if ready to drop them and back the dinghy out into deep water at the first sign.

Mrs. Travers made no sign, but she asked, abruptly: “Mr. d’Alcacer, do you think I shall ever come back?”

Her tone seemed to him to lack sincerity. But who could tell what this abruptness covered — sincere fear or mere vanity? He asked himself whether she was playing a part for his benefit, or only for herself.

“I don’t think you quite understand the situation, Mrs. Travers. I don’t think you have a clear idea, either of his simplicity or of his visionary’s pride.”

She thought, contemptuously, that there were other things which d’Alcacer didn’t know and surrendered to a sudden temptation to enlighten him a little.

“You forget his capacity for passion and that his simplicity doesn’t know its own strength.”

There was no mistaking the sincerity of that murmur. “She has felt it,” d’Alcacer said to himself with absolute certitude. He wondered when, where, how, on what occasion? Mrs. Travers stood up in the stern sheets suddenly and d’Alcacer leaped on the sand to help her out of the boat.

“Hadn’t I better hang about here to take you back again?” he suggested, as he let go her hand.

“You mustn’t!” she exclaimed, anxiously. “You must return to the yacht. There will be plenty of light in another hour. I will come to this spot and wave my handkerchief when I want to be taken off.”

At their feet the shallow water slept profoundly, the ghostly gleam of the sands baffled the eye by its lack of form. Far off, the growth of bushes in the centre raised a massive black bulk against the stars to the southward. Mrs. Travers lingered for a moment near the boat as if afraid of the strange solitude of this lonely sandbank and of this lone sea that seemed to fill the whole encircling universe of remote stars and limitless shadows. “There is nobody here,” she whispered to herself.

“He is somewhere about waiting for you, or I don’t know the man,” affirmed d’Alcacer in an undertone. He gave a vigorous shove which sent the little boat into the water.

D’Alcacer was perfectly right. Lingard had come up on deck long before Mrs. Travers woke up with her face wet with tears. The burial party had returned hours before and the crew of the brig were plunged in sleep, except for two watchmen, who at Lingard’s appearance retreated noiselessly from the poop. Lingard, leaning on the rail, fell into a sombre reverie of his past. Reproachful spectres crowded the air, animated and vocal, not in the articulate language of mortals but assailing him with faint sobs, deep sighs, and fateful gestures. When he came to himself and turned about they vanished, all but one dark shape without sound or movement. Lingard looked at it with secret horror.

“Who’s that?” he asked in a troubled voice.

The shadow moved closer: "It's only me, sir," said Carter, who had left orders to be called directly the Captain was seen on deck.

"Oh, yes, I might have known," mumbled Lingard in some confusion. He requested Carter to have a boat manned and when after a time the young man told him that it was ready, he said "All right!" and remained leaning on his elbow.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Carter after a longish silence, "but are you going some distance?"

"No, I only want to be put ashore on the sandbank."

Carter was relieved to hear this, but also surprised. "There is nothing living there, sir," he said.

"I wonder," muttered Lingard.

"But I am certain," Carter insisted. "The last of the women and children belonging to those cut-throats were taken off by the sampans which brought you and the yacht-party out."

He walked at Lingard's elbow to the gangway and listened to his orders.

"Directly there is enough light to see flags by, make a signal to the schooner to heave short on her cable and loose her sails. If there is any hanging back give them a blank gun, Mr. Carter. I will have no shilly-shallying. If she doesn't go at the word, by heavens, I will drive her out. I am still master here — for another day."

The overwhelming sense of immensity, of disturbing emptiness, which affects those who walk on the sands in the midst of the sea, intimidated Mrs. Travers. The world resembled a limitless flat shadow which was motionless and elusive. Then against the southern stars she saw a human form that isolated and lone appeared to her immense: the shape of a giant outlined amongst the constellations. As it approached her it shrank to common proportions, got clear of the stars, lost its awesomeness, and became menacing in its ominous and silent advance. Mrs. Travers hastened to speak.

"You have asked for me. I am come. I trust you will have no reason to regret my obedience."

He walked up quite close to her, bent down slightly to peer into her face. The first of the tropical dawn put its characteristic cold sheen into the sky above the Shore of Refuge.

Mrs. Travers did not turn away her head.

"Are you looking for a change in me? No. You won't see it. Now I know that I couldn't change even if I wanted to. I am made of clay that is too hard."

"I am looking at you for the first time," said Lingard. "I never could see you before. There were too many things, too many thoughts, too many people. No, I never saw you before. But now the world is dead."

He grasped her shoulders, approaching his face close to hers. She never flinched.

"Yes, the world is dead," she said. "Look your fill then. It won't be for long."

He let her go as suddenly as though she had struck him. The cold white light of the tropical dawn had crept past the zenith now and the expanse of the shallow waters

looked cold, too, without stir or ripple within the enormous rim of the horizon where, to the west, a shadow lingered still.

“Take my arm,” he said.

She did so at once, and turning their backs on the two ships they began to walk along the sands, but they had not made many steps when Mrs. Travers perceived an oblong mound with a board planted upright at one end. Mrs. Travers knew that part of the sands. It was here she used to walk with her husband and d’Alcacer every evening after dinner, while the yacht lay stranded and her boats were away in search of assistance — which they had found — which they had found! This was something that she had never seen there before. Lingard had suddenly stopped and looked at it moodily. She pressed his arm to rouse him and asked, “What is this?”

“This is a grave,” said Lingard in a low voice, and still gazing at the heap of sand. “I had him taken out of the ship last night. Strange,” he went on in a musing tone, “how much a grave big enough for one man only can hold. His message was to forget everything.”

“Never, never,” murmured Mrs. Travers. “I wish I had been on board the Emma. . . . You had a madman there,” she cried out, suddenly. They moved on again, Lingard looking at Mrs. Travers who was leaning on his arm.

“I wonder which of us two was mad,” he said.

“I wonder you can bear to look at me,” she murmured. Then Lingard spoke again.

“I had to see you once more.”

“That abominable Jorgenson,” she whispered to herself.

“No, no, he gave me my chance — before he gave me up.”

Mrs. Travers disengaged her arm and Lingard stopped, too, facing her in a long silence.

“I could not refuse to meet you,” said Mrs. Travers at last. “I could not refuse you anything. You have all the right on your side and I don’t care what you do or say. But I wonder at my own courage when I think of the confession I have to make.” She advanced, laid her hand on Lingard’s shoulder and spoke earnestly. “I shuddered at the thought of meeting you again. And now you must listen to my confession.”

“Don’t say a word,” said Lingard in an untroubled voice and never taking his eyes from her face. “I know already.”

“You can’t,” she cried. Her hand slipped off his shoulder. “Then why don’t you throw me into the sea?” she asked, passionately. “Am I to live on hating myself?”

“You mustn’t!” he said with an accent of fear. “Haven’t you understood long ago that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same?”

“Am I to believe this? No, no! You are too generous to a mere sham. You are the most magnanimous of men but you are throwing it away on me. Do you think it is remorse that I feel? No. If it is anything it is despair. But you must have known that — and yet you wanted to look at me again.”

“I told you I never had a chance before,” said Lingard in an unmoved voice. “It was only after I heard they gave you the ring that I felt the hold you have got on me. How

could I tell before? What has hate or love to do with you and me? Hate. Love. What can touch you? For me you stand above death itself; for I see now that as long as I live you will never die.”

They confronted each other at the southern edge of the sands as if afloat on the open sea. The central ridge heaped up by the winds masked from them the very mastheads of the two ships and the growing brightness of the light only augmented the sense of their invincible solitude in the awful serenity of the world. Mrs. Travers suddenly put her arm across her eyes and averted her face.

Then he added:

“That’s all.”

Mrs. Travers let fall her arm and began to retrace her steps, unsupported and alone. Lingard followed her on the edge of the sand uncovered by the ebbing tide. A belt of orange light appeared in the cold sky above the black forest of the Shore of Refuge and faded quickly to gold that melted soon into a blinding and colourless glare. It was not till after she had passed Jaffir’s grave that Mrs. Travers stole a backward glance and discovered that she was alone. Lingard had left her to herself. She saw him sitting near the mound of sand, his back bowed, his hands clasping his knees, as if he had obeyed the invincible call of his great visions haunting the grave of the faithful messenger. Shading her eyes with her hand Mrs. Travers watched the immobility of that man of infinite illusions. He never moved, he never raised his head. It was all over. He was done with her. She waited a little longer and then went slowly on her way.

Shaw, now acting second mate of the yacht, came off with another hand in a little boat to take Mrs. Travers on board. He stared at her like an offended owl. How the lady could suddenly appear at sunrise waving her handkerchief from the sandbank he could not understand. For, even if she had managed to row herself off secretly in the dark, she could not have sent the empty boat back to the yacht. It was to Shaw a sort of improper miracle.

D’Alcacer hurried to the top of the side ladder and as they met on deck Mrs. Travers astonished him by saying in a strangely provoking tone:

“You were right. I have come back.” Then with a little laugh which impressed d’Alcacer painfully she added with a nod downward, “and Martin, too, was perfectly right. It was absolutely unimportant.”

She walked on straight to the taffrail and d’Alcacer followed her aft, alarmed at her white face, at her brusque movements, at the nervous way in which she was fumbling at her throat. He waited discreetly till she turned round and thrust out toward him her open palm on which he saw a thick gold ring set with a large green stone.

“Look at this, Mr. d’Alcacer. This is the thing which I asked you whether I should give up or conceal — the symbol of the last hour — the call of the supreme minute. And he said it would have made no difference! He is the most magnanimous of men and the uttermost farthing has been paid. He has done with me. The most magnanimous . . . but there is a grave on the sands by which I left him sitting with no glance to spare for me. His last glance on earth! I am left with this thing. Absolutely unimportant. A

dead talisman.” With a nervous jerk she flung the ring overboard, then with a hurried entreaty to d’Alcacer, “Stay here a moment. Don’t let anybody come near us,” she burst into tears and turned her back on him.

Lingard returned on board his brig and in the early afternoon the Lightning got under way, running past the schooner to give her a lead through the maze of Shoals. Lingard was on deck but never looked once at the following vessel. Directly both ships were in clear water he went below saying to Carter: “You know what to do.”

“Yes, sir,” said Carter.

Shortly after his Captain had disappeared from the deck Carter laid the main topsail to the mast. The Lightning lost her way while the schooner with all her light kites abroad passed close under her stern holding on her course. Mrs. Travers stood aft very rigid, gripping the rail with both hands. The brim of her white hat was blown upward on one side and her yachting skirt stirred in the breeze. By her side d’Alcacer waved his hand courteously. Carter raised his cap to them.

During the afternoon he paced the poop with measured steps, with a pair of binoculars in his hand. At last he laid the glasses down, glanced at the compass-card and walked to the cabin skylight which was open.

“Just lost her, sir,” he said. All was still down there. He raised his voice a little:

“You told me to let you know directly I lost sight of the yacht.”

The sound of a stifled groan reached the attentive Carter and a weary voice said, “All right, I am coming.”

When Lingard stepped out on the poop of the Lightning the open water had turned purple already in the evening light, while to the east the Shallows made a steely glitter all along the sombre line of the shore. Lingard, with folded arms, looked over the sea. Carter approached him and spoke quietly.

“The tide has turned and the night is coming on. Hadn’t we better get away from these Shoals, sir?”

Lingard did not stir.

“Yes, the night is coming on. You may fill the main topsail, Mr. Carter,” he said and he relapsed into silence with his eyes fixed in the southern board where the shadows were creeping stealthily toward the setting sun. Presently Carter stood at his elbow again.

“The brig is beginning to forge ahead, sir,” he said in a warning tone.

Lingard came out of his absorption with a deep tremor of his powerful frame like the shudder of an uprooted tree.

“How was the yacht heading when you lost sight of her?” he asked.

“South as near as possible,” answered Carter. “Will you give me a course to steer for the night, sir?”

Lingard’s lips trembled before he spoke but his voice was calm.

“Steer north,” he said.

The Nature of a Crime

Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer

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Preface by Joseph Conrad

FOR years my consciousness of this small piece of collaboration has been very vague, almost impalpable, like the fleeting visits from a ghost. If I ever thought of it, and I must confess that I can hardly remember ever doing it on purpose till it was brought definitely to my notice by my collaborator, I always regarded it as something in the nature of a fragment. I was surprised and even shocked to discover that it was rounded. But I need not have been. Rounded as it is in form, using the word form in its simplest sense — printed form — it remains yet a fragment from its very nature and also from necessity. It could never have become anything else. And even as a fragment it is but a fragment of something that might have been — of a mere intention.

But as it stands what impresses me most is the amount this fragment contains of the crudely materialistic atmosphere of the time of its origin, the time when the English Review was founded. It emerges from the depth of a past as distant from us now as the square-skirted, long frock-coats in which unscrupulous, cultivated, high-minded jouisseurs like ours here attended to their strange business activities and cultivated the little blue flower of sentiment. No doubt our man was conceived for purposes of irony; but our conception of him, I fear, is too fantastic.

Yet the most fantastic thing of all, as it seems to me, is that we two, who had so often discussed soberly the limits and the methods of literary composition, should have believed, for a moment, that a piece of work in the nature of an analytical confession (produced in articulo mortis as it were) could have been developed and achieved in collaboration !

What optimism ! But it did not last long. I seem to remember a moment when I burst into earnest entreaties that all those people should be thrown overboard without much ado. This, I believe, is the real nature of the crime. Overboard. The neatness and dispatch with which it is done in Chapter VIII were wholly the act of my collaborator's good nature in the face of my panic.

After signing these few prefatory words, I will pass the pen to him in the hope that he may be moved to contradict me on every point of fact, impression and appreciation. I said " the hope." Yes. Eager hope. For it would be delightful to catch the echo of the desperate, earnest, eloquent and funny quarrels which enlivened those old days. The pity of it that there comes a time when all the fun of one's life must be looked for in the past !

J. C.

June 1924

Preface by Ford Madox Hueffer

No, I find nothing to contradict, for, the existence of this story having been recalled to my mind by a friend, the details of its birth and its attendant circumstances remain for me completely forgotten, a dark, blind spot on the brain. I cannot remember the houses in which the writing took place, the view from the windows, the pen, the table cloth. At a given point in my life I forgot, literally, all the books I had ever written; but, if nowadays I reread one of them, though I possess next to none and have reread few, nearly all the phrases come back startlingly to my memory, and I see glimpses of Kent, of Sussex, of Carcassonne — of New York, even; and fragments of furniture, mirrors, who knows what? So that, if I didn't happen to retain, almost by a miracle, for me, of retention, the marked up copy of *Romance* from which was made the analysis lately published in a certain periodical, I am certain that I could have identified the phrases exactly as they stand. Looking at the book now I can hear our voices as we read one passage or another aloud for purposes of correction. Moreover, I could say: This passage was written in Kent and hammered over in Sussex; this, written in Sussex and worked on in Kent; or this again was written in the downstairs cafe, and hammered in the sitting-room on the first-floor of an hotel that faces the sea on the Belgian coast.

But of the *Nature of a Crime* no phrase at all suggests either the tones of a voice or the colour of a day. When an old friend, last year, on a Parisian Boulevard, said: "Isn't there a story by yourself and Collaborator buried in the *So and So*?" I repudiated the idea with a great deal of heat. Eventually I had to admit the, as it were, dead fact. And, having admitted that to myself, and my Collaborator having corroborated it, I was at once possessed by a sort of morbid craving to get the story republished in a definite and acknowledged form. One may care infinitely little for the fate of one's work, and yet be almost hypochondriacally anxious as to the form its publication shall take — if the publication is likely to occur posthumously. I became at once dreadfully afraid that some philologist of that Posterity for which one writes might, in the course of his hyena occupation, disinter these poor bones, and, attributing sentence one to writer A and sentence two to B, maul at least one of our memories. With the nature of those crimes one is only too well acquainted. Besides, though one may never read comments one desires to get them over. It is, indeed, agreeable to hear a storm rage in the distance, and rumble eventually away.

Let me, however, since my Collaborator wishes it, and in the name of Fun that is to-day hardly an echo, differ from him for a shade as to the nature of those passages of time. I protest against the word quarrels. There were not any. And I should like to make the note that our collaboration was almost purely oral. We wrote and read aloud

the one to the other. Possibly in the end we even wrote to read aloud the one to the other: for it strikes me very forcibly that the Nature of a Crime is for the most part prose meant for recitation, or of that type.

Anyhow, as the memory comes back to me overwhelmingly, I would read on and read on. One begins with a fine propulsion. Sometimes that would last to the end. But, as often as not, by a real telepathy, with my eyes on the page and my voice going on, I would grow aware of an exaggerated stillness on the part of my Collaborator in the shadows. It was an extraordinary kind of stillness: not of death: not of an ice age. Yes, it was the stillness of a prisoner on the rack determined to conceal an agony. I would read on, my voice gradually sticking to my jaws. When it became unbearable I would glance up. On the other side of the hearth I would have a glimpse of a terribly sick man, of a convulsed face, of fingers contorted. Guido Fawkes beneath the *peine forte et dure* looked like that. You are to remember that we were very serious about writing. I would read on. After a long time it would come: “ Oh ! ... Oh, Oh ! ... Oh, my God... My dear Ford... My dear faller...” (That in those days was the fashionable pronunciation of “ fellow.”)

For myself, I would listen always with admiration. Always with an admiration that I have never since recaptured. And if there were admirablenesses that did not seem to me to fit in with the given scene, I could at least, at the end of the reading, say with perfect sincerity: “ Wonderful ! How you do things ! ... “ before beginning on: “ But don’t you perhaps think...”

And I really do not believe that either my Collaborator or myself ever made an objection, which was not jointly sustained. That is not quarrels. When I last looked through the bound proofs of *Romance* I was struck with the fact that whereas my Collaborator eliminated almost every word of action and 80 per cent. of the conversations by myself, I supplied almost all the descriptive passages of the really collaborated parts — and such softer sentiment as was called for. And my Collaborator let them get through.

All this took place long ago; most of it in another century, during another reign; whilst an earlier, but not less haughty and proud, generation were passing away.

F.M.H.

June 1924

Chapter 1

You are, I suppose, by now in Rome. It is very curious how present to me are both Rome and yourself. There is a certain hill — you, and that is the curious part of it, will never go there — yet, yesterday, late in the evening, I stood upon its summit, and you came walking from a place below. It is always midday there: the seven pillars of the Forum stand on high, their capitals linked together, and form one angle

of a square. At their bases there lie some detritus, a broken marble lion, and I think but I am not certain, the bronze she-wolf suckling the two bronze children. Your dress brushed the herbs: it was grey and tenuous: I suppose you do not know how you look when you are unconscious of being looked at ? But I looked at you for a long time — at my You.

I saw your husband yesterday at the club and he said that you would not be returning till the end of April. When I got back to my chambers I found a certain letter. I will tell you about it afterwards — but I forbid you to look at the end of what I am writing now. There is a piece of news coming: I would break it to you if I could — but there is no way of breaking the utterly unexpected. Only, if you read this through you will gather from the tenor, from the tone of my thoughts, a little inkling, a small preparation for my disclosure. Yes: it is a “ disclosure.”

... Briefly, then, it was this letter — a business letter — that set me thinking: that made that hill rise before me. Yes, I stood upon it and there before me lay Rome — beneath a haze, in the immense sea of plains. I have often thought of going to Rome — of going with you, in a leisurely autumn of your life and mine. Now — since I have received that letter — I know that I shall never see any other Rome than that from an imagined hilltop. And when, in the wonderful light and shadelessness of that noon, last evening, you came from a grove of silver poplars, I looked at you — my you — for a very long while. You had, I think, a parasol behind your head, you moved slowly, you looked up at the capitals of those seven pillars ...And I thought that I should never — since you will not return before the end of April — never see you again. I shall never see again the you that every other man sees ...

You understand everything so well that already you must understand the nature of my disclosure. It is, of course, no disclosure to tell you that I love you. A very great reverence is due to youth — and a very great latitude is due to the dead. For I am dead: I have only lived through you for how many years now ! And I shall never speak with you again. Some sort of burial will have been given to me before the end of April. I am a spirit. I have ended my relations with the world. I have balanced all my books,

my will is made. Only I have nothing to leave — save to you, to whom I leave all that is now mine in the world — my memory.

It is very curious — the world now. I walked slowly down here from Gordon Square. I walked slowly — for all my work is done. On the way I met Graydon Bankes, the K.C. It would have astonished him if he could have known how unreal he looked to me. He is six feet high, and upon his left cheek there is a brown mole. I found it difficult to imagine why he existed. And all sorts of mists hurried past him. It was just

outside the Natural History Museum. He said that his Seaford Railway Bill would come before Committee in June. And I wondered: what is June? ... I laughed and thought: why June will never come !

June will never come. Imagine that for a moment. We have discussed the ethics of suicide. You see why June will never come !

You remember that ring I always wear ? The one with a bulging, greenish stone. Once or twice you have asked me what stone it was. You thought, I know, that it was in bad taste and I told you I wore it for the sake of associations. I know you thought — but no: there has never been any woman but you.

You must have felt a long time ago that there was not, that there could not have been another woman. The associations of the ring are not with the past of a finished affection, or hate, or passion, to all these forms of unrest that have a term in life: they looked forward to where there is no end — whether there is rest in it God alone knows. If it were not bad taste to use big words in extremities I would say there was Eternity in the ring — Eternity which is the negation of all that life may contain of losses and disappointments. Perhaps you have noticed that there was one note in our confidence that never responded to your touch. It was that note of universal negation contained within the glass film of the ring. It is not you who brought the ring into my life: I had it made years ago. It was in my nature always to anticipate a touch on my shoulder, to which the only answer could be an act of defiance. And the ring is my weapon. I shall raise it to my teeth, bite through the glass: inside there is poison.

I haven't concealed anything from you. Have I ? And, with the great wisdom for which I love you, you have tolerated these other things. You would have tolerated this too, you who have met so many sinners and have never sinned ...

Ah, my dear one — that is why I have so loved you. From our two poles we have met upon one common ground of scepticism — so that I am not certain whether it was you or I who first said: “ Believe nothing: be

harsh to no one.” But at least we have suffered. One does not drag around with one such a cannon-ball as I have done all these years without thinking some wise thoughts. And well I know that in your dreary and terrible life you have gained your great wisdom. You have been envied; you too have thought: Is any prospect fair to those among its trees? And I have been envied for my gifts, for my talents, for my wealth, for my official position, for the letters after my name, for my great and empty house, for my taste in pictures — for my ... for my opportunities.

Great criminals and the very patient learn one common lesson: Believe in nothing, be harsh to no one !

But you cannot understand how immensely leisurely I feel. It is one o'clock at night. I cannot possibly be arrested before eleven to-morrow morning. I have ten hours in which, without the shadow of a doubt, I can write to you: I can put down my thoughts desultorily and lazily. I have half a score hours in which to speak to you.

The stress of every secret emotion makes for sincerity in the end. Silence is like a dam. When the flood is at its highest the dam gives way. I am not conceited enough to think that I can sweep you along, terrified, in the rush of my confidences. I have not the elemental force. Perhaps it is just that form of "greatness" that I have lacked all my life — that profound quality which the Italians call *terribilita*. There is nothing overpowering or terrible in the confession of a love too great to be kept within the bounds of the banality which is the safeguard of our daily life. Men have been nerved to crime for the sake of a love that was theirs. The call of every great passion is to unlawfulness. But your love was not mine, and my love for you was vitiated by that conventional reverence which, as to nine parts in ten, is genuine, but as to the last tenth a solemn sham behind which hide all the timidities of a humanity no longer in its youth. I have been of my time — altogether of my time — lacking courage for a swoop, as a bird respects a ragged and nerveless scarecrow. Altogether a man of my time. Observe, I do not say "our time." You are of all time — you are the loved Woman of the first cry that broke the silence and of the last song that shall mark the end of this ingenious world to which love and suffering have been given, but which has in the course of ages invented for itself all the virtues and all the crimes. And being of this world and of my time I have set myself to deal ingeniously with my suffering and my love.

Now everything is over — even regrets. Nothing remains of finite things but a few days of life and my confession to make to you — to you alone of all the world.

It is difficult. How am I to begin? Would you believe it every time I left your presence it was with the desire, with the necessity to forget you. Would you believe it?

This is the great secret — the heart of my confession. The distance did not count. No walls could make me safe. No solitude could defend me; and having no faith in the consolations of eternity I suffered too cruelly from your absence.

If there had been kingdoms to conquer, a crusade to preach — but no. I should not have had the courage to go beyond the sound of your voice. You might have called to me any time I You never did. Never. And now it is too late. Moreover, I am a man of my time, the time is not of great deeds but of colossal speculations. The moments when I was not with you had to be got through somehow. I dared not face them empty-handed lest from sheer distress I should go mad and begin to execrate you. Action? What form of action could remove me far enough from you whose every thought was referred to your existence. And as you were to me a soul of truth and serenity I tried to forget you in lies and excitement. My only refuge from the tyranny of my desire was in abasement. Perhaps I was mad. I gambled. I gambled first with my own money

and then with money that was not mine. You know my connection with the great Burden fortune. I was trustee under my friend's, Alexander Burden's will. I gambled with a determined recklessness, with closed eyes. You understand now the origin of my houses, of my collections, of my reputation, of my taste for magnificence — which you deigned sometimes to mock indulgently with an exquisite flattery as at something not quite worthy of me. It was like a break-neck ride on a wild horse, and now the fall has come. It was sudden. I am alive but my back is broken. Edward Burden is going to be married. I must pay back what I have borrowed from the Trust. I cannot. Therefore I am dead. (A mouse has just come out from beneath one of the deed-boxes. It looks up at me. It may have been eating some of the papers in the large cupboard.

To-morrow morning I shall tell Saunders to get a cat. I have never seen a mouse here before. I have never been here so late before. At times of pressure, as you know, I have always taken my papers home. So that these late hours have been, as it were, the prerogative of the mouse. No. I shall not get a cat. To that extent I am still a part of the world: I am master of the fate of mice !) I have, then, ten hours, less the time it has taken me to chronicle the mouse, in which to talk to you. It is strange, when I look back on it, that in all the years we have known each other — seven years, three months and two days — I have never had so long as ten hours in which I might talk to you. The longest time was when we came back from Paris together, when your husband was in such a state that he could neither see nor hear. (I've seen him, by-the-bye, every day since you have been gone. He's really keeping away from it wonderfully well; in fact, I should say that he has not once actually succumbed. I fancy, really, that your absence is good for him in a way: it creates a new set of circumstances, and a change is said to be an excellent aid in the breaking of a habit. He has, I mean, to occupy himself with some of the things, innumerable as they are, that you do for him. I find that he has even had his pass-book from the bank and has compared it with his counterfoils. I haven't, on account of this improvement, yet been round to his chemist's. But I shall certainly tell them that they must surreptitiously decrease the strength of it.) That was the longest time we have ever really talked together. And, when I think that in all these years I haven't once so much as held your hand for a moment longer than the strictest of etiquette demanded ! And I loved you within the first month.

I wonder why that is. Fancy, perhaps. Habit perhaps — a kind of idealism, a kind of delicacy, a fastidiousness. As you know very well it is not on account of any moral scruples.

I break off to look through what I have already written to you. There is, first, the question of why I never told you my secret: then, the question of what my secret really is; I have started so many questions and have not followed one of them out to the very end. But all questions resolve themselves into the one question of our dear and inestimable relationship.

I think it has been one of the great charms of our relationship that all our talks have been just talks. We have discussed everything under the sun, but we have never discussed anything *au fond*. We have strayed into all sorts of byways and have never

got anywhere. I try to remember how many evenings in the last five years we have not spent together. I think they must be less than a hundred in number. You know how, occasionally, your husband would wake out of his stupors — or walk in his stupor and deliver one of his astonishingly brilliant disquisitions. But remember how, always, whether he talked of free love or the improvement in the breed of carriage-horses, how he always thrashed his subject out to the bitter end. It was not living with a man: it was assisting at a performance. And, when he was sunk into his drugs or when he was merely literary, or when he was away, how lazily we talked. I think no two minds were ever so fitted one into another as yours and mine. It is not of course that we agree on all subjects — or perhaps upon any. In the whole matter of conduct we are so absolutely different — you are always for circumspection, for a careful preparation of the ground, for patience; and I am always ready to act, and afterwards draw the moral from my own actions. But somehow, in the end, it has all worked out in our being in perfect agreement. Later I will tell you why that is.

Let me return to my mouse. For you will observe that the whole question revolves, really, around that little allegorical mite. It is an omen: it is a symbol. It is a little herald of the Providence that I do not believe in — of the Providence you so implicitly seek to obey. For instinctively you believe in Providence — in God, if you will. I as instinctively disbelieve. Intellectually of course you disbelieve in a God. You say that it is impossible for Reason to accept an Overlord; I that Reason forces one to accept an Overlord; I that Reason forces one to believe in an Omnipotent Ruler — only I am unable to believe. We, my dear, are in ourselves evidence of a design in creation. For we are the last word of creation. It has taken all the efforts, all the birthpangs of all the ages to evolve — you and me. And, being evolved, we are intellectually so perfectly and so divinely fashioned to dovetail together. And, physically too, are we not divinely meant the one for the other? Do we not react to the same causes: should not we survive the same hardships or succumb to the same stresses? Since you have been away I have gone looking for people — men, women, children, even animals — that could hold my attention for a minute. There has not been one. And what purer evidence of design could you ask for than that?

I have made this pact with the Providence that I argue for, with the Providence in whose existence I cannot believe — that if, from under the castle of black metal boxes, the mouse reappear and challenge death — then there is no future state. And, since I can find no expression save in you, if we are not reunited I shall no longer exist. So my mouse is the sign, the arbitrament, a symbol of an eternal life or the herald of nothingness.

I will make to you the confession that since this fancy, this profound truth, has entered my mind, I have not raised my eyes from the paper. I dread — I suppose it is dread — to look across the ring of light that my lamp casts. But now I will do so. I will let my eyes travel across the bundles of dusty papers on my desk. Do you know I have left them just as they were on the day when you came to ask me to take your railway

tickets ? I will let my eyes travel across that rampart of blue and white docket... The mouse is not there. |

But that is not an end of it. I am not a man to be ungenerous in my dealings with the Omnipotent: I snatch no verdict.

Chapter 2

LAST night it was very late and I grew tired, so I broke off my letter. Perhaps I was really afraid of seeing that mouse again. Those minute superstitions are curious things. I noticed, when I looked at the enumeration of these pages to-night, I began to write upon the thirteenth sheet — and that gives me a vague dissatisfaction. I read, by-the-bye, a paragraph in a newspaper: it dealt with half-mad authors. One of these, the writer said, was Zola; he was stated to be half-mad because he added together the numbers on the backs of cabs passing him in the street. Personally, I do that again and again — and I know very well that I do it in order to dull my mind. It is a sort of narcotic. Johnson, we know, touched his street-posts in a certain order: that, too, was to escape from miserable thoughts. And we all know how, as children, we have obeyed mysterious promptings to step upon the lines between the paving-stones in the street... But the children have their futures: it is well that they should propitiate the mysterious Omnipotent One. In their day, too, Johnson and Zola had their futures. It was well that Johnson should “ touch “ against the evil chance; that Zola should rest his mind against new problems. In me it is mere imbecility. For I have no future.

Do you find it difficult to believe that? You know the Burdens, of course. But I think you do not know that, for the last nine years, I have administered the Burden estates all by myself. The original trustees were old Lady Burden and I; but nine years ago Lady Burden gave me a power of attorney and since then I have acted alone. It was just before then that I had bought the houses in Gordon Square — the one I live in, the one you live in, and the seven others. Well, rightly speaking, those houses have been bought with Burden money, and all my pictures, all my prints, all my books, my furniture — my reputation as a connoisseur, my governorship of the two charities — all the me that people envy have been bought with the Burden money. I assure you that at times I have found it a pleasurable excitement... You see, I have wanted you sometimes so terribly — so terribly that the juggling with the Burden accounts has been as engrossing a narcotic as to Zola was the adding up of the numbers upon the backs of cabs. Mere ordinary work would never have held my thoughts.

Under old Burden's will young Edward Burden comes of age when he reaches the age of twenty-five or when he marries with my consent. Well, he will reach the age of twenty-five and he will marry on April 5. On that day the solicitors of his future wife will make their scrutiny of my accounts. It is regarded, you understand, as a mere formality. But it amuses me to think of the faces of Coke and Coke when they come to certain figures ! It was an outlaw of some sort, was it not, who danced and sang beneath the gallows ? I wonder, now, what sort of traitor, outlaw, or stealthy politician

I should have made in the Middle Ages. It is certain that, save for this one particular of property, I should be in very truth illustrious. No doubt the state shall come at last in which there shall no more be any property. I was born before my time.

For it is certain that I am illustrious save in that one respect. To-day young Edward Burden came here to the office to introduce me to his fiancée. You observe that I have robbed her. The Burden property is really crippled. They came, this bright young couple, to get a cheque from me with which to purchase a motor-car. They are to try several cars in the next three weeks. On the day before the wedding they are to choose one that will suit them best — and on the wedding-day in the evening they are to start for Italy. They will be coming towards you... Then no doubt, too, a telegram will reach them, to say that in all probability motor-cars will be things not for them for several years to come. What a crumbling of their lives !

It was odd how I felt towards her. You know his pompous, high forehead, the shine all over him, the grave, weighty manner. He held his hat — a wonderful shiny, “ good “ hat — before his mouth, for all the world as if he had been in church. He made, even, a speech in introducing Miss Averies to me. You see, in a sense, he was in a temple. My office enshrined a deity, a divinity: the law, property, the rights of man as maintained by an august constitution. I am for him such a wonderfully “ safe “ man. My dear one, you cannot imagine how I feel towards him: a little like a deity, a little like an avenging Providence. I imagine that the real Deity must feel towards some of His worshippers much as I feel towards this phoenix of the divines.

The Deity is after all the supreme Artist — and the supreme quality of Art is surprise.

Imagine then the feeling of the Deity towards some of those who most confidently enter His temple. Just imagine His attitude towards those who deal in the obvious platitudes that “ honesty is the best policy,” or “ genius the capacity for taking pains.” So for days the world appears to them. Then suddenly: honesty no longer pays; the creature, amassing with his infinite pains, data for his Great Work, is discovered to have produced a work of an Infinite Dulness. That is the all-suffering Deity manifesting Himself to His worshippers. For assuredly a day comes when two added to two no longer results in four.

That day will come on April 5 for Edward Burden.

After all he has done nothing to make two and two become four. He has not even checked his accounts. Well, for some years now I have been doing as much as that. But with his fiancée it is different. She is a fair, slight girl with eyes that dilate under all sorts of emotion. In my office she appears not a confident worshipper but a rather frightened fawn led before an Anthropomorphic Deity. And, strangely enough, though young Burden who trusts me inspires me with a sardonic dislike, I felt myself saying to this poor little thing that faced me: “ Why: I have wronged you ! “ And I regretted it.

She, you see, has after all given something towards a right to enjoy the Burden estates and the Burden wealth; she has given her fragile beauty, her amiability, her

worship, no doubt, of the intolerable Edward. And all this payment in the proper coin; so she has in a sense a right...

Good-night, dear one, I think you have it in your power — you might have it in your power — to atone to this little creature. To-morrow I will tell you why and how.

Chapter 3

I WROTE last night that you have something in your power. If you wished it you could make me live on. I am confident that you will not wish it: for you will understand that capriciously or intolerably I am tired of living this life. I desire you so terribly that now, even the excitement of fooling Burden no longer hypnotises me into an acceptance of life without you. Frankly, I am tired out. If I had to go on living any longer I should have to ask you to be mine in one form or other. With that and with my ability — for of course I have great ability — I could go on fooling Burden for ever. I could restore: I could make sounder than ever it was that preposterous “going concern” the Burden Estate. Unless I like to let them, I think that the wife’s solicitors will not discover what I have done. For, frankly, I have put myself out in this matter in order to be amusing to myself and ingenious. I have forged whole builder’s estimates for repairs that were never executed: I have invented whole hosts of defaulting tenants. It has not been latterly for money that I have done this: it has been simply for the sheer amusement of looking at Edward Burden and saying to myself:

“Ah: you trust me, my sleek friend. Well... .”

But indeed I fancy that I am rich enough to be able to restore to them all that I have taken. And, looking at Edward Burden’s little fiancee, I was almost tempted to set upon that weary course of juggling. But I am at the end of my tether. I cannot live without you longer. And I do not wish to ask you. Later I will tell you. Or No — I will tell you now.

You see, my dear thing, it is a question of going one better. It would be easy enough to deceive your husband: it would be easier still to go away together. I think that neither you nor I have ever had any conscientious scruples. But, analysing the matter down to its very depths, I think we arrive at this, that without the motives for self-restraint that other people have we are anxious to show more self-restraint than they. We are doing certain work not for payment but for sheer love of work. Do I make myself clear? For myself I have a great pride in your image. I can say to myself: “Here is a woman, my complement. She has no respect for the law. She does not value what a respect for the law would bring her. Yet she remains purer than the purest of the makers of law.” And I think it is the converse of that feeling that you have for me.

If you desire me to live on, I will live on: I am so swayed by you that if you desire me to break away from this ideal of you, the breath of a command will send me round to your side.

I am ready to give my life for this Ideal: nay more, I am ready to sacrifice you to it, since I know that life for you will remain a very bitter thing. I know, a little, what renunciation means.

And I am asking you to bear it — for the sake of my ideal of you. For, assuredly, unless I can have you I must die — and I know that you will not ask me to have you. And I love you: and bless you for it.

Chapter 4

I HAVE just come in from Tristan and Isolde. I had to hurry and be there for the first notes because you — my you — would, I felt, be sitting beside me as you have so often. That, of course, is passion — the passion that makes us unaccountable in our actions.

I found you naturally: but I found, too, something else. It has always a little puzzled me why we return to Tristan. There are passages in that thing as intolerable as anything in any of the Germanic master's scores. But we are held — simply by the idea of the love-philtre: it's that alone that interests us. We do not care about the initial amenities of Tristan and the prima donna: we do not believe in Mark's psychologising: but, from the moment when those two dismal marionettes have drained unconsideringly the impossible cup, they become suddenly alive, and we see two human beings under the grip of a passion — acting as irrationally as I did when I promised my cabman five shillings to get me to the theatre in time for the opening bars.

It is, you see, the love-philtre that performs this miracle. It interests — it is real to us — because every human being knows what it is to act, irrationally, under the stress of some passion or other. We are drawn along irresistibly: we commit the predestined follies or the predestined heroisms: the other side of our being acts in contravention of all our rules of conduct or of intellect. Here, in Tristan, we see such madness justified with a concrete substance, a herb, a root. We see a vision of a state of mind in which morality no longer exists: we are given a respite, a rest: an interval in which no standard of conduct oppresses us. It is an idea of an appeal more universal than any other in which the tired imagination of humanity takes refuge.

The thought that somewhere in the world there should be something that I could give to you, or you to me, that would leave us free to do what we wish without the drag of the thought of what we owe, to each other, to the world ! And after all, what greater gift could one give to another? It would be the essential freedom. For assuredly, the philtre could do no more than put it in a man's power to do what he would do if he were let loose. He would not bring out more than he had in him: but he would fully and finally express himself.

Something unexpected has changed the current of my thoughts. Nothing can change their complexion, which is governed not by what others do but by the action which I must face presently. And I don't know why I should use the word unexpected, unless because at the moment I was very far from expecting that sort of perplexity. The correct thing to say would be that something natural has happened.

Perfectly natural. Asceticism is the last thing that one could expect from the Burdens. Alexander Burden, the father, was an exuberant millionaire, in no vulgar way, of course; he was exuberant with restraint, not for show, with a magnificence which was for private satisfaction mainly. I am talking here of the ascetic temperament which is based on renunciation, not of mere simplicity of tastes, which is simply scorn for certain orders of sensations. There have been millionaires who have lived simply. There have been millionaires who have lived sordidly — but miserliness is one of the supreme forms of sensualism.

Poor Burden had a magnificent physique. The reserved abilities of generations of impoverished Burdens, starved for want of opportunities, matured in his immense success — and all their starved appetites too. But all the reserve quality of obscure Burdens has been exhausted in him. There was nothing to come to his son — who at most could have been a great match and is to-day looked upon in that light, I suppose, by the relations of his future wife. I don't know in what light that young man looks upon himself. His time of trial is coming.

Yesterday at eight in the evening he came to see me. I thought at first he wanted some money urgently. But very soon I reflected that he need not have looked so embarrassed in that case. And presently I discovered that it was not money that he was in need of. He looked as though he had come, with that characteristic gravity of his — so unlike his father — to seek absolution at my hands. But that intention he judged more decorous, I suppose, to present to me as a case of conscience.

Of course it was the case of a girl — not his fiancée. At first I thought he was in an ugly scrape. Nothing of the kind. The excellent creature who had accepted his protection for some two years past — how dull they must have seemed to her — was perhaps for that reason perfectly resigned to forgo that advantage. At the same time, she was not too proud to accept a certain provision, compensation — whatever you like to call it. I had never heard of anything so proper in my life. He need not have explained the matter to me at all. But evidently he had made up his mind to indulge in the luxury of a conscience.

To indulge that sort of conscience leads one almost as far as indulged passion, only, I cannot help thinking, on a more sordid road. A luxury snatched from the fire is in a way purified, but to find this one he had gone apparently to the bottom of his heart. I don't charge him with a particularly odious degree of corruption, but I perceived clearly that what he wanted really was to project the sinful effect of that irregular connection — let us call it — into his regulated, reformed, I may say lawfully blessed state — for the sake of retrospective enjoyment, I suppose. This rather subtle, if unholy, appetite, he was pleased to call the voice of his conscience. I listened to his dialectic exercises till the great word that was sure to come out sooner or later was pronounced.

“It seems,” he said, with every appearance of distress, “that from a strictly moral point of view I ought to make a clean breast of it to Annie.”

I listened to him — and, by Heaven, listening to him I do feel like the Godhead of whom I have already written to you. You know, positively he said that at the very moment of his “fall” he had thought of what I should think of him. And I said:

“ My good Edward, you are the most debauched person I have ever met.”

His face fell, his soft lips dropped right down into a horseshoe. He had come to me as one of those bland optimists would go to his deity. He expected to be able to say: “ I have sinned,” and to be able to hear the deity say: “ That’s all right, your very frank confession does you infinite credit.” His deity was, in fact, to find him some way out of his moral hole. I was to find him some genial excuse; to make him feel good in his excellent digestion once more. That was, absolutely, his point of view, for at my brutal pronouncement he stuttered:

“ But — but surely ... the faults of youth ... and surely there are plenty of others ? ...”

I shook my head at him and panic was dropping out of his eyes: “ Can’t I marry Annie honourably? ” he quavered. I took a sinister delight in turning the knife inside him. I was going to let him go anyhow: the sort of cat that I am always lets its mice go. (That mouse, by-the-bye, has never again put in an appearance.)

“ My dear fellow,” I said, “ does not your delicacy let you see the hole you put me into ? It’s to my interest that you should not marry Miss Averies and you ask me to advise you on the point.”

His mouth dropped open: positively he had never considered that when he married I lost the confounded three hundred a year for administering the Burden Trust. I sat and smiled at him to give him plenty of time to let his mind agonise over his position.

. “ Oh, hang it,” he said... And his silly eyes rolled round my room looking for that Providence that he felt ought to intervene in his behalf. When they rested on me again I said:

“ There, go away. Of course it’s a fault of your youth. Of course every man that’s fit to call himself a man has seduced a clergyman’s daughter.”

He said :

“ Oh, but there was not anything common about it.”

“ No,” I answered, “ you had an uncommonly good time of it with your moral scruples. I envy you the capacity. You’ll have a duller one with Miss Averies, you know.”

That was too much for him to take in, so he smoothed his hat.

“ When you said I was ... debauched ... you were only laughing at me. That was hardly fair. I’m tremendously in earnest.”

“ You’re only play-acting compared with me,” I answered. He had the air of buttoning his coat after putting a cheque into his breast pocket. He had got, you see, the cheque he expected: my applause of his successful seduction, my envy of his good fortune. That was what he had come for — and he got it. He went away with it pretty barefacedly, but he stopped at the threshold to let drop:

“ Of course if I had known you would be offended by my having recourse to Annie’s solicitors for the settlement...”

I told him I was laughing at him about that too.

“ It was the correct thing to do, you know,” were the words he shut the door upon. The ass...

The phrase of his — that he had thought of me at the moment of his fall — gives you at once the measure of his respect for me. But it gave me much more. It gave me my cue: it put it into my head to say he was debauched. And, indeed, that is debauchery. For it is the introduction of one’s morals into the management of one’s appetites that makes an indulgence of them debauchery. Had my friend Edward regarded his seduction as the thing he so much desired me to tell him it was; a thing of youth, high spirits — a thing we all do — had he so regarded it I could not really have called it debauchery. But — and this is the profound truth — the measure of debauchery is the amount of joy we get from the indulgence of our appetites. And the measure of joy we get is the amount of excitement: if it brings into play not only all our physical but all our moral nature, then we have the crucial point beyond which no man can go. It isn’t, in fact, the professional seducer, the artist in seduction that gets pleasure from the pursuit of his avocation, any more than it is the professional musician who gets thrills from the performance of music. You cannot figure to yourself the violinist, as he fiddles the most complicated passage of a concerto, when he really surmounts the difficulty by dint of using all his knowledge and all his skill — you cannot imagine him thinking of his adviser, his mother, his God and all the other things that my young friend says he thought about. And it is the same with the professional seducer. He may do all that he knows to bring his object about — but that is not debauchery. It is, by comparison, a joyless occupation: it is drinking when you are thirsty. Putting it in terms of the most threadbare allegory — you cannot imagine that Adam got out of the fall the pleasure that Edward Burden got out of his bite of the apple.

But Edward Burden, whilst he shilly-shallied with “ Shall I ? “ and “ Shan’t I ? “ could deliciously introduce into the matter all his human relationships. He could think of me, of his mother, of the fact that potentially he was casting to the winds the very cause for his existence. For assuredly, if Edward Burden have a cause for existence it is that he should not, morally or physically, do anything that would unfit him to make a good marriage. So he had, along with what physical pleasure there might be, the immense excitement of staking his all along with the tremendous elation of the debate within himself that went before. For he was actually staking his all upon the chance that he could both take what he desired and afterwards reconcile it with his conscience to make a good match. Well, he has staked and won. That is the true debauchery. That, in a sense, is the compensating joy that Puritanism gets.

Chapter 5

I HAVE just come in. Again you will not guess from where. From choosing a motor car with Burden and his fiancée. It seems incredible that I should be called upon to preside at these preparations for my own execution. I looked at hundreds of these shiny engines, with the monstrosly inflated white wheels, and gave a half-amused — but I can assure you a half-interested — attention to my own case. For one of these will one day — and soon now — be arrested in a long rush, by my extinction. In it there will be seated the two young people who went with me through the garages. They will sit in some sort of cushioned ease — the cushions will be green, or red, or blue in shiny leather. I think, however, that they will not be green — because Miss Averies let slip to me, in a little flutter of shy confidence, the words: “ Oh, don't let's have green, because it's an unlucky colour.” Edward Burden, of course, suppressed her with a hurried whisper as if, in thus giving herself away to me, she must be committing a sin against the house of Burden.

That, naturally, is the Burden tradition: a Burden's wife must possess frailties: but she must feign perfection even to a trusted adviser of the family. She must not confess to superstitions. It was amusing, the small incident, because it was the very first attempt that little Miss Averies has ever made to get near me. God knows what Edward may have made me appear to her: but I fancy that, whatever Edward may have said, she had pierced through that particular veil: she realises, with her intuition, that I am dangerous. She is alarmed and possibly fascinated because she feels that I am not “ straight “ — that I might, in fact, be a woman or a poet. Burden, of course, has never got beyond seeing that I dress better than he does and choose a dinner better than his uncle Darlington.

I came, of course, out of the motor-car ordeal with flying colours — on these lines. I lived, in fact, up to my character for being orthodox in the matter of comfort. I even suggested two little mirrors, like those which were so comforting to us all when we sat in hansom cabs. That struck Burden as being the height of ingenuity — and I know it proved to Miss Averies, most finally, that I am dangerous, since no woman ever looks in those little mirrors without some small motive of coquetry. It was just after that that she said to me:

“ Don't you think that the little measures on the tops of the new canisters are extravagant for China tea ? “

That, of course, admitted me to the peculiar intimacy that women allow to other women, or to poets, or to dangerous men. Edward, I know, dislikes the drinking of China tea because it is against the principle of supporting the British flag. But Miss

Averies in her unequal battle with this youth of the classical features slightly vulgarised, called me in to show a sign of sympathy — to give at least the flicker of the other side — of the woman, the poet, or the pessimist among men. She asked me, in fact, not to take up the cudgels to the extent of saying that China tea is the thing to drink — that would have been treason to Edward — but she desired that her instinct should be acknowledged to the extent of saying that the measures of canisters should be contrived to suit the one kind of tea as well as the other. In his blind sort of way Edward caught the challenge in the remark and his straight brows lowered a very little.

“ If you don’t have more than three pounds of China tea in the house in a year it won’t matter about the measures,” he said. “ We never use more at Shackleton.”

“ But it makes the tea too strong, Edward.”

“ Then you need not fill the measure,” he answered.

“ Oh, I wish,” she said to me, “ that you’d tell Edward not to make me make tea at all. I dread it. The servants do it so much better.”

“ So,” I asked, “ Edward has arranged everything down to the last detail?”

Edward looked to me for approval and applause.

“ You see, Annie has had so little experience, and I’ve had to look after my mother’s house for years.” His air said: “Yes ! You’ll see our establishment will be run on the very best lines ! Don’t you admire the way I’m taming her already?”

I gave him, of course, a significant glance. Heaven knows why: for it is absolutely true that I am tired of appearing reliable — to Edward Burden or anyone else in the world. What I want to do is simply to say to Edward Burden: “ No, I don’t at all admire your dragging down a little bundle of ideals and sentiments to your own fatted calf’s level.”

I suppose I have in me something of the poet. I can imagine that if I had to love or to marry this little Averies girl I should try to find out what was her tiny vanity and I should minister to it. In some way I should discover from her that she considered herself charming, or discreet, or tasteful, or frivolous, beyond all her fellows. And, having discovered it, I should bend all my energies to giving her opportunities for displaying her charm, her discreetness or her coquetry. With a woman of larger and finer mould — with you ! — I should no doubt bring into play my own idealism. I should invest her with the attributes that I consider the most desirable in the world. But in either case I cannot figure myself dragging her down to my own social or material necessities.

That is what Edward Burden is doing for little Miss Averies. I don’t mean to say that he does not idealise her — but he sees her transfigured as the dispenser of his special brand of tea or the mother of the sort of child that he was. And that seems to me a very valid reason why women, if they were wise, should trust their fortunes cold-bloodedly and of set reason to the class of dangerous men that now allure them and that they flee from.

They flee from them, I am convinced, because they fear for their worldly material fortunes. They fear, that is to say, that the poet is not a stable man of business: they

recognise that he is a gambler — and it seems to them that it is folly to trust to a gambler for life-long protection. In that they are perhaps right. But I think that no woman doubts her power to retain a man's affection — so that it is not to the reputation for matrimonial instability that the poet owes his disfavour. A woman lives, in short, to play with this particular fire, since to herself she says: "Here is a man who has broken the hearts of many women. I will essay the adventure of taming him." And, if she considers the adventure a dangerous one, that renders the contest only the more alluring, since at heart every woman, like every poet, is a gambler. In that perhaps she is right.

But it seems to me that women make a great mistake in the value of the stakes they are ready to pay in order to enter this game. They will stake, that is to say, their relatively great coin — their sentimental lives; but they hoard with closed fingers the threepenny bit which is merely the material future.

They prefer, that is to say, to be rendered the mere presiding geniuses of well-loaded boards. It is better to be a lady — which you will remember philologically means a "loaf-cutter" — than to be an Ideal.

And in this they are obviously wrong. If a woman can achieve the obvious miracle of making a dangerous man stable in his affections she may well be confident that she can persuade him to turn his serious attention to the task of keeping a roof over her head.

Certainly, I know, if I were a woman, which of the two types of men I would choose. Upon the lowest basis it is better for all purposes of human contracts to be married to a good liar than to a bad one. For a lie is a figurative truth — and it is the poet who is the master of these illusions. Even in the matter of marital relations it is probable that the poet is as faithful as the Edward Burdens of this world — only the Edward Burdens are more skilful at concealing from the rest of the world their pleasant vices. I doubt whether they are as skilful at concealing them from the woman concerned — from the woman, with her intuition, her power to seize fine shades of coolness and her awakened self-interest. Imagine the wife of Edward Burden saying to him, "You have deceived me!" Imagine then the excellent youth, crimsoning, stuttering. He has been taught all his life that truth must prevail though the skies fall — and he stammers: "Yes: I have betrayed you." And that is tragedy, though in the psychological sense and that is the important one — Edward Burden may have been as faithful as the ravens, who live for fifteen decades with the same mate. He will, in short, blunder into a tragic, false position. And he will make the tragedy only the more tragic in that all the intellectual powers he may possess will be in the direction of perpetuating the dismal position. He will not be able to argue that he has not been unfaithful — but he will be able to find a hundred arguments for the miserable woman prolonging her life with him. Position, money, the interests of the children, the feelings of her family and of his — all these considerations will make him eloquent to urge her to prolong her misery. And probably she will prolong it.

This, of course, is due to the excellent Edward's lack of an instinctive sympathy. The poet, with a truer vision, will in the same case, be able to face his Miss Averies' saying, " You have deceived me ! " with a different assurance. Supposing the deflection to have been of the momentary kind, he will be able to deny with a good conscience since he will be aware of himself and his feelings. He will at least be able to put the case in its just light. Or, if the deflection be really temperamental, really permanent, he will be unable — it being

his business to look at the deeper verities — to lie himself out of the matter. He will break, strictly and sharply. Or, if he do not, it may be taken as a sign that his Miss Averies is still of value to him — that she, in fact, is still the woman that it is his desire to have for his companion. This is true of course, only in the large sense, since obviously there are poets whose reverence for position, the interest of children or the feelings of their friends and relatives, may outweigh their hatred of a false position. These, however, are poets in the sense that they write verse: I am speaking of those who live the poet's life; to such, a false position is too intolerable to be long maintained.

But this again is only one of innumerable side-issues: let me return to my main contention that a dinner of herbs with a dangerous man is better than having to consume the flesh of stalled oxen with Edward Burden. Perhaps that is only a way of saying that you would have done better to entrust yourself to me than to — (But no, your husband is a better man than Edward Burden. He has at least had the courage to revert to his passion. I went this afternoon to your chemists and formally notified them that if they supplied him with more than the exactly prescribed quantity of that stuff, I, as holding your power of attorney, should do all that the law allows me to do against them).

Even to the dullest of men, marrying is for the most part an imaginative act. I mean marrying as a step in life sanctioned by law, custom and that general consent of mankind which is the hall-mark of every irrational institution. By irrational I do not mean wrong or stupid. Marriage is august by the magnitude of the issues it involves, balancing peace and strife on the fine point of a natural impulse refined by the need of a tangible ideal. I am not speaking here of mere domestic peace or strife which for most people that count are a question of manners and a mode of life. And I am thinking of the peace mostly — the peace of the soul which yearns for some sort of certitude in this earth, the peace of the heart which yearns for conquest, the peace of the senses that dreads deception, the peace of the imaginative faculty which in its restless quest of a high place of rest is spurred on by these great desires and that great fear.

And even Edward Burden's imagination is moved by these very desires and that very fear — or else he would not have dreamt of marrying. I repeat, marriage is an imaginative institution. It's true that his imagination is a poor thing, but it is genuine nevertheless. The faculty of which I speak is of one kind in all of us. Not to every one is given that depth of feeling, that faculty of absolute trust which will not be deceived, and the exulting masterfulness of the senses which are the mark of a fearless lover. Fearless lovers are rare, if obstinate, and sensual fools are countless as grains of sand

by the seashore. I can imagine that correct young man perfectly capable of setting himself deliberately to worry a distracted girl into surrender.

Chapter 6

I DON'T know why, to-night in particular, the fact that I am a dead man occurs to me very insistently. I had forgotten this for two whole days. If anyone very dear to you has ever been in extremis at a distance and you have journeyed to be at the last bedside, you will know how possible this is — how for hours at a time the mind will go wandering away from the main fact that is drawing you onwards, till suddenly it comes back: some one is dying at a distance. And I suppose one's I is the nearest friend that one has —

and my I is dying at a distance. At the end of a certain number of days is the deathbed towards which I am hurrying — it is a fact which I cannot grasp. But one aspect grows more clear to me every time I return to this subject.

You remember that, when we have discussed suicide, we have agreed that to the man of action death is a solution: to the man of thought it is none. For the man of action expresses himself in action, and death is the negation of action: the man of thought sees the world only in thoughts, and over thought death exercises no solution of continuity. If one dies one's actions cease, one's problem continues. For that reason it is only in so far as I am a man of action that I shall be dying. You understand what I mean — for I do not mean that it is my actions that have killed me. It is simply because I have taken refuge from my thoughts in action, and because after April 5 that refuge will be closed to me, that I take refuge in a final action which, properly speaking, is neither action nor refuge.

And perhaps I am no man of action at all, since the action in which I have taken refuge is properly speaking no action at all, but merely the expression of a frame of mind. I have gambled, that is to say I have not speculated. For the speculator acts for gain: the gambler in order to interest himself. I have gambled — to escape from you: I have tried to escape from my thoughts of you into divining the undividable future. For that is what gambling is. You try for a rise: you try for a fall — and the rise or the fall may depend on the momentary madness of a dozen men who declare a war, or upon the rain from heaven which causes so many more stalks of wheat to arise upon so many million square inches of earth. The point is that you make yourself dependent upon caprice — upon the caprice of the weather or upon the movement in the minds of men more insane than yourself.

To-day I have entered upon what is the biggest gamble of my whole life. Certain men who believe in me — they are not Edward Burdens, nevertheless they believe in me — have proposed to me to form a corner in a certain article which is indispensable

to the daily life of the City. I do not tell you what it is because you will assuredly witness the effects of this inspiration.

You will say that, when this is accomplished, it will be utterly uninteresting. And that is literally true: when it is done it will be uninteresting. But in the multiplicity of things that will have to be done before the whole thing is done — in the waiting for things to take effect, in the failures perhaps more than in the successes, since the failures will imply new devising — in all the meticulous thought-readings that will be necessary, the interest will lie, and in the men with whom one is brought into contact, the men with whom one struggles, the men whom one must bribe or trick.

And you will say: How can I who am to die in fourteen days embark upon an enterprise that will last many months or many years? That, I think, is very simple.

It is my protest against being called a man of action, the misconception that I have had to resent all my life. And this is a thought: not an action: a thought made up of an almost infinite number of erring calculations. You have probably forgotten that I have founded two towns, upon the south coast: originated four railways in tropical climates and one in the West of England: and opened up heaven knows how many mines of one kind or another — and upon my soul I had forgotten these things too until I began to cast about in my mind. And now I go to my death unmindful of these glories in so far as they are concrete. In that sense my death is utter: it is a solution. But, in so far as they are my refuges from you they remain problems to which, if my ghost is to escape you, I must return again and again.

In dying I surrender to you and thus, for the inner self of myself, death is no ending but the commencement of who knows what tortures. It is only in the latent hope that death is the negation of consciousness that I shall take my life. For death, though it can very certainly end no problem, may at least make us unconscious of how, eventually, the problem solves itself. That, you see, is really the crux of the whole thing — that is why the man of action will take refuge in death: the man of thought, never. But I, I am the man of neither the one nor the other: I am the man of love, which partakes of action and of thought, but which is neither.

The lover is, perhaps, the eternal doubter — simply because there is no certain panacea for love. Travel may cure it — but travel may cause to arise homesickness, which of all forms of love is the most terrible. To mix with many other men may cure it — but again, to the man who really loves, it may be a cause for still more terrible unrest, since seeing other men and women may set one always comparing the beloved object with the same thing. And, indeed, the form that it takes with me — for with me love takes the form of a desire to discuss — the form which it takes with me renders each thing that I see, each man with whom I speak, the more torturing, since always I desire to adjust my thoughts of them by your thoughts. I went down the other day — before I had begun to write these letters to you and before I knew death impended so nearly over me — to the sea at P — I was trying to get rid of you. I sat in the moonlight and saw the smacks come home, visible for a minute in the track of the moon and then no more than their lights in the darkness. The fishermen talked of

death by drowning mostly: the passage of the boats across that trail of light suggested reflections, no doubt trite. But, without you to set my thoughts by, I could get no more forward: I went round and round in a ring from the corpses fished up in the nets to the track of the moon. And since walking up and down on the parade brought me no nearer to you, I did not even care to move: I neither meditated nor walked, neither thought nor acted. And that is real torture.

It was the next morning that I heard that young Burden desired that his fiancée's solicitors should scrutinise the accounts of the Burden Trust — and Death loomed up before me.

You will ask: why Death ? Why not some alternative? Flight or prison ? Well: prison would be an unendurable travelling through Time, flight an equally unendurable travelling through Time with Space added. Both these things are familiar: Death alone, in spite of all the experience that humanity has had of Death, is the utterly unfamiliar. For a gambler it is a coup alluring beyond belief — as we know neither what we stake nor what we stand to win. I, personally, stand to win a great deal, since Life holds nothing for me and I stake only my life — and what I seek is only forgetfulness of you, or some sort of eventual and incomprehensible union with you. For the union with you that I seek is a queer sort of thing; hardly at all, I think, a union of the body, but a sort of consciousness of our thoughts proceeding onwards together. That we may find in the unending Afterwards. Or we may find the Herb Oblivion.

Either of these things I desire. For, in so far as we can dogmatise about Death we may lay it down that Death is the negation of Action but is powerless against Thought. I do not desire Action: and at the same time I do not fear Thought. For it is not my thoughts of you that I fear: left alone with them I can say: "What is she more than any other material object?" "It is my feelings that wear out my brain — my feelings that make me know that you are more than every material object living or still, and more than every faith dead or surviving. For feeling is neither Thought nor Action: it is the very stuff of Life itself. And, if Death be the negation of Life it may well be the end of consciousness.

The worst that Death can do to me is to deliver me up for ever to unsatisfied longings for you. Well, that is all that Life has done, that is all that Life can do, for me.

But Life can do so much more that is worse. Believe me when I say that I dread imprisonment — and believe me when I say that I do not dread disgrace. For you know very well that it is true when I say that I positively chuckle at the thought of the shock my fall would give to all these unawakened intelligences of this world. You know how I despise Edward Burden for trusting in me; you know how I have always despised other people who trusted in established reputations. I don't mean to say that I should not have liked to keep the game up, certainly I should, since in gambling it is more desirable to win than to lose. And it is more amusing to fool fools than to give them eye-openers. But I think that, in gambling, it is only a shade less desirable, per se, to lose than to win. The main point is the sensation of either; and the only valid objection

to losing is that, if one loses too often one has at last no longer the wherewithal to gamble. Similarly, to give people eye-openers is, per se, nearly as desirable as to fool them. It is not quite so desirable, since the game itself is the fooling. But the great objection in my case is that the eye-opener would once and for all put an end to the chance of my ever fooling them again. That, however, is a very small matter and what I dread is not that. If people no longer trusted in me I could no doubt still find an outlet for my energies with those who sought to take advantage of my abilities, trusting to themselves to wrest from me a sufficient share of the plunder that they so ardently desire, that I so really have no use for.

No, I seek in Death a refuge from exposure not because exposure would cripple my energies: it would probably help them: and not because exposure would mean disgrace; I should probably find ironical satisfaction in it — but simply because it would mean imprisonment. That I dread beyond belief: I clench my fingers when, in conversation; I hear the words: “ A long sentence.” For that would mean my being delivered up for a long time — for ever — to you. I write “ for ever “ advisedly and after reflection, since a long subjection without relief, to that strain would leave upon my brain a wound that must prove ineffaceable. For to be alone and to think — those are my terrors.

One reads that men who have been condemned for long years to solitary imprisonment go mad. But I think that even that sad gift from Omnipotent Fate would not be mine. As I figure the world to myself, Fate is terrible only to those who surrender to her. If I surrendered, to the extent of living to go to prison, then assuredly the future must be uniformly heavy, uniformly doomed, in my eyes. For I would as soon be mad as anything else I can think of. But I should not go mad. Men go mad because of the opportunities they miss: because the world changes outside the prison walls, or because their children starve. But I have no opportunities to miss or take: the changes of the world to me are nothing, and there is no soul between whom and starvation I could stand.

Whilst I am about making this final disposition of my properties — let me tell you finally what I have done in regard to your husband himself. It is a fact — and this I have been keeping up my sleeve as a final surprise for you — that he is almost cured...

But I have just received an incomprehensible note from Edward Burden. He asks me for some particulars as to his confounded estate and whether I can lend him some thousands of pounds at short notice. Heaven knows what new scrape this is that he's in. Of course this may precipitate my crash. But whatever happens, I shall find time to write my final words to you — and nothing else really matters...

Chapter 7

I HAVEN'T yet discovered what Edward Burden is doing. I have found him a good round sum upon mortgage — the irony of the position being that the money is actually his whilst the mortgage does not actually exist. He says that what he is doing with the money will please me. I suppose that means that he's embarking upon some sort of speculation which he imagines that I would favour. It is odd that he should think that I find gratification in his imitating myself.

But why should I concern myself with this thing at all? Nothing in the world can ever please or displease me any more. For I have taken my resolve: this is my last night upon earth. When I lay down this pen again, I shall never take up any pen more.

For I have said all that I can say to you. I am utterly tired out. To-night I shall make up into a parcel all these letters — I must sit through the night because it is only to-morrow morning that I shall be able to register the parcel to you — and registering it will be my last act upon the habitable globe. For biting through the glass in the ring will be not an action, but the commencement of a new train of thought. Or perhaps only my final action will come to an end when you read these words in Rome. Or will that be only thought — the part of me that lives — pleading to you to give your thoughts for company? I feel too tired to think the matter out !

Let me, then, finish with this earth: I told you, when I finished writing last night, that Robert is almost cured. I would not have told you this for the sake of arrogating to myself the position of a saviour. But I imagine that you would like the cure to go on and, in the case of some accident after my death, it might go all to pieces once more. Quite simply then: I have been doing two things. In the first place I have persuaded your chemists to reduce very gradually the strength of chloral, so that the bottles contain nearly half water. And Robert perceives no difference. Now of course it is very important that he shall not know of the trick that is being so beneficently played on him — so that, in case he should go away or for one reason or another change his chemists, it must be carefully seen to that instead of pure chloral he obtains the exactly diluted mixture. In this way he may be brought gradually to drinking almost pure water.

But that alone would hardly be satisfactory: a comparatively involuntary cure is of little value in comparison with an effort of the will. You may, conceivably, expel nature with a fork, but nothing but a passion will expel a passion. The only point to be proved is whether there exists in your husband any other passion for the sake of which he might abandon his passion for the clearness of vision which he always says his chloral gives him. He has not, of course, the incentives usual to men: you cannot

, in fact, “get” him along ordinary lines...But apart from his physical craving for the drug he has that passion for clearness of intellect that he says the drug gives him — and it is through that that, at last, I have managed to hit his pride.

For I have put it to him very strongly that one view of life is just as good as another — no better, no worse, but just the same. And I have put it to him that his use of chloral simply limits for him the number of views of life that he might conceivably have. And, when you come to think of all the rhapsodies of his that we have listened to, I think that that piece of special pleading is sufficiently justified. I do indeed honestly believe that, for what it is worth, he is on the road to salvation. He means to make a struggle — to attempt the great feat of once more seeing life with the eyes that Fate originally gave to him.

This is my legacy to you: if you ask me why I have presented you with this man’s new identity — since it will mean a new identity — I must answer that I simply don’t know. Why have we kept him alive all these years? I have done it no doubt because I had nothing to give you. But you? If you have loved me you must have wished him — I won’t say dead — but no more there. Yet you have tried too — and I suppose this answer to the riddle is simply the answer to the whole riddle of our life. We have tried to play a supremely difficult game simply because it sanctified our love. For, after all, sanctification arises from difficulties. Well, we have made our way very strait and we have so narrowed the door of entrance that it has vanished altogether. We have never had any hope of a solution that could have satisfied us.

If we had cared to break the rules of the game, I suppose we could have done it easily enough — and we could have done it the more easily since neither you nor I ever subscribed to those rules. If we have not it was, I think, simply because we sought the difficulty which sanctifies... Has it been a very imbecile proceeding? I am most uncertain. For it is not a thing to be very proud of — to be able to say that, for a whole lifetime, one has abstained from that which one most desired. On the other hand, we have won a curious and difficult game. Well — there it is — and there is your legacy. I do not think that there is anything else for me to write about. You will see that, in my will, I have left everything I possess to — Edward Burden. This is not because I wish to make him reparation, and it’s not because I wish to avoid scandal: it is simply because it may show him one very simple thing. It will show him how very nearly I might have made things come right. I have been balancing my accounts very carefully, and I find that, reckoning things reasonably against myself, Edward Burden will have a five-pound note with which to buy himself a mourning-ring.

The being forced to attend to my accounts will make him gasp a good deal. It will certainly shake his belief in all accepted reputations — for he will look on the faces of many men each “as solid as the Bank

of England,” and he will think: “I wonder if you are like — — ? “ His whole world will crumble — not because I have been dishonest, since he is cold-blooded enough to believe that all men may be dishonest. But he will tremble because I have been able to be so wildly dishonest and yet to be so successfully respectable. He won’t even dare

to “ expose “ me, since, if he did that, half of the shares which he will inherit from me would suffer an eclipse of disreputability, would tumble to nothingness in value — and would damage his poor pocket. He will have to have my estate set down at a high figure; he will have to be congratulated on his fortunate inheritance, and he will have, sedulously, to compound my felony.

You will wonder how I can be capable of this final cruelty — the most cruel thing that, perhaps, ever one man did to another. I will tell you why it is: it is because I hate all the Edward Burdens of the world — because, being the eternal Haves of the world, they have made their idiotic rules of the game. And you and I suffer: you and I, the eternal Have Nots. And we suffer, not because their rules bind us, but because, being the finer spirits, we are forced to set ourselves rules that are still more strict in order that, in all things, we may be the truly gallant.

But why do I write: “ You will wonder how I can be capable of this “? You will have understood — you who understand everything.

Eight in the morning. — Well: now we part. I am going to register the parcel containing all these letters to you. We part: and it is as if you were dropping back — the lost Eurydice of the world — into an utter blackness. For, in a minute, you will be no more than part of my past. Well then: goodnight.

Chapter 8

You will have got the telegram I sent you long before you got the parcel of letters: you will have got the note I wrote you by the same post as the letters themselves. If I have taken these three days to myself before again writing to you it has been because I have needed to recover my power of thinking. Now, in a way, I have recovered it — and it is only fair to say that I have devoted all my thoughts to how the new situation affects you — and you in your relations to me.

It places me in your hands — let that be written first and foremost. You have to decree my life or my death. For I take it that now we can never get back again into our old position: I have spoken, you have heard me speak. The singular unity, the silence of our old life is done with for good. There is perhaps no reason why this should not be so: silence is no necessary part of our relationship. But it has seemed to make a rather exquisite bond between us.

It must, if I am to continue to live — it must be replaced by some other bond. In our silence we have seemed to speak in all sorts of strange ways: we have perhaps read each other's thoughts. I have seen words form themselves upon your lips. But now you must — there is no way out of it — you must write to me. You must write to me fully: all your thoughts. You must, as I have done, find the means of speech — or I can no longer live...

I am reprieved !

I don't know if, in my note to you, I explained exactly what had happened. It was in this way. I was anxious to be done with my world very early and, as soon as eight o'clock struck, I set out for the post-office at the corner to register that parcel of letters for you. Till the task was accomplished — the last I was to perform on earth — I noticed nothing: I was simply in a hurry. But, having given the little faggot into the hands of a sleepy girl, I said to myself suddenly: "Now I am dead ! " I began suddenly as they say of young children, to "notice." A weight that I had never felt before seemed to fall away from me. I noticed, precisely, that the girl clerk was sleepy, that, as she reached up one hand to take the parcel over the brass caging, she placed the other over her mouth to hide a yawn.

And out on the pavement it was most curious what had befallen the world. It had lost all interest: but it had become fascinating, vivid. I had not, you see, any senses left, but my eyesight and hearing. Vivid: that is the word. I watched a news-boy throw his papers down an area, and it appeared wonderfully interesting to discover that that was how one's papers got into the house. I watched a milkman go up some doorsteps to put a can of milk beside a boot-scraper and I was wonderfully interested to see

a black cat follow him. They were the clearest moments I have ever spent upon the earth — those when I was dead. They were so clear because nothing else weighed on my attention but just those little things. It was an extraordinary, a luxuriant feeling. That, I imagine, must have been how Adam and Eve felt before they had eaten of the fruit of knowledge.

Supposing I had tacitly arranged with myself that I would die in the street, I think I should still have walked home simply to dally longer with that delightful feeling of sheer curiosity. For it was sheer curiosity to see how this world, which I had never looked at, really performed before utterly unbiassed eyes.

That was why, when I got home, I sent away the messenger that brought to me Edward Burden's letter; there was to be no answer. Whatever Burden's query might be I was not going to commit myself to any other act. My last was that of sending off the parcel to you.

My opening Burden's letter when the messenger had gone was simply a part of my general curiosity. I wanted to see how a Burden letter would look when it no longer had any bearings at all for me. It was as if I were going to read a letter from that dear Edward to a man I did not know upon a subject of which I had never heard.

And then I was reprieved !

The good Edward, imagining that I was hurt at his having proposed to allow his wife's solicitors to superintend my stewardship — the good Edward in his concern had positively insisted that all the deeds should be returned to me absolutely unchecked. He said that he had had a hard fight for it and that the few thousands he had borrowed from me had represented his settlement, which he had thus paid in specie...

It chimed in wonderfully with his character, when I come to think of it. Of course he was disciplining Miss Averies' representatives just as he had disciplined her in the matter of China tea of which I have written to you. And he had imagined that I was seriously hurt ! Can you figure to yourself such an imbecile? But, if you permit me to continue to live, you will be saving the poor fool from the great shock I had prepared for him — the avalanche of discovery, the earthquake of uncertainty. For he says in that so kind way of his that, having thus shown his entire confidence in me — in the fact, that is, that Providence is on the side of all Burdens — he will choose a time in the future, convenient for me, when he will go thoroughly with me into his accounts. And inasmuch as his wedding-tour will take him all round the world I have at least a year in which to set things straight. And of course I can put off his scrutiny indefinitely or deceive him for ever.

I did not think all these things at once. In fact, when I had read his letter, so strong within me was the feeling that it was only a mental phenomenon, a thing that had no relation with me — the feeling of finality was so strong upon me that I actually found myself sitting in that chair before I realised what had occurred.

What had occurred was that I had become utterly and for good your property.

In that sense only am I reprieved. As far as Edward Burden is concerned I am entirely saved. I stand before you and ask you to turn your thumb up or down. For,

having spoken as I have to you, I have given you a right over me. Now that the pressing necessity for my death is over I have to ask you whether I shall plunge into new adventures that will lead me to death or whether I am to find some medium in which we may lead a life of our own, in some way together. I was about to take my life to avoid prison: now prison is no more a part of my scheme of existence. But I must now have some means of working towards you or I must run some new and wild risk to push you out of my thoughts. I don't, as you know, ask you to be my secret mistress, I don't ask you to elope with me. But I say that you must belong to me as much in thought as I have, in this parcel of letters, been revealed and given over to you. Otherwise, I must once more gamble — and having tasted of gambling in the shadow of death, I must gamble for ever in that way. I must, I mean, feel that I am coming towards you or committing crimes that I may forget you.

My dear, I am a very tired man. If you knew what it was to long for you as I have longed for you all these years, you would wonder that I did not, sitting in that chair, put the ring up to my teeth, in spite of Burden's letter, and end it. I have an irresistible longing for rest — or perhaps it is only your support. To think that I must face for ever — or for as long as it lasts — this troublesome excitement of avoiding thoughts of you — that was almost unbearable. I resisted because I had written these letters to you. I love you and I know you love me — yet without them I would have inflicted upon you the wound of my death. Having written them I cannot face the cruelty to you. I mean that, if I had died without your knowing why, it would have been only a death grievous to you — still it is the duty of humanity and of you with humanity to bear and to forget deaths. But now that you must know, I could not face the cruelty of filling you with the pain of unmerited remorse. For I know that you would have felt remorse, and it would have been unmerited, since I gave you no chance or any time to stretch out your hands to me. Now I give it you and wait for your verdict.

For the definite alternatives are these: I will put Burden's estate absolutely clear within the year and work out, in order to make safe money, the new and comparatively sober scheme of which I have written to you: that I will do if you will consent to be mine to the extent of sharing our thoughts alone. Or, if you will not, I will continue to gamble more wildly than ever with the Burden money. And that in the end means death and a refuge from you.

So then, I stand reprieved — and the final verdict is in your hands.

The Rover

Conrad's last complete novel was written between 1921 and 1922, and first published in 1923. The story takes place in the south of France, against the backdrop of the French Revolution, Napoleon's rise to power, and the French-English rivalry in the Mediterranean. Peyrol, a master-gunner and pirate attempts to find refuge in an isolated farmhouse on the Giens Peninsula near Hyères.

The first edition

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‘Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas, Ease after war, death after life, does greatly please.’ Spenser

To G. Jean Aubry in friendship this tale of the last days of a French brother of the coast

Chapter 1

After entering at break of day the inner roadstead of the Port of Toulon, exchanging several loud hails with one of the guardboats of the Fleet, which directed him where he was to take up his berth, Master-Gunner Peyrol let go the anchor of the sea-worn and battered ship in his charge, between the arsenal and the town, in full view of the principal quay. The course of his life, which in the opinion of any ordinary person might have been regarded as full of marvellous incidents (only he himself had never marvelled at them), had rendered him undemonstrative to such a degree that he did not even let out a sigh of relief at the rumble of the cable. And yet it ended a most anxious six months of knocking about at sea with valuable merchandise in a damaged hull, most of the time on short rations, always on the lookout for English cruisers, once or twice on the verge of shipwreck and more than once on the verge of capture. But as to that, old Peyrol had made up his mind from the first to blow up his valuable charge — -unemotionally, for such was his character, formed under the sun of the Indian Seas in lawless contests with his kind for a little loot that vanished as soon as grasped, but mainly for bare life almost as precarious to hold through its ups and downs, and which now had lasted for fifty-eight years.

While his crew of half-starved scarecrows, hard as nails and ravenous as so many wolves for the delights of the shore, swarmed aloft to furl the sails nearly as thin and as patched as the grimy shirts on their backs, Peyrol took a survey of the quay. Groups were forming along its whole stretch to gaze at the new arrival. Peyrol noted particularly a good many men in red caps and said to himself — -“Here they are.” Amongst the crews of ships that had brought the tricolour into the seas of the East, there were hundreds professing sans-culotte principles; boastful and declamatory beggars he had thought them. But now he was beholding the shore breed. Those who had made the Revolution safe. The real thing. Peyrol, after taking a good long look, went below into his cabin to make himself ready to go ashore.

He shaved his big cheeks with a real English razor, looted years ago from an officer’s cabin in an English East Indiaman captured by a ship he was serving in then. He put on a white shirt, a short blue jacket with metal buttons and a high roll-collar, a pair of white trousers which he fastened with a red bandana handkerchief by way of a belt. With a black, shiny low-crowned hat on his head he made a very creditable prize-master. He beckoned from the poop to a boatman and got himself rowed to the quay.

By that time the crowd had grown to a large size. Peyrol’s eyes ranged over it with no great apparent interest, though it was a fact that he had never in all his man’s life seen so many idle white people massed together to stare at a sailor. He had been a

rover of the outer seas; he had grown into a stranger to his native country. During the few minutes it took the boatman to row him to the step, he felt like a navigator about to land on a newly discovered shore.

On putting his foot on it he was mobbed. The arrival of a prize made by a squadron of the Republic in distant seas was not an everyday occurrence in Toulon. The wildest rumours had been already set flying. Peyrol elbowed himself through the crowd somehow, but it continued to move after him. A voice cried out, "Where do you come from, citizen?" — "From the other side of the world," Peyrol boomed out.

He did not get rid of his followers till the door of the Port Office. There he reported himself to the proper officials as master of a prize taken off the Cape by Citizen Renaud, Commander-in-Chief of the Republican Squadron in the Indian Seas. He had been ordered to make for Dunkerque but, said he, having been chased by the sacs Anglais three times in a fortnight between Cape Verde and Cape Spartel, he had made up his mind to run into the Mediterranean where, he had understood from a Danish brig he had met at sea, there were no English men-of-war just then. And here he was; and there were his ship's papers and his own papers and everything in order. He mentioned also that he was tired of rolling about the seas, and that he longed for a period of repose on shore. But till all the legal business was settled he remained in Toulon roaming about the streets at a deliberate gait, enjoying general consideration as Citizen Peyrol, and looking everybody coldly in the eye.

His reticence about his past was of that kind which starts a lot of mysterious stories about a man. No doubt the maritime authorities of Toulon had a less cloudy idea of Peyrol's past, though it need not necessarily have been more exact. In the various offices connected with the sea where his duties took him, the wretched scribes, and even some of the chiefs, looked very hard at him as he went in and out, dressed very neatly, and always with his cudgel, which he used to leave outside the door of private offices when called in for an interview with one or another of the "gold-laced lot." Having, however, cut off his queue and got in touch with some prominent patriots of the Jacobin type, Peyrol cared little for people's stares and whispers. The person that came nearest to trying his composure was a certain naval captain with a patch over one eye and a very threadbare uniform coat who was doing some administrative work at the Port Office. That officer, looking up from some papers, remarked brusquely, "As a matter of fact you have been the best part of your life skimming the seas, if the truth were known. You must have been a deserter from the Navy at one time, whatever you may call yourself now."

There was not a quiver on the large cheeks of the gunner Peyrol.

"If there was anything of the sort it was in the time of kings and aristocrats," he said steadily. "And now I have brought in a prize, and a service letter from Citizen Renaud, commanding in the Indian Seas. I can also give you the names of good republicans in this town who know my sentiments. Nobody can say I was ever anti-revolutionary in my life. I knocked about the Eastern seas for forty-five years — - that's true. But let me observe that it was the seamen who stayed at home that let the English into

the Port of Toulon.” He paused a moment and then added: “When one thinks of that, citizen Commandant, any little slips I and fellows of my kind may have made five thousand leagues from here and twenty years ago cannot have much importance in these times of equality and fraternity.”

“As to fraternity,” remarked the post-captain in the shabby coat, “the only one you are familiar with is the Brotherhood of the Coast, I should say.”

“Everybody in the Indian Ocean except milksops and youngsters had to be,” said the untroubled Citizen Peyrol. “And we practised republican principles long before a republic was thought of; for the Brothers of the Coast were all equal and elected their own chiefs.”

“They were an abominable lot of lawless ruffians,” remarked the officer venomously, leaning back in his chair. “You will not dare to deny that.”

Citizen Peyrol refused to take up a defensive attitude. He merely mentioned in a neutral tone that he had delivered his trust to the Port Office all right, and as to his character he had a certificate of civism from his section. He was a patriot and entitled to his discharge. After being dismissed by a nod he took up his cudgel outside the door and walked out of the building with the calmness of rectitude. His large face of the Roman type betrayed nothing to the wretched quill-drivers, who whispered on his passage. As he went along the streets he looked as usual everybody in the eye; but that very same evening he vanished from Toulon. It wasn't that he was afraid of anything. His mind was as calm as the natural set of his florid face. Nobody could know what his forty years or more of sea-life had been, unless he told them himself. And of that he didn't mean to tell more than what he had told the inquisitive captain with the patch over one eye. But he didn't want any bother for certain other reasons; and more than anything else he didn't want to be sent perhaps to serve in the fleet now fitting out in Toulon. So at dusk he passed through the gate on the road to Frjus in a high two-wheeled cart belonging to a well-known farmer whose habitation lay that way. His personal belongings were brought down and piled up on the tailboard of the cart by some ragamuffin patriots whom he engaged in the street for that purpose. The only indiscretion he committed was to pay them for their trouble with a large handful of assignats. From such a prosperous seaman, however, this generosity was not so very compromising. He himself got into the cart over the wheel, with such slow and ponderous movements, that the friendly farmer felt called upon to remark: “Ah, we are not so young as we used to be — -you and I.” — “I have also an awkward wound,” said Citizen Peyrol, sitting down heavily.

And so from farmer's cart to farmer's cart, getting lifts all along, jogging in a cloud of dust between stone walls and through little villages well known to him from his boyhood's days, in a landscape of stony hills, pale rocks, and dusty green of olive trees, Citizen Peyrol went on unmolested till he got down clumsily in the yard of an inn on the outskirts of the town of Hyres. The sun was setting to his right. Near a clump of dark pines with blood-red trunks in the sunset, Peyrol perceived a rutty track branching off in the direction of the sea.

At that spot Citizen Peyrol had made up his mind to leave the high road. Every feature of the country with the darkly wooded rises, the barren flat expanse of stones and sombre bushes to his left, appealed to him with a sort of strange familiarity, because they had remained unchanged since the days of his boyhood. The very cartwheel tracks scored deep into the stony ground had kept their physiognomy; and far away, like a blue thread, there was the sea of the Hyres roadstead with a lumpy indigo swelling still beyond — -which was the island of Porquerolles, but he really did not know. The notion of a father was absent from his mentality. What he remembered of his parents was a tall, lean, brown woman in rags, who was his mother. But then they were working together at a farm which was on the mainland. He had fragmentary memories of her shaking down olives, picking stones out of a field, or handling a manure fork like a man, tireless and fierce, with wisps of greyish hair flying about her bony face; and of himself running barefooted in connection with a flock of turkeys, with hardly any clothes on his back. At night, by the farmer's favour, they were permitted to sleep in a sort of ruinous byre built of stones and with only half a roof on it, lying side by side on some old straw on the ground. And it was on a bundle of straw that his mother had tossed ill for two days and had died in the night. In the darkness, her silence, her cold face had given him an awful scare. He supposed they had buried her but he didn't know, because he had rushed out terror-struck, and never stopped till he got as far as a little place by the sea called Almanarre, where he hid himself on board a tartane that was lying there with no one on board. He went into the hold because he was afraid of some dogs on shore. He found down there a heap of empty sacks, which made a luxurious couch, and being exhausted went to sleep like a stone. Some time during the night the crew came on board and the tartane sailed for Marseilles. That was another awful scare — -being hauled out by the scruff of the neck on the deck and being asked who the devil he was and what he was doing there. Only from that one he could not run away. There was water all around him and the whole world, including the coast not very far away, wobbled in a most alarming manner. Three bearded men stood about him and he tried to explain to them that he had been working at Peyrol's. Peyrol was the farmer's name. The boy didn't know that he had one of his own. Moreover, he didn't know very well how to talk to people, and they must have misunderstood him. Thus the name of Peyrol stuck to him for life.

There the memories of his native country stopped, overlaid by other memories, with a multitude of impressions of endless oceans, of the Mozambique Channel, of Arabs and negroes, of Madagascar, of the coast of India, of islands and channels and reefs; of fights at sea, rows on shore, desperate slaughter and desperate thirst, of all sorts of ships one after another: merchant ships and frigates and privateers; of reckless men and enormoussprees. In the course of years he had learned to speak intelligibly and think connectedly and even to read and write after a fashion. The name of the farmer Peyrol, attached to his person on account of his inability to give a clear account of himself, acquired a sort of reputation, both openly, in the ports of the East and, secretly, amongst the Brothers of the Coast, that strange fraternity with something masonic

and not a little piratical in its constitution. Round the Cape of Storms, which is also the Cape of Good Hope, the words Republic, Nation, Tyranny, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and the cult of the Supreme Being came floating on board ships from home, new cries and new ideas which did not upset the slowly developed intelligence of the gunner Peyrol. They seemed the invention of landsmen, of whom the seaman Peyrol knew very little — -nothing, so to speak. Now, after nearly fifty years of lawful and lawless sea-life, Citizen Peyrol, at the yard gate of the roadside inn, looked at the late scene of his childhood. He looked at it without any animosity, but a little puzzled as to his bearings amongst the features of the land. “Yes, it must be somewhere in that direction,” he thought vaguely. Decidedly he would go no further along the high road. . . . A few yards away the woman of the inn stood looking at him, impressed by the good clothes, the great shaven cheeks, the well-to-do air of that seaman; and suddenly Peyrol noticed her. With her anxious brown face, her grey locks, and her rustic appearance she might have been his mother, as he remembered her, only she wasn’t in rags.

“Hi! La mre,” hailed Peyrol. “Have you got a man to lend a hand with my chest into the house?”

He looked so prosperous and so authoritative that she piped without hesitation in a thin voice, “Mais oui, citoyen. He will be here in a moment.”

In the dusk the clump of pines across the road looked very black against the quiet clear sky; and Citizen Peyrol gazed at the scene of his young misery with the greatest possible placidity. Here he was after nearly fifty years, and to look at things it seemed like yesterday. He felt for all this neither love nor resentment. He felt a little funny as it were, and the funniest thing was the thought which crossed his mind that he could indulge his fancy (if he had a mind to it) to buy up all this land to the furthestmost field, away over there where the track lost itself sinking into the flats bordering the sea where the small rise at the end of the Giens peninsula had assumed the appearance of a black cloud.

“Tell me, my friend,” he said in his magisterial way to the farmhand with a tousled head of hair who was awaiting his good pleasure, “doesn’t this track lead to Almanarre?”

“Yes,” said the labourer, and Peyrol nodded. The man continued, mouthing his words slowly as if unused to speech. “To Almanarre and further too, beyond the great pond right out to the end of the land, to Cape Esterel.”

Peyrol was lending his big flat hairy ear. “If I had stayed in this country,” he thought, “I would be talking like this fellow.” And aloud he asked:

“Are there any houses there, at the end of the land?”

“Why, a hamlet, a hole, just a few houses round a church and a farm where at one time they would give you a glass of wine.”

Chapter 2

Citizen Peyrol stayed at the inn-yard gate till the night had swallowed up all those features of the land to which his eyes had clung as long as the last gleams of daylight. And even after the last gleams had gone he had remained for some time staring into the darkness in which all he could distinguish was the white road at his feet and the black heads of pines where the cart track dipped towards the coast. He did not go indoors till some carters who had been refreshing themselves had departed with their big two-wheeled carts piled up high with empty wine-casks, in the direction of Frjus. The fact that they did not remain for the night pleased Peyrol. He ate his bit of supper alone, in silence, and with a gravity which intimidated the old woman who had aroused in him the memory of his mother. Having finished his pipe and obtained a bit of candle in a tin candle-stick, Citizen Peyrol went heavily upstairs to rejoin his luggage. The crazy staircase shook and groaned under his feet as though he had been carrying a burden. The first thing he did was to close the shutters most carefully as though he had been afraid of a breath of night air. Next he bolted the door of the room. Then sitting on the floor, with the candlestick standing before him between his widely straddled legs, he began to undress, flinging off his coat and dragging his shirt hastily over his head. The secret of his heavy movements was disclosed then in the fact that he had been wearing next his bare skin — -like a pious penitent his hair-shirt — -a sort of waistcoat made of two thicknesses of old sail-cloth and stitched all over in the manner of a quilt with tarred twine. Three horn buttons closed it in front. He undid them, and after he had slipped off the two shoulder-straps which prevented this strange garment from sagging down on his hips he started rolling it up. Notwithstanding all his care there were during this operation several faint chinks of some metal which could not have been lead.

His bare torso thrown backwards and sustained by his rigid big arms heavily tattooed on the white skin above the elbows, Peyrol drew a long breath into his broad chest with a pepper-and-salt pelt down the breastbone. And not only was the breast of Citizen Peyrol relieved to the fullest of its athletic capacity, but a change had also come over his large physiognomy on which the expression of severe stolidity had been simply the result of physical discomfort. It isn't a trifle to have to carry girt about your ribs and hung from your shoulders a mass of mixed foreign coins equal to sixty or seventy thousand francs in hard cash; while as to the paper money of the Republic, Peyrol had had already enough experience of it to estimate the equivalent in cartloads. A thousand of them. Perhaps two thousand. Enough in any case to justify his flight of fancy, while looking at the countryside in the light of the sunset, that what he had

on him would buy all that soil from which he had sprung: houses, woods, vines, olives, vegetable gardens, rocks and salt lagoons — -in fact, the whole landscape, including the animals in it. But Peyrol did not care for the land at all. He did not want to own any part of the solid earth for which he had no love. All he wanted from it was a quiet nook, an obscure corner out of men's sight where he could dig a hole unobserved.

That would have to be done pretty soon, he thought. One could not live for an indefinite number of days with a treasure strapped round one's chest. Meantime, an utter stranger in his native country the landing on which was perhaps the biggest adventure in his adventurous life, he threw his jacket over the rolled-up waistcoat and laid his head down on it after extinguishing the candle. The night was warm. The floor of the room happened to be of planks, not of tiles. He was no stranger to that sort of couch. With his cudgel laid ready at his hand Peyrol slept soundly till the noises and the voices about the house and on the road woke him up shortly after sunrise. He threw open the shutter, welcoming the morning light and the morning breeze in the full enjoyment of idleness which, to a seaman of his kind, is inseparable from the fact of being on shore. There was nothing to trouble his thoughts; and though his physiognomy was far from being vacant, it did not wear the aspect of profound meditation.

It had been by the merest accident that he had discovered during the passage, in a secret recess within one of the lockers of his prize, two bags of mixed coins: gold mohurs, Dutch ducats, Spanish pieces, English guineas. After making that discovery he had suffered from no doubts whatever. Loot big or little was a natural fact of his freebooter's life. And now when by the force of things he had become a master-gunner of the Navy he was not going to give up his find to confounded landsmen, mere sharks, hungry quill-drivers, who would put it in their own pockets. As to imparting the intelligence to his crew (all bad characters), he was much too wise to do anything of the kind. They would not have been above cutting his throat. An old fighting sea-dog, a Brother of the Coast, had more right to such plunder than anybody on earth. So at odd times, while at sea, he had busied himself within the privacy of his cabin in constructing the ingenious canvas waistcoat in which he could take his treasure ashore secretly. It was bulky, but his garments were of an ample cut, and no wretched customs-guard would dare to lay hands on a successful prize-master going to the Port Admiral's offices to make his report. The scheme had worked perfectly. He found, however, that this secret garment, which was worth precisely its weight in gold, tried his endurance more than he had expected. It wearied his body and even depressed his spirits somewhat. It made him less active and also less communicative. It reminded him all the time that he must not get into trouble of any sort — - keep clear of rows, of intimacies, of promiscuous jollities. This was one of the reasons why he had been anxious to get away from the town. Once, however, his head was laid on his treasure he could sleep the sleep of the just.

Nevertheless in the morning he shrank from putting it on again. With a mixture of sailor's carelessness and of old-standing belief in his own luck he simply stuffed the precious waistcoat up the flue of the empty fireplace. Then he dressed and had

his breakfast. An hour later, mounted on a hired mule, he started down the track as calmly as though setting out to explore the mysteries of a desert island.

His aim was the end of the peninsula which, advancing like a colossal jetty into the sea, divides the picturesque roadstead of Hyres from the headlands and curves of the coast forming the approaches of the Port of Toulon. The path along which the sure-footed mule took him (for Peyrol, once he had put its head the right way, made no attempt at steering) descended rapidly to a plain of an aspect, with the white gleams of the Salins in the distance, bounded by bluish hills of no great elevation. Soon all traces of human habitations disappeared from before his roaming eyes. This part of his native country was more foreign to him than the shores of the Mozambique Channel, the coral strands of India, the forests of Madagascar. Before long he found himself on the neck of the Giens peninsula, impregnated with salt and containing a blue lagoon, particularly blue, darker and even more still than the expanses of the sea to the right and left of it from which it was separated by narrow strips of land not a hundred yards wide in places. The track ran indistinct, presenting no wheel-ruts, and with patches of efflorescent salt as white as snow between the tufts of wiry grass and the particularly dead-looking bushes. The whole neck of land was so low that it seemed to have no more thickness than a sheet of paper laid on the sea. Citizen Peyrol saw on the level of his eye, as if from a mere raft, sails of various craft, some white and some brown, while before him his native island of Porquerolles rose dull and solid beyond a wide strip of water. The mule, which knew rather better than Citizen Peyrol where it was going to, took him presently amongst the gentle rises at the end of the peninsula. The slopes were covered with scanty grass; crooked boundary walls of dry stones ran across the fields, and above them, here and there, peeped a low roof of red tiles shaded by the heads of delicate acacias. At a turn of the ravine appeared a village with its few houses, mostly with their blind walls to the path, and, at first, no living soul in sight. Three tall platanes, very ragged as to their bark and very poor as to foliage, stood in a group in an open space; and Citizen Peyrol was cheered by the sight of a dog sleeping in the shade. The mule swerved with great determination towards a massive stone trough under the village fountain. Peyrol, looking round from the saddle while the mule drank, could see no signs of an inn. Then, examining the ground nearer to him, he perceived a ragged man sitting on a stone. He had a broad leathern belt and his legs were bare to the knee. He was contemplating the stranger on the mule with stony surprise. His dark nut-brown face contrasted strongly with his grey shock of hair. At a sign from Peyrol he showed no reluctance and approached him readily without changing the stony character of his stare.

The thought that if he had remained at home he would have probably looked like that man crossed unbidden the mind of Peyrol. With that gravity from which he seldom departed he inquired if there were any inhabitants besides himself in the village. Then, to Peyrol's surprise, that destitute idler smiled pleasantly and said that the people were out looking after their bits of land.

There was enough of the peasant-born in Peyrol, still, to remark that he had seen no man, woman, or child, or four-footed beast for hours, and that he would hardly have thought that there was any land worth looking after anywhere around. But the other insisted. Well, they were working on it all the same, at least those that had any.

At the sound of the voices the dog got up with a strange air of being all backbone, and, approaching in dismal fidelity, stood with his nose close to his master's calves.

"And you," said Peyrol, "you have no land then?"

The man took his time to answer. "I have a boat."

Peyrol became interested when the man explained that his boat was on the salt pond, the large, deserted and opaque sheet of water lying dead between the two great bays of the living sea. Peyrol wondered aloud why any one should want a boat on it.

"There is fish there," said the man.

"And is the boat all your worldly goods?" asked Peyrol.

The flies buzzed, the mule hung its head, moving its ears and flapping its thin tail languidly.

"I have a sort of hut down by the lagoon and a net or two," the man confessed, as it were. Peyrol, looking down, completed the list by saying: "And this dog."

The man again took his time to say:

"He is company."

Peyrol sat as serious as a judge. "You haven't much to make a living of," he delivered himself at last. "However! . . . Is there no inn, caf, or some place where one could put up for a day? I have heard up inland that there was some such place."

"I will show it to you," said the man, who then went back to where he had been sitting and picked up a large empty basket before he led the way. His dog followed with his head and tail low, and then came Peyrol dangling his heels against the sides of the intelligent mule, which seemed to know before-hand all that was going to happen. At the corner where the houses ended there stood an old wooden cross stuck into a square block of stone. The lonely boatman of the Lagoon of Pesquiers pointed in the direction of a branching path where the rises terminating the peninsula sank into a shallow pass. There were leaning pines on the skyline, and in the pass itself dull silvery green patches of olive orchards below a long yellow wall backed by dark cypresses, and the red roofs of buildings which seemed to belong to a farm.

"Will they lodge me there" asked Peyrol.

"I don't know. They will have plenty of room, that's certain. There are no travellers here. But as for a place of refreshment, it used to be that. You have only got to walk in. If he isn't there, the mistress is sure to be there to serve you. She belongs to the place. She was born on it. We know all about her."

"What sort of woman is she?" asked Citizen Peyrol, who was very favourably impressed by the aspect of the place.

"Well, you are going there. You shall soon see. She is young."

“And the husband?” asked Peyrol, who, looking down into the other’s steady upward stare, detected a flicker in the brown, slightly faded eyes. “Why are you staring at me like this? I haven’t got a black skin, have I?”

The other smiled, showing in the thick pepper-and-salt growth on his face as sound a set of teeth as Citizen Peyrol himself. There was in his bearing something embarrassed, but not unfriendly, and, he uttered a phrase from which Peyrol discovered that the man before him, the lonely, hirsute, sunburnt and barelegged human being at his stirrup, nourished patriotic suspicions as to his character. And this seemed to him outrageous. He wanted to know in a severe voice whether he looked like a confounded landsman of any kind. He swore also without, however, losing any of the dignity of expression inherent in his type of features and in the very modelling of his flesh.

“For an aristocrat you don’t look like one, but neither do you look like a farmer or a pedlar or a patriot. You don’t look like anything that has been seen here for years and years and years. You look like one, I dare hardly say what. You might be a priest.”

Astonishment kept Peyrol perfectly quiet on his mule. “Do I dream?” he asked himself mentally. “You aren’t mad?” he asked aloud. “Do you know what you are talking about? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

“All the same,” persisted the other innocently, “it is much less than ten years ago since I saw one of them of the sort they call bishops, who had a face exactly like yours.”

Instinctively Peyrol passed his hand over his face. What could there be in it? Peyrol could not remember ever having seen a bishop in his life. The fellow stuck to his point, for he puckered his brow and murmured:

“Others too. . . . I remember perfectly. . . . It isn’t so many years ago. Some of them skulk amongst the villages yet, for all the chasing they got from the patriots.”

The sun blazed on the boulders and stones and bushes in the perfect stillness of the air. The mule, disregarding with republican austerity the neighbourhood of a stable within less than a hundred and twenty yards, dropped its head, and even its ears, and dozed as if in the middle of a desert. The dog, apparently changed into stone at his master’s heels, seemed to be dozing too with his nose near the ground. Peyrol had fallen into a deep meditation, and the boatman of the lagoon awaited the solution of his doubts without eagerness and with something like a grin within his thick beard. Peyrol’s face cleared. He had solved the problem, but there was a shade of vexation in his tone.

“Well, it can’t be helped,” he said. “I learned to shave from the English. I suppose that’s what’s the matter.”

At the name of the English the boatman pricked up his ears.

“One can’t tell where they are all gone to,” he murmured. “Only three years ago they swarmed about this coast in their big ships. You saw nothing but them, and they were fighting all round Toulon on land. Then in a week or two, crac! — -nobody! Cleared out devil knows where. But perhaps you would know.”

“Oh, yes,” said Peyrol, “I know all about the English, don’t you worry your head.”

"I am not troubling my head. It is for you to think about what's best to say when you speak with him up there. I mean the master of the farm."

"He can't be a better patriot than I am, for all my shaven face," said Peyrol. "That would only seem strange to a savage like you."

With an unexpected sigh the man sat down at the foot of the cross, and, immediately, his dog went off a little way and curled himself up amongst the tufts of grass.

"We are all savages here," said the forlorn fisherman from the lagoon. "But the master up there is a real patriot from the town. If you were ever to go to Toulon and ask people about him they would tell you. He first became busy purveying the guillotine when they were purifying the town from all aristocrats. That was even before the English came in. After the English got driven out there was more of that work than the guillotine could do. They had to kill traitors in the streets, in cellars, in their beds. The corpses of men and women were lying in heaps along the quays. There were a good many of his sort that got the name of drinkers of blood. Well, he was one of the best of them. I am only just telling you."

Peyrol nodded. "That will do me all right," he said. And before he could pick up the reins and hit it with his heels the mule, as though it had just waited for his words, started off along the path.

In less than five minutes Peyrol was dismounting in front of a low, long addition to a tall farmhouse with very few windows, and flanked by walls of stones enclosing not only the yard but apparently a field or two also. A gateway stood open to the left, but Peyrol dismounted at the door, through which he entered a bare room, with rough whitewashed walls and a few wooden chairs and tables, which might have been a rustic caf. He tapped with his knuckles on the table. A young woman with a fichu round her neck and a striped white and red skirt, with black hair and a red mouth, appeared in an inner doorway.

"Bonjour, citoyenne," said Peyrol. She was so startled by the unusual aspect of this stranger that she answered him only by a murmured "bonjour," but in a moment she came forward and waited expectantly. The perfect oval of her face, the colour of her smooth cheeks, and the whiteness of her throat forced from the Citizen Peyrol a slight hiss through his clenched teeth.

"I am thirsty, of course," he said, "but what I really want is to know whether I can stay here."

The sound of a mule's hoofs outside caused Peyrol to start, but the woman arrested him.

"She is only going to the shed. She knows the way. As to what you said, the master will be here directly. Nobody ever comes here. And how long would you want to stay?"

The old rover of the seas looked at her searchingly.

"To tell you the truth, citoyenne, it may be in a manner of speaking for ever."

She smiled in a bright flash of teeth, without gaiety or any change in her restless eyes that roamed about the empty room as though Peyrol had come in attended by a mob of Shades.

"It's like me," she said. "I lived as a child here."

"You are but little more than that now," said Peyrol, examining her with a feeling that was no longer surprise or curiosity, but seemed to be lodged in his very breast.

"Are you a patriot?" she asked, still surveying the invisible company in the room.

Peyrol, who had thought that he had "done with all that damned nonsense," felt angry and also at a loss for an answer.

"I am a Frenchman," he said bluntly.

"Arlette!" called out an aged woman's voice through the open inner door.

"What do you want?" she answered readily.

"There's a saddled mule come into the yard."

"All right. The man is here." Her eyes, which had steadied, began to wander again all round and about the motionless Peyrol. She moved a step nearer to him and asked in a low confidential tone: "Have you ever carried a woman's head on a pike?"

Peyrol, who had seen fights, massacres on land and Sea, towns taken by assault by savage warriors, who had killed men in attack and defence, found himself at first bereft of speech by this simple question, and next moved to speak bitterly.

"No. I have heard men boast of having done so. They were mostly braggarts with craven hearts. But what is all this to you?"

She was not listening to him, the edge of her white even teeth pressing her lower lip, her eyes never at rest. Peyrol remembered suddenly the sans-culotte — - the blood-drinker. Her husband. Was it possible? . . . Well, perhaps it was possible. He could not tell. He felt his utter incompetence. As to catching her glance, you might just as well have tried to catch a wild sea-bird with your hands. And altogether she was like a sea-bird — -not to be grasped. But Peyrol knew how to be patient, with that patience that is so often a form of courage. He was known for it. It had served him well in dangerous situations. Once it had positively saved his life. Nothing but patience. He could well wait now. He waited. And suddenly as if tamed by his patience this strange creature dropped her eyelids, advanced quite close to him and began to finger the lapel of his coat—something that a child might have done. Peyrol all but gasped with surprise, but he remained perfectly still. He was disposed to hold his breath. He was touched by a soft indefinite emotion, and as her eyelids remained lowered till her black lashes seemed to lie like a shadow on her pale cheek, there was no need for him to force a smile. After the first moment he was not even surprised. It was merely the sudden movement, not the nature of the act itself, that had startled him.

"Yes. You may stay. I think we shall be friends. I'll tell you about the Revolution."

At these words Peyrol, the man of violent deeds, felt something like a chill breath at the back of his head.

"What's the good of that?" he said.

"It must be," she said and backed away from him swiftly, and without raising her eyes turned round and was gone in a moment, so lightly that one would have thought her feet had not touched the ground. Peyrol, staring at the open kitchen door, saw

after a moment an elderly woman's head, with brown thin cheeks and tied up in a coloured handkerchief, peeping at him fearfully.

"A bottle of wine, please," he shouted at it.

Chapter 3

The affectation common to seamen of never being surprised at anything that sea or land can produce had become in Peyrol a second nature. Having learned from childhood to suppress every sign of wonder before all extraordinary sights and events, all strange people, all strange customs, and the most alarming phenomena of nature (as manifested, for instance, in the violence of volcanoes or the fury of human beings), he had really become indifferent — -or only perhaps utterly inexpressive. He had seen so much that was bizarre or atrocious, and had heard so many astounding tales, that his usual mental reaction before a new experience was generally formulated in the words, “J’en ai vu bien d’autres.” The last thing which had touched him with the panic of the supernatural had been the death under a heap of rags of that gaunt, fierce woman, his mother; and the last thing that had nearly overwhelmed him at the age of twelve with another kind of terror was the riot of sound and the multitude of mankind on the quays in Marseilles, something perfectly inconceivable from which he had instantly taken refuge behind a stack of wheat sacks after having been chased ashore from the tartane. He had remained there quaking till a man in a cocked hat and with a sabre at his side (the boy had never seen either such a hat or such a sabre in his life) had seized him by the arm close to the armpit and had hauled him out from there; a man who might have been an ogre (only Peyrol had never heard of an ogre) but at any rate in his own way was alarming and wonderful beyond anything he could have imagined — -if the faculty of imagination had been developed in him then. No doubt all this was enough to make one die of fright, but that possibility never occurred to him. Neither did he go mad; but being only a child, he had simply adapted himself, by means of passive acquiescence, to the new and inexplicable conditions of life in something like twenty-four hours. After that initiation the rest of his existence, from flying fishes to whales and on to black men and coral reefs, to decks running with blood, and thirst in open boats, was comparatively plain sailing. By the time he had heard of a Revolution in France and of certain Immortal Principles causing the death of many people, from the mouths of seamen and travellers and year-old gazettes coming out of Europe, he was ready to appreciate contemporary history in his own particular way. Mutiny and throwing officers overboard. He had seen that twice and he was on a different side each time. As to this upset, he took no side. It was too far — -too big — -also not distinct enough. But he acquired the revolutionary jargon quickly enough and used it on occasion, with secret contempt. What he had gone through, from a spell of crazy love for a yellow girl to the experience of treachery from a bosom friend and shipmate (and both those things Peyrol confessed to himself he could never hope to understand),

with all the graduations of varied experience of men and passions between, had put a drop of universal scorn, a wonderful sedative, into the strange mixture which might have been called the soul of the returned Peyrol.

Therefore he not only showed no surprise but did not feel any when he beheld the master, in the right of his wife, of the Escampobar Farm. The homeless Peyrol, sitting in the bare salle with a bottle of wine before him, was in the act of raising the glass to his lips when the man entered, ex-orator in the sections, leader of red-capped mobs, hunter of the ci-devants and priests, purveyor of the guillotine, in short a blood-drinker. And Citizen Peyrol, who had never been nearer than six thousand miles as the crow flies to the realities of the Revolution, put down his glass and in his deep unemotional voice said: "Salut."

The other returned a much fainter "Salut," staring at the stranger of whom he had heard already. His almond-shaped, soft eyes were noticeably shiny and so was to a certain extent the skin on his high but rounded cheekbones, coloured red like a mask of which all the rest was but a mass of clipped chestnut hair growing so thick and close around the lips as to hide altogether the design of the mouth which, for all Citizen Peyrol knew, might have been of a quite ferocious character. A careworn forehead and a perpendicular nose suggested a certain austerity proper to an ardent patriot. He held in his hand a long bright knife which he laid down on one of the tables at once. He didn't seem more than thirty years old, a well-made man of medium height, with a lack of resolution in his bearing. Something like disillusion was suggested by the set of his shoulders. The effect was subtle, but Peyrol became aware of it while he explained his case and finished the tale by declaring that he was a seaman of the Republic and that he had always done his duty before the enemy.

The blood-drinker had listened profoundly. The high arches of his eyebrows gave him an astonished look. He came close up to the table and spoke in a trembling voice.

"You may have! But you may all the same be corrupt. The seamen of the Republic were eaten up with corruption paid for with the gold of the tyrants. Who would have guessed it? They all talked like patriots. And yet the English entered the harbour and landed in the town without opposition. The armies of the Republic drove them out, but treachery stalks in the land, it comes up out of the ground, it sits at our hearthstones, lurks in the bosom of the representatives of the people, of our fathers, of our brothers. There was a time when civic virtue flourished, but now it has got to hide its head. And I will tell you why: there has not been enough killing. It seems as if there could never be enough of it. It's discouraging. Look what we have come to."

His voice died in his throat as though he had suddenly lost confidence in himself.

"Bring another glass, citizen," said Peyrol, after a short pause, "and let's drink together. We will drink to the confusion of traitors. I detest treachery as much as any man, but . . ."

He waited till the other had returned, then poured out the wine, and after they had touched glasses and half emptied them, he put down his own and continued:

“But you see I have nothing to do with your politics. I was at the other side of the world, therefore you can’t suspect me of being a traitor. You showed no mercy, you other sans-culottes, to the enemies of the Republic at home, and I killed her enemies abroad, far away. You were cutting off heads without much compunction. . . .”

The other most unexpectedly shut his eyes for a moment, then opened them very wide. “Yes, yes,” he assented very low. “Pity may be a crime.”

“Yes. And I knocked the enemies of the Republic on the head whenever I had them before me without inquiring about the number. It seems to me that you and I ought to get on together.”

The master of Escampobar farmhouse murmured, however, that in times like these nothing could be taken as proof positive. It behoved every patriot to nurse suspicion in his breast. No sign of impatience escaped Peyrol. He was rewarded for his self-restraint and the unshaken good-humour with which he had conducted the discussion by, carrying his point. Citizen Scevola Bron (for that appeared to be the name of the master of the farm), an object of fear and dislike to the other inhabitants of the Giens peninsula, might have been influenced by a wish to have some one with whom he could exchange a few words from time to time. No villagers ever came up to the farm, or were likely to, unless perhaps in a body and animated with hostile intentions. They resented his presence in their part of the world sullenly.

“Where do you come from?” was the last question he asked.

“I left Toulon two days ago.”

Citizen Scevola struck the table with his fist, but this manifestation of energy was very momentary.

“And that was the town of which by a decree not a stone upon another was to be left,” he complained, much depressed.

“Most of it is still standing,” Peyrol assured him calmly. “I don’t know whether it deserved the fate you say was decreed for it. I was there for the last month or so and I know it contains some good patriots. I know because I made friends with them all.” Thereupon Peyrol mentioned a few names which the retired sans-culotte greeted with a bitter smile and an ominous silence, as though the bearers of them had been only good for the scaffold and the guillotine.

“Come along and I will show you the place where you will sleep,” he said with a sigh, and Peyrol was only too ready. They entered the kitchen together. Through the open back door a large square of sunshine fell on the floor of stone flags. Outside one could see quite a mob of expectant chickens, while a yellow hen postured on the very doorstep, darting her head right and left with affectation. All old woman holding a bowl full of broken food put it down suddenly on a table and stared. The vastness and cleanliness of the place impressed Peyrol favourably.

“You will eat with us here,” said his guide, and passed without stopping into a narrow passage giving access to a steep flight of stairs. Above the first landing a narrow spiral staircase led to the upper part of the farmhouse; and when the sans-culotte flung open the solid plank door at which it ended he disclosed to Peyrol a large low room

containing a four-poster bedstead piled up high with folded blankets and spare pillows. There were also two wooden chairs and a large oval table.

“We could arrange this place for you,” said the master, “but I don’t know what the mistress will have to say,” he added.

Peyrol, struck by the peculiar expression of his face, turned his head and saw the girl standing in the doorway. It was as though she had floated up after them, for not the slightest sound of rustle or footfall had warned Peyrol of her presence. The pure complexion of her white cheeks was set off brilliantly by her coral lips and the bands of raven-black hair only partly covered by a muslin cap trimmed with lace. She made no sign, uttered no sound, behaved exactly as if there had been nobody in the room; and Peyrol suddenly averted his eyes from that mute and unconscious face with its roaming eyes.

In some way or other, however, the sans-culotte seemed to have ascertained her mind, for he said in a final tone:

“That’s all right then,” and there was a short silence, during which the woman shot her dark glances all round the room again and again, while on her lips there was a half-smile, not so much absent-minded as totally unmotivated, which Peyrol observed with a side glance, but could not make anything of. She did not seem to know him at all.

“You have a view of salt water on three sides of you,” remarked Peyrol’s future host.

The farmhouse was a tall building, and this large attic with its three windows commanded on one side the view of Hyres roadstead on the first plan, with further blue undulations of the coast as far as Frjus; and on the other the vast semicircle of barren high hills, broken by the entrance to Toulon harbour guarded by forts and batteries, and ending in Cape Cpet, a squat mountain, with sombre folds and a base of brown rocks, with a white spot gleaming on the very summit of it, a *ci-devant* shrine dedicated to Our Lady, and a *ci-devant* place of pilgrimage. The noonday glare seemed absorbed by the gemlike surface of the sea perfectly flawless in the invincible depth of its colour.

“It’s like being in a lighthouse,” said Peyrol. “Not a bad place for a seaman to live in.” The sight of the sails dotted about cheered his heart. The people of landsmen with their houses and animals and activities did not count. What made for him the life of any strange shore were the craft that belonged to it: canoes, catamarans, ballahous, praus, lorchas, mere dug-outs, or even rafts of tied logs with a bit of mat for a sail from which naked brown men fished along stretches of white sand crushed under the tropical skyline, sinister in its glare and with a thunder-cloud crouching on the horizon. But here he beheld a perfect serenity, nothing sombre on the shore, nothing ominous in the sunshine. The sky rested lightly on the distant and vaporous outline of the hills; and the immobility of all things seemed poised in the air like a gay mirage. On this tideless sea several tartanes lay becalmed in the Petite Passe between Porquerolles and Cape Esterel, yet theirs was not the stillness of death but of light slumber, the immobility of a smiling enchantment, of a Mediterranean fair day, breathless sometimes but never

without life. Whatever enchantment Peyrol had known in his wanderings it had never been so remote from all thoughts of strife and death, so full of smiling security, making all his past appear to him like a chain of lurid days and sultry nights. He thought he would never want to get away from it, as though he had obscurely felt that his old rover's soul had been always rooted there. Yes, this was the place for him; not because expediency dictated, but simply because his instinct of rest had found its home at last.

He turned away from the window and found himself face to face with the sans-culotte, who had apparently come up to him from behind, perhaps with the intention of tapping him on the shoulder, but who now turned away his head. The young woman had disappeared.

"Tell me, patron," said Peyrol, "is there anywhere near this house a little dent in the shore with a bit of beach in it perhaps where I could keep a boat?"

"What do you want a boat for?"

"To go fishing when I have a fancy to," answered Peyrol curtly.

Citizen Bron, suddenly subdued, told him that what he wanted was to be found a couple of hundred yards down the hill from the house. The coast, of course, was full of indentations, but this was a perfect little pool. And the Toulon blood-drinker's almond-shaped eyes became strangely sombre as they gazed at the attentive Peyrol. A perfect little pool, he repeated, opening from a cove that the English knew well. He paused. Peyrol observed without much animosity but in a tone of conviction that it was very difficult to keep off the English whenever there was a bit of salt water anywhere; but what could have brought English seamen to a spot like this he couldn't imagine.

"It was when their fleet first came here," said the patriot in a gloomy voice, "and hung round the coast before the anti-revolutionary traitors let them into Toulon, sold the sacred soil of their country for a handful of gold. Yes, in the days before the crime was consummated English officers used to land in that cove at night and walk up to this very house."

"What audacity!" commented Peyrol, who was really surprised. "But that's just like what they are." Still, it was hard to believe. But wasn't it only a tale?

The patriot flung one arm up in a strained gesture. "I swore to its truth before the tribunal," he said. "It was a dark story," he cried shrilly, and paused. "It cost her father his life," he said in a low voice . . . "her mother too — -but the country was in danger," he added still lower.

Peyrol walked away to the western window and looked towards Toulon. In the middle of the great sheet of water within Cape Cici a tall two-decker lay becalmed and the little dark dots on the water were her boats trying to tow her head round the right way. Peyrol watched them for a moment, and then walked back to the middle of the room.

"Did you actually drag him from this house to the guillotine?" he asked in his unemotional voice.

The patriot shook his head thoughtfully with downcast eyes. "No, he came over to Toulon just before the evacuation, this friend of the English . . . sailed over in a tartane he owned that is still lying here at the Madrague. He had his wife with him. They came over to take home their daughter who was living then with some skulking old nuns. The victorious Republicans were closing in and the slaves of tyranny had to fly."

"Came to fetch their daughter," mused Peyrol. "Strange, that guilty people should . . ."

The patriot looked up fiercely. "It was justice," he said loudly. "They were anti-revolutionists, and if they had never spoken to an Englishman in their life the atrocious crime was on their heads."

"H'm, stayed too long for their daughter," muttered Peyrol. "And so it was you who brought her home."

"I did," said the patron. For a moment his eyes evaded Peyrol's investigating glance, but in a moment he looked straight into his face. "No lessons of base superstition could corrupt her soul," he declared with exaltation. "I brought home a patriot."

Peyrol, very calm, gave him a hardly perceptible nod. "Well," he said, "all this won't prevent me sleeping very well in this room. I always thought I would like to live in a lighthouse when I got tired of roving about the seas. This is as near a lighthouse lantern as can be. You will see me with all my little affairs to-morrow," he added, moving towards the stairs. "Salut, citoyen."

There was in Peyrol a fund of self-command amounting to placidity. There were men living in the East who had no doubt whatever that Peyrol was a calmly terrible man. And they would quote illustrative instances which from their own point of view were simply admirable. But all Peyrol had ever done was to behave rationally, as it seemed to him in all sorts of dangerous circumstances without ever being led astray by the nature, or the cruelty, or the danger of any given situation. He adapted himself to the character of the event and to the very spirit of it, with a profound responsive feeling of a particularly unsentimental kind. Sentiment in itself was an artificiality of which he had never heard and if he had seen it in action would have appeared to him too puzzling to make anything of. That sort of genuineness in acceptance made him a satisfactory inmate of the Escampobar Farm. He duly turned up with all his cargo, as he called it, and was met at the door of the farmhouse itself by the young woman with the pale face and wandering eyes. Nothing could hold her attention for long amongst her familiar surroundings. Right and left and far away beyond you, she seemed to be looking for something while you were talking to her, so that you doubted whether she could follow what you said. But as a matter of fact she had all her wits about her. In the midst of this strange search for something that was not there she had enough detachment to smile at Peyrol. Then, withdrawing into the kitchen, she watched, as much as her restless eyes could watch anything, Peyrol's cargo and Peyrol himself passing up the stairs.

The most valuable part of Peyrol's cargo being strapped to his person, the first thing he did after being left alone in that attic room which was like the lantern of a lighthouse was to relieve himself of the burden and lay it on the foot of the bed. Then he sat down and leaning his elbow far on the table he contemplated it with a feeling of complete relief. That plunder had never burdened his conscience. It had merely on occasion oppressed his body; and if it had at all affected his spirits it was not by its secrecy but by its mere weight, which was inconvenient, irritating, and towards the end of a day altogether insupportable. It made a free-limbed, deep-breathing sailor-man feel like a mere overloaded animal, thus extending whatever there was of compassion in Peyrol's nature towards the four-footed beasts that carry men's burdens on the earth. The necessities of a lawless life had taught Peyrol to be ruthless, but he had never been cruel.

Sprawling in the chair, stripped to the waist, robust and grey-haired, his head with a Roman profile propped up on a mighty and tattooed forearm, he remained at ease, with his eyes fixed on his treasure with an air of meditation. Yet Peyrol was not meditating (as a superficial observer might have thought) on the best place of concealment. It was not that he had not had a great experience of that sort of property which had always melted so quickly through his fingers. What made him meditative was its character, not of a share of a hard-won booty in toil, in risk, in danger, in privation, but of a piece of luck personally his own. He knew what plunder was and how soon it went; but this lot had come to stay. He had it with him, away from the haunts of his lifetime, as if in another world altogether. It couldn't be drunk away, gambled away, squandered away in any sort of familiar circumstances, or even given away. In that room, raised a good many feet above his revolutionized native land where he was more of a stranger than anywhere else in the world, in this roomy garret full of light and as it were surrounded by the sea, in a great sense of peace and security, Peyrol didn't see why he should bother his head about it so very much. It came to him that he had never really cared for any plunder that fell into his hands. No, never for any. And to take particular care of this for which no one would seek vengeance or attempt recovery would have been absurd. Peyrol got up and opened his big sandalwood chest secured with an enormous padlock, part, too, of some old plunder gathered in a Chinese town in the Gulf of Tonkin, in company of certain Brothers of the Coast, who having boarded at night a Portuguese schooner and sent her crew adrift in a boat, had taken a cruise on their own account, years and years and years ago. He was young then, very young, and the chest fell to his share because nobody else would have anything to do with the cumbersome thing, and also for the reason that the metal of the curiously wrought thick hoops that strengthened it was not gold but mere brass. He, in his innocence, had been rather pleased with the article. He had carried it about with him into all sorts of places, and also he had left it behind him — -once for a whole year in a dark and noisome cavern on a certain part of the Madagascar coast. He had left it with various native chiefs, with Arabs, with a gambling-hell keeper in Pondicherry, with his various friends in short, and even with his enemies. Once he had lost it altogether.

That was on the occasion when he had received a wound which laid him open and gushing like a slashed wine-skin. A sudden quarrel broke out in a company of Brothers over some matter of policy complicated by personal jealousies, as to which he was as innocent as a babe unborn. He never knew who gave him the slash. Another Brother, a chum of his, an English boy, had rushed in and hauled him out of the fray, and then he had remembered nothing for days. Even now when he looked at the scar he could not understand why he had not died. That occurrence, with the wound and the painful convalescence, was the first thing that sobered his character somewhat. Many years afterwards, when in consequence of his altered views of mere lawlessness he was serving as quartermaster on board the *Hirondelle*, a comparatively respectable privateer, he caught sight of that chest again in Port Louis, of all places in the world, in a dark little den of a shop kept by a lone Hindoo. The hour was late, the side street was empty, and so Peyrol went in there to claim his property, all fair, a dollar in one hand and a pistol in the other, and was entreated abjectly to take it away. He carried off the empty chest on his shoulder, and that same night the privateer went to sea; then only he found time to ascertain that he had made no mistake, because, soon after he had got it first, he had, in grim wantonness, scratched inside the lid, with the point of his knife, the rude outline of a skull and cross-bones into which he had rubbed afterwards a little Chinese vermilion. And there it was, the whole design, as fresh as ever.

In the garret full of light of the Escampobar farmhouse, the grey-haired Peyrol opened the chest, took all the contents out of it, laying them neatly on the floor, and spread his treasure — -pockets downwards — - over the bottom, which it filled exactly. Busy on his knees he repacked the chest. A jumper or two, a fine cloth jacket, a remnant piece of Madapolam muslin, costly stuff for which he had no use in the world — -a quantity of fine white shirts. Nobody would dare to rummage in his chest, he thought, with the assurance of a man who had been feared in his time. Then he rose, and looking round the room and stretching his powerful arms, he ceased to think of the treasure, of the future and even of to-morrow, in the sudden conviction that he could make himself very comfortable there.

Chapter 4

In a tiny bit of a looking-glass hung on the frame of the east window, Peyrol, handling the unwearable English blade, was shaving himself — -for the day was Sunday. The years of political changes ending with the proclamation of Napoleon as Consul for life had not touched Peyrol except as to his strong thick head of hair, which was nearly all white now. After putting the razor away carefully, Peyrol introduced his stockinged feet into a pair of sabots of the very best quality and clattered downstairs. His brown cloth breeches were untied at the knee and the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his shoulders. That sea-rover turned rustic was now perfectly at home in that farm which, like a lighthouse, commanded the view of two roadsteads and of the open sea. He passed through the kitchen. It was exactly as he had seen it first, sunlight on the floor, red copper utensils shining on the walls, the table in the middle scrubbed snowy white; and it was only the old woman, Aunt Catherine, who seemed to have acquired a sharper profile. The very hen manuvring her neck pretentiously on the doorstep, might have been standing there for the last eight years. Peyrol shooed her away, and going into the yard washed himself lavishly at the pump. When he returned from the yard he looked so fresh and hale that old Catherine complimented him in a thin voice on his “bonne mine.” Manners were changing, and she addressed him no longer as citoyen but as Monsieur Peyrol. He answered readily that if her heart was free he was ready to lead her to the altar that very day. This was such an old joke that Catherine took no notice of it whatever, but followed him with her eyes as he crossed the kitchen into the salle, which was cool, with its tables and benches washed clean, and no living soul in it. Peyrol passed through to the front of the house, leaving the outer door open. At the clatter of his clogs a young man sitting outside on a bench turned his head and greeted him by a careless nod. His face was rather long, sunburnt and smooth, with a slightly curved nose and a very well-shaped chin. He wore a dark blue naval jacket open on a white shirt and a black neckerchief tied in a slip-knot with long ends. White breeches and stockings and black shoes with steel buckles completed his costume. A brass-hilted sword in a black scabbard worn on a cross-belt was lying on the ground at his feet. Peyrol, silver-headed and ruddy, sat down on the bench at some little distance. The level piece of rocky ground in front of the house was not very extensive, falling away to the sea in a declivity framed between the rises of two barren hills. The old rover and the young seaman with their arms folded across their chests gazed into space, exchanging no words, like close intimates or like distant strangers. Neither did they stir when the master of the Escampobar Farm appeared out of the yard gate with a manure fork on his shoulder and started to cross the piece of level ground. His grimy hands,

his rolled-up shirt sleeves, the fork over the shoulder, the whole of his working-day aspect had somehow an air of being a manifestation; but the patriot dragged his dirty clogs low-spiritedly in the fresh light of the young morning, in a way no real worker on the land would ever do at the end of a day of toil. Yet there were no signs of debility about his person. His oval face with rounded cheek-bones remained unwrinkled except at the corners of his almond-shaped, shiny, visionary's eyes, which had not changed since the day when old Peyrol's gaze had met them for the first time. A few white hairs on his tousled head and in the thin beard alone had marked the passage of years, and you would have had to look for them closely. Amongst the unchangeable rocks at the extreme end of the Peninsula, time seemed to have stood still and idle while the group of people poised at that southernmost point of France had gone about their ceaseless toil, winning bread and wine from a stony-hearted earth.

The master of the farm, staring straight before him, passed before the two men towards the door of the *salle*, which Peyrol had left open. He leaned his fork against the wall before going in. The sound of a distant bell, the bell of the village where years ago the returned rover had watered his mule and had listened to the talk of the man with the dog, came up faint and abrupt in the great stillness of the upper space. The violent slamming of the *salle* door broke the silence between the two gazers on the sea.

"Does that fellow never rest?" asked the young man in a low indifferent voice which covered the delicate tinkling of the bell, and without moving his head.

"Not on Sunday anyhow," answered the rover in the same detached manner. "What can you expect? The church bell is like poison to him. That fellow, I verily believe, has been born a *sans-culotte*. Every 'dcadi' he puts on his best clothes, sticks a red cap on his head and wanders between the buildings like a lost soul in the light of day. A Jacobin, if ever there was one."

"Yes. There is hardly a hamlet in France where there isn't a *sans-culotte* or two. But some of them have managed to change their skins if nothing else."

"This one won't change his skin, and as to his inside he never had anything in him that could be moved. Aren't there some people that remember him in Toulon? It isn't such a long time ago. And yet . . ." Peyrol turned slightly towards the young man . . . "And yet to look at him . . ."

The officer nodded, and for a moment his face wore a troubled expression which did not escape the notice of Peyrol who went on speaking easily:

"Some time ago, when the priests began to come back to the parishes, he, that fellow" — -Peyrol jerked his head in the direction of the *salle* door — -"would you believe it? — -started for the village with a sabre hanging to his side and his red cap on his head. He made for the church door. What he wanted to do there I don't know. It surely could not have been to say the proper kind of prayers. Well, the people were very much elated about their reopened church, and as he went along some woman spied him out of a window and started the alarm. 'Eh, there! look! The jacobin, the *sans-culotte*, the blood-drinker! Look at him.' Out rushed some of them, and a man or two that were working in their home patches vaulted over the low walls. Pretty soon

there was a crowd, mostly women, each with the first thing she could snatch up — -stick, kitchen knife, anything. A few men with spades and cudgels joined them by the water-trough. He didn't quite like that. What could he do? He turned and bolted up the hill, like a hare. It takes some pluck to face a mob of angry women. He ran along the cart track without looking behind him, and they after him, yelling: 'A mort! A mort le buveur de sang!' He had been a horror and an abomination to the people for years, what with one story and another, and now they thought it was their chance. The priest over in the presbytery hears the noise, comes to the door. One look was enough for him. He is a fellow of about forty but a wiry, long-legged beggar, and agile — -what? He just tucked up his skirts and dashed out, taking short cuts over the walls and leaping from boulder to boulder like a blessed goat. I was up in my room when the noise reached me there. I went to the window and saw the chase in full cry after him. I was beginning to think the fool would fetch all those furies along with him up here and that they would carry the house by boarding and do for the lot of us, when the priest cut in just in the nick of time. He could have tripped Scevola as easy as anything, but he lets him pass and stands in front of his parishioners with his arms extended. That did it. He saved the patron all right. What he could say to quieten them I don't know, but these were early days and they were very fond of their new priest. He could have turned them round his little finger. I had my head and shoulders out of the window — -it was interesting enough. They would have massacred all the accursed lot, as they used to call us down there — -and when I drew in, behold there was the patronne standing behind me looking on too. You have been here often enough to know how she roams about the grounds and about the house, without a sound. A leaf doesn't pose itself lighter on the ground than her feet do. Well, I suppose she didn't know that I was upstairs, and came into the room just in her way of always looking for something that isn't there, and noticing me with my head stuck out, naturally came up to see what I was looking at. Her face wasn't any paler than usual, but she was clawing the dress over her chest with her ten fingers — -like this. I was confounded. Before I could find my tongue she just turned round and went out with no more sound than a shadow."

When Peyrol ceased, the ringing of the church bell went on faintly and then stopped as abruptly as it had begun.

"Talking about her shadow," said the young officer indolently, "I know her shadow."

Old Peyrol made a really pronounced movement. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Where?"

"I have got only one window in the room where they put me to sleep last night and I stood at it looking out. That's what I am here for — -to look out, am I not? I woke up suddenly, and being awake I went to the window and looked out."

"One doesn't see shadows in the air," growled old Peyrol.

"No, but you see them on the ground, pretty black too when the moon is full. It fell across this open space here from the corner of the house."

"The patronne," exclaimed Peyrol in a low voice, "impossible!"

“Does the old woman that lives in the kitchen roam, do the village women roam as far as this?” asked the officer composedly. “You ought to know the habits of the people. It was a woman’s shadow. The moon being to the west, it glided slanting from that corner of the house and glided back again. I know her shadow when I see it.”

“Did you hear anything?” asked Peyrol after a moment of visible hesitation.

“The window being open I heard somebody snoring. It couldn’t have been you, you are too high. Moreover, from the snoring,” he added grimly, “it must have been somebody with a good conscience. Not like you, old skimmer of the seas, because, you know, that’s what you are, for all your gunner’s warrant.” He glanced out of the corner of his eyes at old Peyrol. “What makes you look so worried?”

“She roams, that cannot be denied,” murmured Peyrol, with an uneasiness which he did not attempt to conceal.

“Evidently. I know a shadow when I see it, and when I saw it, it did not frighten me, not a quarter as much as the mere tale of it seems to have frightened you. However, that sans-culotte friend of yours must be a hard sleeper. Those purveyors of the guillotine all have a first-class fireproof Republican conscience. I have seen them at work up north when I was a boy running barefoot in the gutters. . . .”

“The fellow always sleeps in that room,” said Peyrol earnestly.

“But that’s neither here nor there,” went on the officer, “except that it may be convenient for roaming shadows to hear his conscience taking its ease.”

Peyrol, excited, lowered his voice forcibly. “Lieutenant,” he said, “if I had not seen from the first what was in your heart I would have contrived to get rid of you a long time ago in some way or other.”

The lieutenant glanced sideways again and Peyrol let his raised fist fall heavily on his thigh. “I am old Peyrol and this place, as lonely as a ship at sea, is like a ship to me and all in it are like shipmates. Never mind the patron. What I want to know is whether you heard anything? Any sound at all? Murmur, footstep?” A bitterly mocking smile touched the lips of the young man.

“Not a fairy footstep. Could you hear the fall of a leaf — -and with that terrorist cur trumpeting right above my head? . . .” Without unfolding his arms he turned towards Peyrol, who was looking at him anxiously. . . . “You want to know, do you? Well, I will tell you what I heard and you can make the best of it. I heard the sound of a stumble. It wasn’t a fairy either that stubbed its toe. It was something in a heavy shoe. Then a stone went rolling down the ravine in front of us interminably, then a silence as of death. I didn’t see anything moving. The way the moon was then, the ravine was in black shadow. And I didn’t try to see.”

Peyrol, with his elbow on his knee, leaned his head in the palm of his hand. The officer repeated through his clenched teeth: “Make the best of it.”

Peyrol shook his head slightly. After having spoken, the young officer leaned back against the wall, but next moment the report of a piece of ordnance reached them as it were from below, travelling around the rising ground to the left in the form of a

dull thud followed by a sighing sound that seemed to seek an issue amongst the stony ridges and rocks near by.

“That’s the English corvette which has been dodging in and out of Hyres Roads for the last week,” said the young officer, picking up his sword hastily. He stood up and buckled the belt on, while Peyrol rose more deliberately from the bench, and said:

“She can’t be where we saw her at anchor last night. That gun was near. She must have crossed over. There has been enough wind for that at various times during the night. But what could she be firing at down there in the Petite Passe? We had better go and see.”

He strode off, followed by Peyrol. There was not a human being in sight about the farm and not a sound of life except for the lowing of a cow coming faintly from behind a wall. Peyrol kept close behind the quickly moving officer who followed the footpath marked faintly on the stony slope of the hill.

“That gun was not shotted,” he observed suddenly in a deep steady voice.

The officer glanced over his shoulder.

“You may be right. You haven’t been a gunner for nothing. Not shotted, eh? Then a signal gun. But who to? We have been observing that corvette now for days and we know she has no companion.”

He moved on, Peyrol following him on the awkward path without losing his wind and arguing in a steady voice: “She has no companion but she may have seen a friend at daylight this morning.”

“Bah!” retorted the officer without checking his pace. “You talk now like a child or else you take me for one. How far could she have seen? What view could she have had at daylight if she was making her way to the Petite Passe where she is now? Why, the islands would have masked for her two-thirds of the sea and just in the direction too where the English inshore squadron is hovering below the horizon. Funny blockade that! You can’t see a single English sail for days and days together, and then when you least expect them they come down all in a crowd as if ready to eat us alive. No, no! There was no wind to bring her up a companion. But tell me, gunner, you who boast of knowing the bark of every English piece, what sort of gun was it?”

Peyrol growled in answer:

“Why, a twelve. The heaviest she carries. She is only a corvette.”

“Well, then, it was fired as a recall for one of her boats somewhere out of sight along the shore. With a coast like this, all points and bights, there would be nothing very extraordinary in that, would there?”

“No,” said Peyrol, stepping out steadily. “What is extraordinary is that she should have had a boat away at all.”

“You are right there.” The officer stopped suddenly. “Yes, it is really remarkable, that she should have sent a boat away. And there is no other way to explain that gun.”

Peyrol’s face expressed no emotion of any sort.

“There is something there worth investigating,” continued the officer with animation.

"If it is a matter of a boat," Peyrol said without the slightest excitement, "there can be nothing very deep in it. What could there be? As likely as not they sent her inshore early in the morning with lines to try to catch some fish for the captain's breakfast. Why do you open your eyes like this? Don't you know the English? They have enough cheek for anything."

After uttering those words with a deliberation made venerable by his white hair, Peyrol made the gesture of wiping his brow, which was barely moist.

"Let us push on," said the lieutenant abruptly.

"Why hurry like this?" argued Peyrol without moving. "Those heavy clogs of mine are not adapted for scrambling on loose stones."

"Aren't they?" burst out the officer. "Well, then, if you are tired you can sit down and fan yourself with your hat. Good-bye." And he strode away before Peyrol could utter a word.

The path following the contour of the hill took a turn towards its sea-face and very soon the lieutenant passed out of sight with startling suddenness. Then his head reappeared for a moment, only his head, and that too vanished suddenly. Peyrol remained perplexed. After gazing in the direction in which the officer had disappeared, he looked down at the farm buildings, now below him but not at a very great distance. He could see distinctly the pigeons walking on the roof ridges. Somebody was drawing water from the well in the middle of the yard. The patron, no doubt; but that man, who at one time had the power to send so many luckless persons to their death, did not count for old Peyrol. He had even ceased to be an offence to his sight and a disturber of his feelings. By himself he was nothing. He had never been anything but a creature of the universal blood-lust of the time. The very doubts about him had died out by now in old Peyrol's breast. The fellow was so insignificant that had Peyrol in a moment of particular attention discovered that he cast no shadow, he would not have been surprised. Below there he was reduced to the shape of a dwarf lugging a bucket away from the well. But where was she? Peyrol asked himself, shading his eyes with his hand. He knew that the patronne could not be very far away, because he had a sight of her during the morning; but that was before he had learned she had taken to roaming at night. His growing uneasiness came suddenly to an end when, turning his eyes away from the farm buildings, where obviously she was not, he saw her appear, with nothing but the sky full of light at her back, coming down round the very turn of the path which had taken the lieutenant out of sight.

Peyrol moved briskly towards her. He wasn't a man to lose time in idle wonder, and his sabots did not seem to weigh heavy on his feet. The fermire, whom the villagers down there spoke of as Arlette as though she had been a little girl, but in a strange tone of shocked awe, walked with her head drooping and her feet (as Peyrol used to say) touching the ground as lightly as falling leaves. The clatter of the clogs made her raise her black, clear eyes that had been smitten on the very verge of womanhood by such sights of bloodshed and terror, as to leave in her a fear of looking steadily in any direction for long, lest she should see coming through the empty air some mutilated

vision of the dead. Peyrol called it trying not to see something that was not there; and this evasive yet frank mobility was so much a part of her being that the steadiness with which she met his inquisitive glance surprised old Peyrol for a moment. He asked without beating about the bush:

“Did he speak to you?”

She answered with something airy and provoking in her voice, which also struck Peyrol as a novelty: “He never stopped. He passed by as though he had not seen me” — -and then they both looked away from each other.

“Now, what is it you took into your head to watch for at night?”

She did not expect that question. She hung her head and took a pleat of her skirt between her fingers, embarrassed like a child.

“Why should I not,” she murmured in a low shy note, as if she had two voices within her.

“What did Catherine say?”

“She was asleep, or perhaps, only lying on her back with her eyes shut.”

“Does she do that?” asked Peyrol with incredulity.

“Yes.” Arlette gave Peyrol a queer, meaningless smile with which her eyes had nothing to do. “Yes, she often does. I have noticed that before. She lies there trembling under her blankets till I come back.”

“What drove you out last night?” Peyrol tried to catch her eyes, but they eluded him in the usual way. And now her face looked as though it couldn’t smile.

“My heart,” she said. For a moment Peyrol lost his tongue and even all power of motion. The fermire having lowered her eyelids, all her life seemed to have gone into her coral lips, vivid and without a quiver in the perfection of their design, and Peyrol, giving up the conversation with an upward fling of his arm, hurried up the path without looking behind him. But once round the turn of the path, he approached the lookout at an easier gait. It was a piece of smooth ground below the summit of the hill. It had quite a pronounced slope, so that a short and robust pine growing true out of the soil yet leaned well over the edge of the sheer drop of some fifty feet or so. The first thing that Peyrol’s eyes took in was the water of the Petite Passe with the enormous shadow of the Porquerolles Island darkening more than half of its width at this still early hour. He could not see the whole of it, but on the part his glance embraced there was no ship of any kind. The lieutenant, leaning with his chest along the inclined pine, addressed him irritably.

“Squat! Do you think there are no glasses on board the Englishman?”

Peyrol obeyed without a word and for the space of a minute or so presented the bizarre sight of a rather bulky peasant with venerable white locks crawling on his hands and knees on a hillside for no visible reason. When he got to the foot of the pine he raised himself on his knees. The lieutenant, flattened against the inclined trunk and with a pocket-glass glued to his eye, growled angrily:

“You can see her now, can’t you?”

Peyrol in his kneeling position could see the ship now. She was less than a quarter of a mile from him up the coast, almost within hailing effort of his powerful voice. His unaided eyes could follow the movements of the men on board like dark dots about her decks. She had drifted so far within Cape Esterel that the low projecting mass of it seemed to be in actual contact with her stern. Her unexpected nearness made Peyrol draw a sharp breath through his teeth. The lieutenant murmured, still keeping the glass to his eye:

“I can see the very epaulettes of the officers on the quarter-deck.”

Chapter 5

As Peyrol and the lieutenant had surmised from the report of the gun, the English ship which the evening before was lying in Hyres Roads had got under way after dark. The light airs had taken her as far as the Petite Passe in the early part of the night, and then had abandoned her to the breathless moonlight in which, bereft of all motion, she looked more like a white monument of stone dwarfed by the darkling masses of land on either hand than a fabric famed for its swiftness in attack or in flight.

Her captain was a man of about forty, with clean-shaven, full cheeks and mobile thin lips which he had a trick of compressing mysteriously before he spoke and sometimes also at the end of his speeches. He was alert in his movements and nocturnal in his habits.

Directly he found that the calm had taken complete possession of the night and was going to last for hours, Captain Vincent assumed his favourite attitude of leaning over the rail. It was then some time after midnight and in the pervading stillness the moon, riding on a speckless sky, seemed to pour her enchantment on an uninhabited planet. Captain Vincent did not mind the moon very much. Of course it made his ship visible from both shores of the Petite Passe. But after nearly a year of constant service in command of the extreme lookout ship of Admiral Nelson's blockading fleet he knew the emplacement of almost every gun of the shore defences. Where the breeze had left him he was safe from the biggest gun of the few that were mounted on Porquerolles. On the Giens side of the pass he knew for certain there was not even a popgun mounted anywhere. His long familiarity with that part of the coast had imbued him with the belief that he knew the habits of its population thoroughly. The gleams of light in their houses went out very early and Captain Vincent felt convinced that they were all in their beds, including the gunners of the batteries who belonged to the local militia. Their interest in the movements of H.M.'s twenty-two gun sloop *Amelia* had grown stale by custom. She never interfered with their private affairs, and allowed the small coasting craft to go to and fro unmolested. They would have wondered if she had been more than two days away. Captain Vincent used to say grimly that the Hyres roadstead had become like a second home to him.

For an hour or so Captain Vincent mused a bit on his real home, on matters of service and other unrelated things, then getting into motion in a very wide-awake manner, he superintended himself the dispatch of that boat the existence of which had been acutely surmised by Lieutenant Ral and was a matter of no doubt whatever to old Peyrol. As to her mission, it had nothing to do with catching fish for the captain's breakfast. It was the captain's own gig, a very fast-pulling boat. She was already alongside with

her crew in her when the officer, who was going in charge, was beckoned to by the captain. He had a cutlass at his side and a brace of pistols in his belt, and there was a businesslike air about him that showed he had been on such service before.

“This calm will last a good many hours,” said the captain. “In this tideless sea you are certain to find the ship very much where she is now, but closer inshore. The attraction of the land — -you know.”

“Yes, sir. The land does attract.”

“Yes. Well, she may be allowed to put her side against any of these rocks. There would be no more danger than alongside a quay with a sea like this. Just look at the water in the pass, Mr. Bolt. Like the floor of a ballroom. Pull close along shore when you return. I’ll expect you back at dawn.”

Captain Vincent paused suddenly. A doubt crossed his mind as to the wisdom of this nocturnal expedition. The hammer-head of the peninsula with its sea-face invisible from both sides of the coast was an ideal spot for a secret landing. Its lonely character appealed to his imagination, which in the first instance had been stimulated by a chance remark of Mr. Bolt himself.

The fact was that the week before, when the *Amelia* was cruising off the peninsula, Bolt, looking at the coast, mentioned that he knew that part of it well; he had actually been ashore there a good many years ago, while serving with Lord Howe’s fleet. He described the nature of the path, the aspect of a little village on the reverse slope, and had much to say about a certain farmhouse where he had been more than once, and had even stayed for twenty-four hours at a time on more than one occasion.

This had aroused Captain Vincent’s curiosity. He sent for Bolt and had a long conversation with him. He listened with great interest to Bolt’s story — -how one day a man was seen from the deck of the ship in which Bolt was serving then, waving a white sheet or table-cloth amongst the rocks at the water’s edge. It might have been a trap; but, as the man seemed alone and the shore was within range of the ship’s guns, a boat was sent to take him off.

“And that, sir,” Bolt pursued impressively, “was, I verily believe, the very first communication that Lord Howe had from the royalists in Toulon.” Afterwards Bolt described to Captain Vincent the meetings of the Toulon royalists with the officers of the fleet. From the back of the farm he, Bolt himself, had often watched for hours the entrance of the Toulon harbour on the lookout for the boat bringing over the royalist emissaries. Then he would make an agreed signal to the advanced squadron and some English officers would land on their side and meet the Frenchmen at the farmhouse. It was as simple as that. The people of the farmhouse, husband and wife, were well-to-do, good class altogether, and staunch royalists. He had got to know them well.

Captain Vincent wondered whether the same people were still living there. Bolt could see no reason why they shouldn’t be. It wasn’t more than ten years ago, and they were by no means an old couple. As far as he could make out, the farm was their own property. He, Bolt, knew only very few French words at that time. It was much later, after he had been made a prisoner and kept inland in France till the Peace of

Amiens, that he had picked up a smattering of the lingo. His captivity had done away with his feeble chance of promotion, he could not help remarking. Bolt was a master's mate still.

Captain Vincent, in common with a good many officers of all ranks in Lord Nelson's fleet, had his misgivings about the system of distant blockade from which the Admiral apparently would not depart. Yet one could not blame Lord Nelson. Everybody in the fleet understood that what was in his mind was the destruction of the enemy; and if the enemy was closely blockaded he would never come out to be destroyed. On the other hand it was clear that as things were conducted the French had too many chances left them to slip out unobserved and vanish from all human knowledge for months. Those possibilities were a constant worry to Captain Vincent, who had thrown himself with the ardour of passion into the special duty with which he was entrusted. Oh, for a pair of eyes fastened night and day on the entrance of the harbour of Toulon! Oh, for the power to look at the very state of French ships and into the very secrets of French minds!

But he said nothing of this to Bolt. He only observed that the character of the French Government was changed and that the minds of the royalist people in the farmhouse might have changed too, since they had got back the exercise of their religion. Bolt's answer was that he had had a lot to do with royalists, in his time, on board Lord Howe's fleet, both before and after Toulon was evacuated. All sorts, men and women, barbers and noblemen, sailors and tradesmen; almost every kind of royalist one could think of; and his opinion was that a royalist never changed. As to the place itself, he only wished the captain had seen it. It was the sort of spot that nothing could change. He made bold to say that it would be just the same a hundred years hence.

The earnestness of his officer caused Captain Vincent to look hard at him. He was a man of about his own age, but while Vincent was a comparatively young captain, Bolt was an old master's mate. Each understood the other perfectly. Captain Vincent fidgeted for a while and then observed abstractedly that he was not a man to put a noose round a dog's neck, let alone a good seaman's.

This cryptic pronouncement caused no wonder to appear in Bolt's attentive gaze. He only became a little thoughtful before he said in the same abstracted tone that an officer in uniform was not likely to be hanged for a spy. The service was risky, of course. It was necessary, for its success, that, assuming the same people were there, it should be undertaken by a man well known to the inhabitants. Then he added that he was certain of being recognized. And while he enlarged on the extremely good terms he had been on with the owners of the farm, especially the farmer's wife, a comely motherly woman, who had been very kind to him, and had all her wits about her, Captain Vincent, looking at the master's mate's bushy whiskers, thought that these in themselves were enough to insure recognition. This impression was so strong that he asked point-blank: "You haven't altered the growth of the hair on your face, Mr. Bolt, since then?"

There was just a touch of indignation in Bolt's negative reply; for he was proud of his whiskers. He declared he was ready to take the most desperate chances for the service of his king and his country.

Captain Vincent added: "For the sake of Lord Nelson, too." One understood well what his Lordship wished to bring about by that blockade at sixty leagues off. He was talking to a sailor, and there was no need to say any more. Did Bolt think that he could persuade those people to conceal him in their house on that lonely shore end of the peninsula for some considerable time? Bolt thought it was the easiest thing in the world. He would simply go up there and renew the old acquaintance, but he did not mean to do that in a reckless manner. It would have to be done at night, when of course there would be no one about. He would land just where he used to before, wrapped up in a Mediterranean sailor's cloak — -he had one of his own — -over his uniform, and simply go straight to the door, at which he would knock. Ten to one the farmer himself would come down to open it. He knew enough French by now, he hoped, to persuade those people to conceal him in some room having a view in the right direction; and there he would stick day after day on the watch, taking a little exercise in the middle of the night, ready to live on mere bread and water if necessary, so as not to arouse suspicion amongst the farmhands. And who knows if, with the farmer's help, he could not get some news of what was going on actually within the port. Then from time to time he could go down in the dead of night, signal to the ship and make his report. Bolt expressed the hope that the *Amelia* would remain as much as possible in sight of the coast. It would cheer him up to see her about. Captain Vincent naturally assented. He pointed out to Bolt, however, that his post would become most important exactly when the ship had been chased away or driven by the weather off her station, as could very easily happen. — -"You would be then the eyes of Lord Nelson's fleet, Mr. Bolt — -think of that. The actual eyes of Lord Nelson's fleet!"

After dispatching his officer, Captain Vincent spent the night on deck. The break of day came at last, much paler than the moonlight which it replaced. And still no boat. And again Captain Vincent asked himself if he had not acted indiscreetly. Impenetrable, and looking as fresh as if he had just come up on deck, he argued the point with himself till the rising sun clearing the ridge on Porquerolles Island flashed its level rays upon his ship with her dew-darkened sails and dripping rigging. He roused himself then to tell his first lieutenant to get the boats out to tow the ship away from the shore. The report of the gun he ordered to be fired expressed simply his irritation. The *Amelia*, pointing towards the middle of the *Passe*, was moving at a snail's pace behind her string of boats. Minutes passed. And then suddenly Captain Vincent perceived his boat pulling back in shore according to orders. When nearly abreast of the ship, she darted away, making for her side. Mr. Bolt clambered on board, alone, ordering the gig to go ahead and help with the towing. Captain Vincent, standing apart on the quarter-deck, received him with a grimly questioning look.

Mr. Bolt's first words were to the effect that he believed the confounded spot to be bewitched. Then he glanced at the group of officers on the other side of the quarter-

deck. Captain Vincent led the way to his cabin. There he turned and looked at his officer, who, with an air of distraction, mumbled: "There are night-walkers there."

"Come, Bolt, what the devil have you seen? Did you get near the house at all?"

"I got within twenty yards of the door, sir," said Bolt. And encouraged by the captain's much less ferocious — "Well?" began his tale. He did not pull up to the path which he knew, but to a little bit of beach on which he told his men to haul up the boat and wait for him. The beach was concealed by a thick growth of bushes on the landward side and by some rocks from the sea. Then he went to what he called the ravine, still avoiding the path, so that as a matter of fact he made his way up on his hands and knees mostly, very carefully and slowly amongst the loose stones, till by holding on to a bush he brought his eyes on a level with the piece of flat ground in front of the farmhouse.

The familiar aspect of the buildings, totally unchanged from the time when he had played his part in what appeared as a most successful operation at the beginning of the war, inspired Bolt with great confidence in the success of his present enterprise, vague as it was, but the great charm of which lay, no doubt, in mental associations with his younger years. Nothing seemed easier than to stride across the forty yards of open ground and rouse the farmer whom he remembered so well, the well-to-do man, a grave sagacious royalist in his humble way; certainly, in Bolt's view, no traitor to his country, and preserving so well his dignity in ambiguous circumstances. To Bolt's simple vision neither that, man nor his wife could have changed.

In this view of Arlette's parents Bolt was influenced by the consciousness of there having been no change in himself. He was the same Jack Bolt, and everything around him was the same as if he had left the spot only yesterday. Already he saw himself in the kitchen which he knew so well, seated by the light of a single candle before a glass of wine and talking his best French to that worthy farmer of sound principles. The whole thing was as well as done. He imagined himself a secret inmate of that building, closely confined indeed, but sustained by the possible great results of his watchfulness, in many ways more comfortable than on board the *Amelia* and with the glorious consciousness that he was, in Captain Vincent's phrase, the actual physical eyes of the fleet.

He didn't, of course, talk of his private feelings to Captain Vincent. All those thoughts and emotions were compressed in the space of not much more than a minute or two while, holding on with one hand to his bush and having got a good foothold for one of his feet, he indulged in that pleasant anticipatory sense of success. In the old days the farmer's wife used to be a light sleeper. The farmhands who, he remembered, lived in the village or were distributed in stables and outhouses, did not give him any concern. He wouldn't need to knock heavily. He pictured to himself the farmer's wife sitting up in bed, listening, then rousing her husband, who, as likely as not, would take the gun standing against the dresser downstairs and come to the door.

And then everything would be all right. . . . But perhaps . . . Yes! It was just as likely the farmer would simply open the window and hold a parley. That really was

most likely. Naturally. In his place Bolt felt he would do that very thing. Yes, that was what a man in a lonely house, in the middle of the night, would do most naturally. And he imagined himself whispering mysteriously his answers up the wall to the obvious questions — -Ami — -Bolt — -Ouvrez-moi — -vive le roi — -or things of that sort. And in sequence to those vivid images it occurred to Bolt that the best thing he could do would be to throw small stones against the window shutter, the sort of sound most likely to rouse a light sleeper. He wasn't quite sure which window on the floor above the ground floor was that of those people's bedroom, but there were anyhow only three of them. In a moment he would have sprung up from his foothold on to the level if, raising his eyes for another look at the front of the house, he had not perceived that one of the windows was already open. How he could have failed to notice that before he couldn't explain.

He confessed to Captain Vincent in the course of his narrative that "this open window, sir, checked me dead. In fact, sir, it shook my confidence, for you know, sir, that no native of these parts would dream of sleeping with his window open. It struck me that there was something wrong there; and I remained where I was."

That fascination of repose, of secretive friendliness, which houses present at night, was gone. By the power of an open window, a black square in the moon-lighted wall, the farmhouse took on the aspect of a man-trap. Bolt assured Captain Vincent that the window would not have stopped him; he would have gone on all the same, though with an uncertain mind. But while he was thinking it out, there glided without a sound before his irresolute eyes from somewhere a white vision — -a woman. He could see her black hair flowing down her back. A woman whom anybody would have been excused for taking for a ghost. "I won't say that she froze my blood, sir, but she made me cold all over for a moment. Lots of people have seen ghosts, at least they say so, and I have an open mind about that. She was a weird thing to look at in the moonlight. She did not act like a sleep-walker either. If she had not come out of a grave, then she had jumped out of bed. But when she stole back and hid herself round the corner of the house I knew she was not a ghost. She could not have seen me. There she stood in the black shadow watching for something — -or waiting for somebody," added Bolt in a grim tone. "She looked crazy," he conceded charitably.

One thing was clear to him: there had been changes in that farmhouse since his time. Bolt resented them, as if that time had been only last week. The woman concealed round the corner remained in his full view, watchful, as if only waiting for him to show himself in the open, to run off screeching and rouse all the countryside. Bolt came quickly to the conclusion that he must withdraw from the slope. On lowering himself from his first position he had the misfortune to dislodge a stone. This circumstance precipitated his retreat. In a very few minutes he found himself by the shore. He paused to listen. Above him, up the ravine and all round amongst the rocks, everything was perfectly still. He walked along in the direction of his boat. There was nothing for it but to get away quietly and perhaps . . .

“Yes, Mr. Bolt, I fear we shall have to give up our plan,” interrupted Captain Vincent at that point. Bolt’s assent came reluctantly, and then he braced himself to confess that this was not the worst. Before the astonished face of Captain Vincent he hastened to blurt it out. He was very sorry, he could in no way account for it, but — he had lost a man.

Captain Vincent seemed unable to believe his ears. “What do you say? Lost a man out of my boat’s crew!” He was profoundly shocked. Bolt was correspondingly distressed. He narrated that, shortly after he had left them, the seamen had heard, or imagined they had heard, some faint and peculiar noises somewhere within the cove. The coxswain sent one of the men, the oldest of the boat’s crew, along the shore to ascertain whether their boat hauled on the beach could be seen from the other side of the cove. The man — it was Symons — departed crawling on his hands and knees to make the circuit and, well — he had not returned. This was really the reason why the boat was so late in getting back to the ship. Of course Bolt did not like to give up the man. It was inconceivable that Symons should have deserted. He had left his cutlass behind and was completely unarmed, but had he been suddenly pounced upon he surely would have been able to let out a yell that could have been heard all over the cove. But till daybreak a profound stillness, in which it seemed a whisper could have been heard for miles, had reigned over the coast. It was as if Symons had been spirited away by some supernatural means, without a scuffle, without a cry. For it was inconceivable that he should have ventured inland and got captured there. It was equally inconceivable that there should have been on that particular night men ready to pounce upon Symons and knock him on the head so neatly as not to let him give a groan even.

Captain Vincent said: “All this is very fantastical, Mr. Bolt,” and compressed his lips firmly for a moment before he continued: “But not much more than your woman. I suppose you did see something real. . . .”

“I tell you, sir, she stood there in full moonlight for ten minutes within a stone’s throw of me,” protested Bolt with a sort of desperation. “She seemed to have jumped out of bed only to look at the house. If she had a petticoat over her night-shift, that was all. Her back was to me. When she moved away I could not make out her face properly. Then she went to stand in the shadow of the house.”

“On the watch,” suggested Captain Vincent.

“Looked like it, sir,” confessed Bolt.

“So there must have been somebody about,” concluded Captain Vincent with assurance.

Bolt murmured a reluctant, “Must have been.” He had expected to get into enormous trouble over this affair and was much relieved by the captain’s quiet attitude. “I hope, sir, you approve of my conduct in not attempting to look for Symons at once?”

“Yes. You acted prudently by not advancing inland,” said the captain.

“I was afraid of spoiling our chances to carry out your plan, sir, by disclosing our presence on shore. And that could not have been avoided. Moreover, we were only five in all and not properly armed.”

“The plan has gone down before your night-walker, Mr. Bolt,” Captain Vincent declared dryly. “But we must try to find out what has become of our man if it can be done without risking too much.”

“By landing a large party this very next night we could surround the house,” Bolt suggested. “If we find friends there, well and good. If enemies, then we could carry off some of them on board for exchange perhaps. I am almost sorry I did not go back and kidnap that wench — -whoever she was,” he added recklessly. “Ah! If it had only been a man!”

“No doubt there was a man not very far off,” said Captain Vincent equably. “That will do, Mr. Bolt. You had better go and get some rest now.”

Bolt was glad to obey, for he was tired and hungry after his dismal failure. What vexed him most was its absurdity. Captain Vincent, though he too had passed a sleepless night, felt too restless to remain below. He followed his officer on deck.

Chapter 6

By that time the Amelia had been towed half a mile or so away from Cape Esterel. This change had brought her nearer to the two watchers on the hillside, who would have been plainly visible to the people on her deck, but for the head of the pine which concealed their movements. Lieutenant Ral, bestriding the rugged trunk as high as he could get, had the whole of the English ship's deck open to the range of his pocket-glass which he used between the branches. He said to Peyrol suddenly:

"Her captain has just come on deck."

Peyrol, sitting at the foot of the tree, made no answer for a long while. A warm drowsiness lay over the land and seemed to press down his eyelids. But inwardly the old rover was intensely awake. Under the mask of his immobility, with half-shut eyes and idly clasped hands, he heard the lieutenant, perched up there near the head of the tree, mutter counting something: "One, two, three," and then a loud "Parbleu!" after which the lieutenant in his trunk-bestruding attitude began to jerk himself backwards. Peyrol got up out of his way, but could not restrain himself from asking: "What's the matter now?"

"I will tell you what's the matter," said the other excitedly. As soon as he got his footing he walked up to old Peyrol and when quite close to him folded his arms across his chest.

"The first thing I did was to count the boats in the water. There was not a single one left on board. And now I just counted them again and found one more there. That ship had a boat out last night. How I missed seeing her pull out from under the land I don't know. I was watching the decks, I suppose, and she seems to have gone straight up to the tow-rope. But I was right. That Englishman had a boat out."

He seized Peyrol by both shoulders suddenly. "I believe you knew it all the time. You knew it, I tell you." Peyrol, shaken violently by the shoulders, raised his eyes to look at the angry face within a few inches of his own. In his worn gaze there was no fear or shame, but a troubled perplexity and obvious concern. He remained passive, merely remonstrating softly:

"Doucement. Doucement."

The lieutenant suddenly desisted with a final jerk which failed to stagger old Peyrol, who, directly he had been released, assumed an explanatory tone.

"For the ground is slippery here. If I had lost my footing I would not have been able to prevent myself from grabbing at you, and we would have gone down that cliff together; which would have told those Englishmen more than twenty boats could have found out in as many nights."

Secretly Lieutenant Ral was daunted by Peyrol's mildness. It could not be shaken. Even physically he had an impression of the utter futility of his effort, as though he had tried to shake a rock. He threw himself on the ground carelessly saying:

"As for instance?"

Peyrol lowered himself with a deliberation appropriate to his grey hairs. "You don't suppose that out of a hundred and twenty or so pairs of eyes on board that ship there wouldn't be a dozen at least scanning the shore. Two men falling down a cliff would have been a startling sight. The English would have been interested enough to send a boat ashore to go through our pockets, and whether dead or only half dead we wouldn't have been in a state to prevent them. It wouldn't matter so much as to me, and I don't know what papers you may have in your pockets, but there are your shoulder-straps, your uniform coat."

"I carry no papers in my pocket, and . . ." A sudden thought seemed to strike the lieutenant, a thought so intense and far-fetched as to give his mental effort a momentary aspect of vacancy. He shook it off and went on in a changed tone: "The shoulder-straps would not have been much of a revelation by themselves."

"No. Not much. But enough to let her captain know that he had been watched. For what else could the dead body of a naval officer with a spyglass in his pocket mean? Hundreds of eyes may glance carelessly at that ship every day from all parts of the coast, though I fancy those landsmen hardly take the trouble to look at her now. But that's a very different thing from being kept under observation. However I don't suppose all this matters much."

The lieutenant was recovering from the spell of that sudden thought. "Papers in my pocket," he muttered to himself. "That would be a perfect way." His parted lips came together in a slightly sarcastic smile with which he met Peyrol's puzzled, sidelong glance provoked by the inexplicable character of these words.

"I bet," said the lieutenant, "that ever since I came here first you have been more or less worrying your old head about my motives and intentions."

Peyrol said simply: "You came here on service at first and afterwards you came again because even in the Toulon fleet an officer may get a few days' leave. As to your intentions, I won't say anything about them. Especially as regards myself. About ten minutes ago anybody looking on would have thought they were not friendly to me."

The lieutenant sat up suddenly. By that time the English sloop, getting away from under the land, had become visible even from the spot on which they sat.

"Look!" exclaimed Ral. "She seems to be forging ahead in this calm."

Peyrol, startled, raised his eyes and saw the *Amelia* clear of the edge of the cliff and heading across the *Passe*. All her boats were already alongside, and yet, as a minute or two of steady gazing was enough to convince Peyrol, she was not stationary.

"She moves! There is no denying that. She moves. Watch the white speck of that house on *Porquerolles*. There! The end of her jib-boom touches it now. In a moment her head sails will mask it to us."

"I would never have believed it," muttered the lieutenant, after a pause of intent gazing. "And look, Peyrol, look, there is not a wrinkle on the water."

Peyrol, who had been shading his eyes from the sun, let his hand fall. "Yes," he said, "she would answer to a child's breath quicker than a feather, and the English very soon found it out when they got her. She was caught in Genoa only a few months after I came home and got my moorings here."

"I didn't know," murmured the young man.

"Aha, lieutenant," said Peyrol, pressing his finger to his breast, "it hurts here, doesn't it? There is nobody but good Frenchmen here. Do you think it is a pleasure to me to watch that flag out there at her peak? Look, you can see the whole of her now. Look at her ensign hanging down as if there were not a breath of wind under the heavens. . . ." He stamped his foot suddenly. "And yet she moves! Those in Toulon that may be thinking of catching her dead or alive would have to think hard and make long plans and get good men to carry them out."

"There was some talk of it at the Toulon Admiralty," said Ral.

The rover shook his head. "They need not have sent you on the duty," he said. "I have been watching her now for a month, her and the man who has got her now. I know all his tricks and all his habits and all his dodges by this time. The man is a seaman, that must be said for him, but I can tell beforehand what he will do in any given case."

Lieutenant Ral lay down on his back again, his clasped hands under his head. He thought that this old man was not boasting. He knew a lot about the English ship, and if an attempt to capture her was to be made, his ideas would be worth having. Nevertheless, in his relations with old Peyrol Lieutenant Ral suffered from contradictory feelings. Ral was the son of a *ci-devant* couple — -small provincial gentry — -who had both lost their heads on the scaffold, within the same week. As to their boy, he was apprenticed by order of the Delegate of the Revolutionary Committee of his town to a poor but pure-minded joiner, who could not provide him with shoes to run his errands in, but treated this aristocrat not unkindly. Nevertheless, at the end of the year the orphan ran away and volunteered as a boy on board one of the ships of the Republic about to sail on a distant expedition. At sea he found another standard of values. In the course of some eight years, suppressing his faculties of love and hatred, he arrived at the rank of an officer by sheer merit, and had accustomed himself to look at men sceptically, without much scorn or much respect. His principles were purely professional and he had never formed a friendship in his life — -more unfortunate in that respect than old Peyrol, who at least had known the bonds of the lawless Brotherhood of the Coast. He was, of course, very self-contained. Peyrol, whom he had found unexpectedly settled on the peninsula, was the first human being to break through that schooled reserve which the precariousness of all things had forced on the orphan of the Revolution. Peyrol's striking personality had aroused Ral's interest, a mistrustful liking mixed with some contempt of a purely doctrinaire kind. It was clear that the

fellow had been next thing to a pirate at one time or another — -a sort of past which could not commend itself to a naval officer.

Still, Peyrol had broken through: and, presently, the peculiarities of all those people at the farm, each individual one of them, had entered through the breach.

Lieutenant Ral, on his back, closing his eyes to the glare of the sky, meditated on old Peyrol, while Peyrol himself, with his white head bare in the sunshine, seemed to be sitting by the side of a corpse. What in that man impressed Lieutenant Ral was the faculty of shrewd insight. The facts of Ral's connection with the farmhouse on the peninsula were much as Peyrol had stated. First on specific duty about establishing a signal station, then, when that project had been given up, voluntary visits. Not belonging to any ship of the fleet but doing shore duty at the Arsenal, Lieutenant Ral had spent several periods of short leave at the farm, where indeed nobody could tell whether he had come on duty or on leave. He personally could not — -or perhaps would not — -tell even to himself why it was that he came there. He had been growing sick of his work. He had no place in the world to go to, and no one either. Was it Peyrol he was coming to see? A mute, strangely suspicious, defiant understanding had established itself imperceptibly between him and that lawless old man who might have been suspected to have come there only to die, if the whole robust personality of Peyrol with its quiet vitality had not been antagonistic to the notion of death. That rover behaved as though he had all the time in the world at his command.

Peyrol spoke suddenly, with his eyes fixed in front of him as if he were addressing the Island of Porquerolles, eight miles away.

"Yes — -I know all her moves, though I must say that this trick of dodging close to our peninsula is something new."

"H'm! Fish for the captain's breakfast," mumbled Ral without opening his eyes. "Where is she now?"

"In the middle of the Passe, busy hoisting in her boats. And still moving! That ship will keep her way as long as the flame of a candle on her deck will not stand upright."

"That ship is a marvel."

"She has been built by French shipwrights," said old Peyrol bitterly.

This was the last sound for a long time. Then the lieutenant said in an indifferent tone: "You are very positive about that. How do you know?"

"I have been looking at her for a month, whatever name she might have had or whatever name the English call her by now. Did you ever see such a bow on an English-built ship?"

The lieutenant remained silent, as though he had lost all interest and there had been no such thing as an English man-of-war within a mile. But all the time he was thinking hard. He had been told confidentially of a certain piece of service to be performed on instructions received from Paris. Not an operation of war, but service of the greatest importance. The risk of it was not so much deadly as particularly odious. A brave man might well have shrunk from it; and there are risks (not death) from which a resolute man might shrink without shame.

“Have you ever tasted of prison, Peyrol?” he asked suddenly, in an affectedly sleepy voice.

It roused Peyrol nearly into a shout. “Heavens! No! Prison! What do you mean by prison? . . . I have been a captive to savages,” he added, calming down, “but that’s a very old story. I was young and foolish then. Later, when a grown man, I was a slave to the famous Ali-Kassim. I spent a fortnight with chains on my legs and arms in the yard of a mud fort on the shores of the Persian Gulf. There was nearly a score of us Brothers of the Coast in the same predicament in consequence of a shipwreck.”

“Yes. . . . The lieutenant was very languid indeed. . . . And I daresay you all took service with that bloodthirsty old pirate.”

“There was not a single one of his thousands of blackamoors that could lay a gun properly. But Ali-Kassim made war like a prince. We sailed, a regular fleet, across the gulf, took a town on the coast of Arabia somewhere, and looted it. Then I and the others managed to get hold of an armed dhow, and we fought our way right through the blackamoors’ fleet. Several of us died of thirst later. All the same, it was a great affair. But don’t you talk to me of prisons. A proper man if given a chance to fight can always get himself killed. You understand me?”

“Yes, I understand you,” drawled the lieutenant. “I think I know you pretty well. I suppose an English prison . . .”

“That is a horrible subject of conversation,” interrupted Peyrol in a loud, emotional tone. “Naturally, any death is better than a prison. Any death! What is it you have in your mind, lieutenant?”

“Oh, it isn’t that I want you to die,” drawled Ral in an uninterested manner.

Peyrol, his entwined fingers clasping his legs, gazed fixedly at the English sloop floating idly in the Passe while he gave up all his mind to the consideration of these words that had floated out, idly too, into the peace and silence of the morning. Then he asked in a low tone:

“Do you want to frighten me?”

The lieutenant laughed harshly. Neither by word, gesture nor glance did Peyrol acknowledge the enigmatic and unpleasant sound. But when it ceased the silence grew so oppressive between the two men that they got up by a common impulse. The lieutenant sprang to his feet lightly. The uprising of Peyrol took more time and had more dignity. They stood side by side unable to detach their longing eyes from the enemy ship below their feet.

“I wonder why he put himself into this curious position,” said the officer.

“I wonder,” growled Peyrol curtly. “If there had been only a couple of eighteen-pounders placed on the rocky ledge to the left of us, we could have unrigged her in about ten minutes.”

“Good old gunner,” commented Ral ironically. “And what afterwards? Swim off, you and I, with our cutlasses in our teeth and take her by boarding, what?”

This sally provoked in Peyrol an austere smile. “No! No!” he protested soberly. “But why not let Toulon know? Bring out a frigate or two and catch him alive. Many a

time have I planned his capture just to ease my heart. Often I have stared at night out of my window upstairs across the bay to where I knew he was lying at anchor, and thinking of a little surprise I could arrange for him if I were not only old Peyrol, the gunner.”

“Yes. And keeping out of the way at that, with a bad note against his name in the books of the Admiralty in Toulon.”

“You can’t say I have tried to hide myself from you who are a naval officer,” struck in Peyrol quickly. “I fear no man. I did not run. I simply went away from Toulon. Nobody had given me an order to stay there. And you can’t say I ran very far either.”

“That was the cleverest move of all. You knew what you were doing.”

“Here you go again, hinting at something crooked like that fellow with big epaulettes at the Port Office that seemed to be longing to put me under arrest just because I brought a prize from the Indian Ocean, eight thousand miles, dodging clear of every Englishmen that came in my way, which was more perhaps than he could have done. I have my gunner’s warrant signed by Citizen Renaud, a chef d’escadre. It wasn’t given me for twirling my thumbs or hiding in the cable tier when the enemy was about. There were on board our ships some patriots that weren’t above doing that sort of thing, I can tell you. But republic or no republic, that kind wasn’t likely to get a gunner’s warrant.”

“That’s all right,” said Ral, with his eyes fixed on the English ship, the head of which was swung to the northward now. . . . “Look, she seems to have lost her way at last,” he remarked parenthetically to Peyrol, who also glanced that way and nodded. . . . “That’s all right. But it’s on record that you managed in a very short time to get very thick with a lot of patriots ashore. Section leaders. Terrorists. . . .”

“Why, yes. I wanted to hear what they had to say. They talked like a drunken crew of scallywags that had stolen a ship. But at any rate it wasn’t such as they that had sold the Port to the English. They were a lot of bloodthirsty landlubbers. I did get out of town as soon as I could. I remembered I was born around here. I knew no other bit of France, and I didn’t care to go any further. Nobody came to look for me.”

“No, not here. I suppose they thought it was too near. They did look for you, a little, but they gave it up. Perhaps if they had persevered and made an admiral of you we would not have been beaten at Aboukir.”

At the mention of that name Peyrol shook his fist at the serene Mediterranean sky. “And yet we were no worse men than the English,” he cried, “and there are no such ships as ours in the world. You see, lieutenant, the republican god of these talkers would never give us seamen a chance of fair play.”

The lieutenant looked round in surprise. “What do you know about a republican god?” he asked. “What on earth do you mean?”

“I have heard of and seen more gods than you could ever dream of in a long night’s sleep, in every corner of the earth, in the very heart of forests, which is an inconceivable thing. Figures, stones, sticks. There must be something in the idea. . . . And what I meant,” he continued in a resentful tone, “is that their republican god, which is neither

stick nor stone, but seems to be some kind of lubber, has never given us seamen a chief like that one the soldiers have got ashore.”

Lieutenant Ral looked at Peyrol with unsmiling attention, then remarked quietly, “Well, the god of the aristocrats is coming back again and it looks as if he were bringing an emperor along with him. You’ve heard something of that, you people in the farmhouse? Haven’t you?”

“No,” said Peyrol. “I have heard no talk of an emperor. But what does it matter? Under one name or another a chief can be no more than a chief, and that general whom they have been calling consul is a good chief — nobody can deny that.”

After saying those words in a dogmatic tone, Peyrol looked up at the sun and suggested that it was time to go down to the farmhouse “pour manger la soupe.” With a suddenly gloomy face Ral moved off, followed by Peyrol. At the first turn of the path they got the view of the Escampobar buildings with the pigeons still walking on the ridges of the roofs, of the sunny orchards and yards without a living soul in them. Peyrol remarked that everybody no doubt was in the kitchen waiting for his and the lieutenant’s return. He himself was properly hungry. “And you, lieutenant?”

The lieutenant was not hungry. Hearing this declaration made in a peevish tone, Peyrol gave a sagacious movement of his head behind the lieutenant’s back. Well, whatever happened, a man had to eat. He, Peyrol, knew what it was to be altogether without food; but even half-rations was a poor show, very poor show for anybody who had to work or to fight. For himself he couldn’t imagine any conjuncture that would prevent him having a meal as long as there was something to eat within reach.

His unwonted garrulity provoked no response, but Peyrol continued to talk in that strain as though his thoughts were concentrated on food, while his eyes roved here and there and his ears were open for the slightest sound. When they arrived in front of the house Peyrol stopped to glance anxiously down the path to the coast, letting the lieutenant enter the caf. The Mediterranean, in that part which could be seen from the door of the caf, was as empty of all sail as a yet undiscovered sea. The dull tinkle of a cracked bell on the neck of some wandering cow was the only sound that reached him, accentuating the Sunday peace of the farm. Two goats were lying down on the western slope of the hill. It all had a very reassuring effect and the anxious expression on Peyrol’s face was passing away when suddenly one of the goats leaped to its feet. The rover gave a start and became rigid in a pose of tense apprehension. A man who is in such a frame of mind that a leaping goat makes him start cannot be happy. However, the other goat remained lying down. There was really no reason for alarm, and Peyrol, composing his features as near as possible to their usual placid expression, followed the lieutenant into the house.

Chapter 7

A single cover having been laid at the end of a long table in the *salle* for the lieutenant, he had his meal there while the others sat down to theirs in the kitchen, the usual strangely assorted company served by the anxious and silent Catherine. Peyrol, thoughtful and hungry, faced Citizen Scevola in his working clothes and very much withdrawn within himself. Scevola's aspect was more feverish than usual, with the red patches on his cheekbones very marked above the thick beard. From time to time the mistress of the farm would get up from her place by the side of old Peyrol and go out into the *salle* to attend to the lieutenant. The other three people seemed unconscious of her absences. Towards the end of the meal Peyrol leaned back in his wooden chair and let his gaze rest on the ex-terrorist who had not finished yet, and was still busy over his plate with the air of a man who had done a long morning's work. The door leading from the kitchen to the *salle* stood wide open, but no sound of voices ever came from there.

Till lately Peyrol had not concerned himself very much with the mental states of the people with whom he lived. Now, however, he wondered to himself what could be the thoughts of the ex-terrorist patriot, that sanguinary and extremely poor creature occupying the position of master of the Escampobar Farm. But when Citizen Scevola raised his head at last to take a long drink of wine there was nothing new on that face which in its high colour resembled so much a painted mask. Their eyes met.

"Sacrebleu!" exclaimed Peyrol at last. "If you never say anything to anybody like this you will forget how to speak at last."

The patriot smiled from the depths of his beard, a smile which Peyrol for some reason, mere prejudice perhaps, always thought resembled the defensive grin of some small wild animal afraid of being cornered.

"What is there to talk about?" he retorted. "You live with us; you haven't budged from here; I suppose you have counted the bunches of grapes in the enclosure and the figs on the fig-tree on the west wall many times over. . . ." He paused to lend an ear to the dead silence in the *salle*, and then said with a slight rise of tone, "You and I know everything that is going on here."

Peyrol wrinkled the corners of his eyes in a keen, searching glance. Catherine clearing the table bore herself as if she had been completely deaf. Her face, of a walnut colour, with sunken cheeks and lips, might have been a carving in the marvellous immobility of its fine wrinkles. Her carriage was upright and her hands swift in their movements. Peyrol said: "We don't want to talk about the farm. Haven't you heard any news lately?"

The patriot shook his head violently. Of public news he had a horror. Everything was lost. The country was ruled by perjurers and renegades. All the patriotic virtues were dead. He struck the table with his fist and then remained listening as though the blow could have roused an echo in the silent house. Not the faintest sound came from anywhere. Citizen Scevola sighed. It seemed to him that he was the only patriot left, and even in his retirement his life was not safe.

“I know,” said Peyrol. “I saw the whole affair out of the window. You can run like a hare, citizen.”

“Was I to allow myself to be sacrificed by those superstitious brutes?” argued Citizen Scevola in a high-pitched voice and with genuine indignation which Peyrol watched coldly. He could hardly catch the mutter of “Perhaps it would have been just as well if I had let those reactionary dogs kill me that time.”

The old woman washing up at the sink glanced uneasily towards the door of the salle.

“No!” shouted the lonely sans-culotte. “It isn’t possible! There must be plenty of patriots left in France. The sacred fire is not burnt out yet.”

For a short time he presented the appearance of a man who is sitting with ashes on his head and desolation in his heart. His almond-shaped eyes looked dull, extinguished. But after a moment he gave a sidelong look at Peyrol as if to watch the effect and began declaiming in a low voice and apparently as if rehearsing a speech to himself: “No, it isn’t possible. Some day tyranny will stumble and then it will be time to pull it down again. We will come out in our thousands and-a ira!”

Those words, and even the passionate energy of the tone, left Peyrol unmoved. With his head sustained by his thick brown hand he was thinking of something else so obviously as to depress again the feebly struggling spirit of terrorism in the lonely breast of Citizen Scevola. The glow of reflected sunlight in the kitchen became darkened by the body of the fisherman of the lagoon, mumbling a shy greeting to the company from the frame of the doorway. Without altering his position Peyrol turned his eyes on him curiously. Catherine, wiping her hands on her apron, remarked: “You come late for your dinner, Michel.” He stepped in then, took from the old woman’s hand an earthenware pot and a large hunk of bread and carried them out at once into the yard. Peyrol and the sans-culotte got up from the table. The latter, after hesitating like somebody who has lost his way, went brusquely into the passage, while Peyrol, avoiding Catherine’s anxious stare, made for the back-yard. Through the open door of the salle he obtained a glimpse of Arlette sitting upright with her hands in her lap gazing at somebody he could not see, but who could be no other than Lieutenant Ral.

In the blaze and heat of the yard the chickens, broken up into small groups, were having their siesta in patches of shade. But Peyrol cared nothing for the sun. Michel, who was eating his dinner under the pent roof of the cart shed, put the earthenware pot down on the ground and joined his master at the well encircled by a low wall of stones and topped by an arch of wrought iron on which a wild fig-tree had twined a slender offshoot. After his dog’s death the fisherman had abandoned the salt lagoon, leaving

his rotting punt exposed on the dismal shore and his miserable nets shut up in the dark hut. He did not care for another dog, and besides, who was there to give him a dog? He was the last of men. Somebody must be last. There was no place for him in the life of the village. So one fine morning he had walked up to the farm in order to see Peyrol. More correctly, perhaps, to let himself be seen by Peyrol. That was exactly Michel's only hope. He sat down on a stone outside the gate with a small bundle, consisting mainly of an old blanket, and a crooked stick lying on the ground near him, and looking the most lonely, mild and harmless creature on this earth. Peyrol had listened gravely to his confused tale of the dog's death. He, personally, would not have made a friend of a dog like Michel's dog, but he understood perfectly the sudden breaking up of the establishment on the shore of the lagoon. So when Michel had concluded with the words, "I thought I would come up here," Peyrol, without waiting for a plain request, had said: "Trs bien. You will be my crew," and had pointed down the path leading to the seashore. And as Michel, picking up his bundle and stick, started off, waiting for no further directions, he had shouted after him: "You will find a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine in a locker aft, to break your fast on."

These had been the only formalities of Michel's engagement to serve as "crew" on board Peyrol's boat. The rover indeed had tried without loss of time to carry out his purpose of getting something of his own that would float. It was not so easy to find anything worthy. The miserable population of Madrague, a tiny fishing hamlet facing towards Toulon, had nothing to sell. Moreover, Peyrol looked with contempt on all their possessions. He would have as soon bought a catamaran of three logs of wood tied together with rattans as one of their boats; but lonely and prominent on the beach, lying on her side in weather-beaten melancholy, there was a two-masted tartane with her sun-whitened cordage hanging in festoons and her dry masts showing long cracks. No man was ever seen dozing under the shade of her hull on which the Mediterranean gulls made themselves very much at home. She looked a wreck thrown high up on the land by a disdainful sea. Peyrol, having surveyed her from a distance, saw that the rudder still hung in its place. He ran his eye along her body and said to himself that a craft with such lines would sail well. She was much bigger than anything he had thought of, but in her size, too, there was a fascination. It seemed to bring all the shores of the Mediterranean within his reach, Balears and Corsica, Barbary and Spain. Peyrol had sailed over hundreds of leagues of ocean in craft that were no bigger. At his back in silent wonder a knot of fishermen's wives, bareheaded and lean, with a swarm of ragged children clinging to their skirts, watched the first stranger they had seen for years.

Peyrol borrowed a short ladder in the hamlet (he knew better than to trust his weight to any of the ropes hanging over the side) and carried it down to the beach followed at a respectful distance by the staring women and children: a phenomenon and a wonder to the natives, as it had happened to him before on more than one island in distant seas. He clambered on board the neglected tartane and stood on the decked forepart, the centre of all eyes. A gull flew away with an angry scream. The bottom

of the open hold contained nothing but a little sand, a few broken pieces of wood, a rusty hook, and some few stalks of straw which the wind must have carried for miles before they found their rest in there. The decked after-part had a small skylight and a companion, and Peyrol's eyes rested fascinated on an enormous padlock which secured its sliding door. It was as if there had been secrets or treasures inside — -and yet most probably it was empty. Peyrol turned his head away and with the whole strength of his lungs shouted in the direction of the fishermen's wives who had been joined by two very old men and a hunchbacked cripple swinging between two crutches:

"Is there anybody looking after this tartane, a caretaker?"

At first the only answer was a movement of recoil. Only the hunchback held his ground and shouted back in an unexpectedly strong voice:

"You are the first man that has been on board her for years."

The wives of the fishermen admired his boldness, for Peyrol indeed appeared to them a very formidable being.

"I might have guessed that," thought Peyrol. "She is in a dreadful mess." The disturbed gull had brought some friends as indignant as itself and they circled at different levels uttering wild cries over Peyrol's head. He shouted again:

"Who does she belong to?"

The being on crutches lifted a finger towards the circling birds and answered in a deep tone:

"They are the only ones I know." Then, as Peyrol gazed down at him over the side, he went on: "This craft used to belong to Escampobar. You know Escampobar ? It's a house in the hollow between the hills there."

"Yes, I know Escampobar," yelled Peyrol, turning away and leaning against the mast in a pose which he did not change for a long time. His immobility tired out the crowd. They moved slowly in a body towards their hovels, the hunchback bringing up the rear with long swings between his crutches, and Peyrol remained alone with the angry gulls. He lingered on board the tragic craft which had taken Arlette's parents to their death in the vengeful massacre of Toulon and had brought the youthful Arlette and Citizen Scevola back to Escampobar where old Catherine, left alone at that time, had waited for days for somebody's return. Days of anguish and prayer, while she listened to the booming of guns about Toulon and with an almost greater but different terror to the dead silence which ensued.

Peyrol, enjoying the sensation of some sort of craft under his feet, indulged in no images of horror connected with that desolate tartane. It was late in the evening before he returned to the farm, so that he had to have his supper alone. The women had retired, only the sans-culotte, smoking a short pipe out of doors, had followed him into the kitchen and asked where he had been and whether he had lost his way. This question gave Peyrol an opening. He had been to Madrague and had seen a very fine tartane lying perishing on the beach.

"They told me down there that she belonged to you, citizen."

At this the terrorist only blinked.

“What’s the matter? Isn’t she the craft you came here in? Won’t you sell her to me?” Peyrol waited a little. “What objection can you have?”

It appeared that the patriot had no positive objections. He mumbled something about the tartane being very dirty. This caused Peyrol to look at him with intense astonishment.

“I am ready to take her off your hands as she stands.”

“I will be frank with you, citizen. You see, when she lay at the quay in Toulon a lot of fugitive traitors, men and women, and children too, swarmed on board of her, and cut the ropes with a view of escaping, but the avengers were not far behind and made short work of them. When we discovered her behind the Arsenal, I and another man, we had to throw a lot of bodies overboard, out of the hold and the cabin. You will find her very dirty all over. We had no time to clear up.” Peyrol felt inclined to laugh. He had seen decks swimming in blood and had himself helped to throw dead bodies overboard after a fight; but he eyed the citizen with an unfriendly eye. He thought to himself: “He had a hand in that massacre, no doubt,” but he made no audible remark. He only thought of the enormous padlock securing that emptied charnel house at the stern. The terrorist insisted. “We really had not a moment to clean her up. The circumstances were such that it was necessary for me to get away quickly lest some of the false patriots should do me some carnagole or other. There had been bitter quarrelling in my section. I was not alone in getting away, you know.”

Peyrol waved his arm to cut short the explanation. But before he and the terrorist had parted for the night Peyrol could regard himself as the owner of the tragic tartane.

Next day he returned to the hamlet and took up his quarters there for a time. The awe he had inspired wore off, though no one cared to come very near the tartane. Peyrol did not want any help. He wrenched off the enormous padlock himself with a bar of iron and let the light of day into the little cabin which did indeed bear the trace’s of the massacre in the stains of blood on its woodwork, but contained nothing else except a wisp of long hair and a woman’s earring, a cheap thing which Peyrol picked up and looked at for a long time. The associations of such finds were not foreign to his past. He could without very strong emotion figure to himself the little place choked with corpses. He sat down and looked about at the stains and splashes which had been untouched by sunlight for years. The cheap little earring lay before him on the rough-hewn table between the lockers, and he shook his head at it weightily. He, at any rate, had never been a butcher.

Peyrol unassisted did all the cleaning. Then he turned con amore to the fitting out of the tartane. The habits of activity still clung to him. He welcomed something to do; this congenial task had all the air of preparation for a voyage, which was a pleasing dream, and it brought every evening the satisfaction of something achieved to that illusory end. He rove new gear, scraped the masts himself, did all the sweeping, scrubbing and painting single-handed, working steadily and hopefully as though he had been preparing his escape from a desert island; and directly he had cleaned and renovated the dark little hole of a cabin he took to sleeping on board. Once only he

went up on a visit to the farm for a couple of days, as if to give himself a holiday. He passed them mostly in observing Arlette. She was perhaps the first problematic human being he had ever been in contact with. Peyrol had no contempt for women. He had seen them love, suffer, endure, riot, and even fight for their own hand, very much like men. Generally with men and women you had to be on your guard, but in some ways women were more to be trusted. As a matter of fact, his country-women were to him less known than any other kind. From his experience of many different races, however, he had a vague idea that women were very much alike everywhere. This one was a lovable creature. She produced on him the effect of a child, aroused a kind of intimate emotion which he had not known before to exist by itself in a man. He was startled by its detached character. "Is it that I am getting old?" he asked himself suddenly one evening, as he sat on the bench against the wall looking straight before him, after she had crossed his line of sight.

He felt himself an object of observation to Catherine, whom he used to detect peeping at him round corners or through half-opened doors. On his part he would stare at her openly — -aware of the impression he produced on her: mingled curiosity and awe. He had the idea she did not disapprove of his presence at the farm, where, it was plain to him, she had a far from easy life. This had no relation to the fact that she did all the household work. She was a woman of about his own age, straight as a dart but with a wrinkled face. One evening as they were sitting alone in the kitchen Peyrol said to her: "You must have been a handsome girl in your day, Catherine. It's strange you never got married."

She turned to him under the high mantel of the fireplace and seemed struck all of a heap, unbelieving, amazed, so that Peyrol was quite provoked. "What's the matter? If the old moke in the yard had spoken you could not look more surprised. You can't deny that you were a handsome girl."

She recovered from her scare to say: "I was born here, grew up here, and early in my life I made up my mind to die here."

"A strange notion," said Peyrol, "for a young girl to take into her head."

"It's not a thing to talk about," said the old woman, stooping to get a pot out of the warm ashes. "I did not think, then," she went on, with her back to Peyrol, "that I would live long. When I was eighteen I fell in love with a priest."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed Peyrol under his breath.

"That was the time when I prayed for death," she pursued in a quiet voice. "I spent nights on my knees upstairs in that room where you sleep now. I shunned everybody. People began to say I was crazy. We have always been hated by the rabble about here. They have poisonous tongues. I got the nickname of 'la fiance du prtre.' Yes, I was handsome, but who would have looked at me if I had wanted to be looked at? My only luck was to have a fine man for a brother. He understood. No word passed his lips, but sometimes when we were alone and not even his wife was by, he would lay his hand on my shoulder gently. From that time to this I have not been to church and I never will go. But I have no quarrel with God now."

There were no signs of watchfulness and care in her bearing now. She stood straight as an arrow before Peyrol and looked at him with a confident air. The rover was not yet ready to speak. He only nodded twice and Catherine turned away to put the pot to cool in the sink. "Yes, I wished to die. But I did not, and now I have got something to do," she said, sitting down near the fireplace and taking her chin in her hand. "And I daresay you know what that is," she added.

Peyrol got up deliberately.

"Well! bonsoir," he said. "I am off to Madrague. I want to begin work again on the tartane at daylight."

"Don't talk to me about the tartane, She took my brother away for ever. I stood on the shore watching her sails growing smaller and smaller. Then I came up alone to this farmhouse."

Moving calmly her faded lips which no lover or child had ever kissed, old Catherine told Peyrol of the days and nights of waiting, with the distant growl of the big guns in her ears. She used to sit outside on the bench longing for news, watching the flickers in the sky and listening to heavy bursts of gunfire coming over the water. Then came a night as if the world were coming to an end. All the sky was lighted up, the earth shook to its foundations, and she felt the house rock, so that jumping up from the bench she screamed with fear. That night she never went to bed. Next morning she saw the sea covered with sails, while a black and yellow cloud of smoke hung over Toulon. A man coming up from Madrague told her that he believed that the whole town had been blown up. She gave him a bottle of wine and he helped her to feed the stock that evening. Before going home he expressed the opinion that there could not be a soul left alive in Toulon, because the few that survived would have gone away in the English ships. Nearly a week later she was dozing by the fire when voices outside woke her up, and she beheld standing in the middle of the salle, pale like a corpse out of a grave, with a blood-soaked blanket over her shoulders and a red cap on her head, a ghastly looking young girl in whom she suddenly recognized her niece. She screamed in her terror: "Franois, Franois!" This was her brother's name, and she thought he was outside. Her scream scared the girl, who ran out of the door. All was still outside. Once more she screamed "Franois!" and, tottering as far as the door, she saw her niece clinging to a strange man in a red cap and with a sabre by his side who yelled excitedly: "You won't see Franois again. Vive la Rpublique!"

"I recognized the son Bron," went on Catherine. "I knew his parents. When the troubles began he left his home to follow the Revolution. I walked straight up to him and took the girl away from his side. She didn't want much coaxing. The child always loved me," she continued, getting up from the stool and moving a little closer to Peyrol. "She remembered her Aunt Catherine. I tore the horrid blanket off her shoulders. Her hair was clotted with blood and her clothes all stained with it. I took her upstairs. She was as helpless as a little child. I undressed her and examined her all over. She had no hurt anywhere. I was sure of that — -but of what more could I be sure? I couldn't make sense of the things she babbled at me. Her very voice distracted me.

She fell asleep directly I had put her into my bed, and I stood there looking down at her, nearly going out of my mind with the thought of what that child may have been dragged through. When I went downstairs I found that good-for-nothing inside the house. He was ranting up and down the salle, vapouring and boasting till I thought all this must be an awful dream. My head was in a whirl. He laid claim to her, and God knows what. I seemed to understand things that made my hair stir on my head. I stood there clasping my hands with all the strength I had, for fear I should go out of my senses.”

“He frightened you,” said Peyrol, looking at her steadily. Catherine moved a step nearer to him.

“What? The son Bron, frighten me! He was the butt of all the girls, mooning about amongst the people outside the church on feast days in the time of the king. All the countryside knew about him. No. What I said to myself was that I mustn’t let him kill me. There upstairs was the child I had just got away from him, and there was I, all alone with that man with the sabre and unable to get hold of a kitchen knife even.”

“And so he remained,” said Peyrol.

“What would you have had me to do?” asked Catherine steadily. “He had brought the child back out of those shambles. It was a long time before I got an idea of what had happened. I don’t know everything even yet and I suppose I will never know. In a very few days my mind was more at ease about Arlette, but it was a long time before she would speak and then it was never anything to the purpose. And what could I have done single-handed? There was nobody I would condescend to call to my help. We of the Escampobar have never been in favour with the peasants here,” she said, proudly. “And this is all I can tell you.”

Her voice faltered, she sat down on the stool again and took her chin in the palm of her hand. As Peyrol left the house to go to the hamlet he saw Arlette and the patron come round the corner of the yard wall walking side by side but as if unconscious of each other.

That night he slept on board the renovated tartane and the rising sun found him at work about the hull. By that time he had ceased to be the object of awed contemplation to the inhabitants of the hamlet who still, however, kept up a mistrustful attitude. His only intermediary for communicating with them was the miserable cripple. He was Peyrol’s only company, in fact, during his period of work on the tartane. He had more activity, audacity, and intelligence, it seemed to Peyrol, than all the rest of the inhabitants put together. Early in the morning he could be seen making his way on his crutches with a pendulum motion towards the hull on which Peyrol would have been already an hour or so at work. Peyrol then would throw him over a sound rope’s end and the cripple, leaning his crutches against the side of the tartane, would pull his wretched little carcass, all withered below the waist, up the rope, hand over hand, with extreme ease. There, sitting on the small foredeck, with his back against the mast and his thin, twisted legs folded in front of him, he would keep Peyrol company, talking to him along the whole length of the tartane in a strained voice and sharing his midday

meal, as of right, since it was he generally who brought the provisions slung round his neck in a quaint flat basket. Thus were the hours of labour shortened for Peyrol by shrewd remarks and bits of local gossip. How the cripple got hold of it it was difficult to imagine, and the rover had not enough knowledge of European superstitions to suspect him of flying through the night on a broomstick like a sort of male witch — -for there was a manliness in that twisted scrap of humanity which struck Peyrol from the first. His very voice was manly and the character of his gossip was not feminine. He did indeed mention to Peyrol that people used to take him about the neighbourhood in carts for the purpose of playing a fiddle at weddings and other festive occasions; but this seemed hardly adequate, and even he himself confessed that there was not much of that sort of thing going on during the Revolution when people didn't like to attract attention and everything was done in a hole-and-corner manner. There were no priests to officiate at weddings, and if there were no ceremonies how could there be rejoicings? Of course children were born as before, but there were no christenings — -and people got to look funny somehow or other. Their countenances got changed somehow; the very boys and girls seemed to have something on their minds.

Peyrol, busy about one thing and another, listened without appearing to pay much attention to the story of the Revolution, as if to the tale of an intelligent islander on the other side of the world talking of bloody rites and amazing hopes of some religion unknown to the rest of mankind. But there was something biting in the speech of that cripple which confused his thoughts a little. Sarcasm was a mystery which he could not understand. On one occasion he remarked to his friend the cripple as they sat together on the foredeck munching the bread and figs of their midday meal:

“There must have been something in it. But it doesn't seem to have done much for you people here.”

“To be sure,” retorted the scrap of man vivaciously, “it hasn't straightened my back or given me a pair of legs like yours.”

Peyrol, whose trousers were rolled up above the knee because he had been washing the hold, looked at his calves complacently. “You could hardly have expected that,” he remarked with simplicity.

“Ah, but you don't know what people with properly made bodies expected or pretended to,” said the cripple. “Everything was going to be changed. Everybody was going to tie up his dog with a string of sausages for the sake of principles.” His long face which, in repose, had an expression of suffering peculiar to cripples, was lighted up by an enormous grin. “They must feel jolly well sold by this time,” he added. “And of course that vexes them, but I am not vexed. I was never vexed with my father and mother. While the poor things were alive I never went hungry — -not very hungry. They couldn't have been very proud of me.” He paused and seemed to contemplate himself mentally. “I don't know what I would have done in their place. Something very different. But then, don't you see, I know what it means to be like I am. Of course they couldn't know, and I don't suppose the poor people had very much sense. A priest

from Almanarre — -Almanarre is a sort of village up there where there is a church. . . .”

Peyrol interrupted him by remarking that he knew all about Almanarre. This, on his part, was a simple delusion because in reality he knew much less of Almanarre than of Zanzibar or any pirate village from there up to Cape Guardafui. And the cripple contemplated him with his brown eyes which had an upward cast naturally.

“You know . . .! For me,” he went on, in a tone of quiet decision, “you are a man fallen from the sky. Well, a priest from Almanarre came to bury them. A fine man with a stern face. The finest man I have seen from that time till you dropped on us here. There was a story of a girl having fallen in love with him some years before. I was old enough then to have heard something of it, but that’s neither here nor there. Moreover, many people wouldn’t believe the tale.”

Peyrol, without looking at the cripple, tried to imagine what sort of child he might have been — - what sort of youth? The rover had seen staggering deformities, dreadful mutilations which were the cruel work of man; but it was amongst people with dusky skins. And that made a great difference. But what he had heard and seen since he had come back to his native land, the tales, the facts, and also the faces, reached his sensibility with a particular force, because of that feeling that came to him so suddenly after a whole lifetime spent amongst Indians, Malagashes, Arabs, blackamoors of all sorts, that he belonged there, to this land, and had escaped all those things by a mere hair’s breadth. His companion completed his significant silence, which seemed to have been occupied with thoughts very much like his own, by saying:

“All this was in the king’s time. They didn’t cut off his head till several years afterwards. It didn’t make my life any easier for me, but since those Republicans had deposed God and flung Him out of all the churches I have forgiven Him all my troubles.”

“Spoken like a man,” said Peyrol. Only the misshapen character of the cripple’s back prevented Peyrol from giving him a hearty slap. He got up to begin his afternoon’s work. It was a bit of inside painting and from the foredeck the cripple watched him at it with dreamy eyes and something ironic on his lips.

It was not till the sun had travelled over Cape Cici, which could be seen across the water like dark mist in the glare, that he opened his lips to ask: “And what do you propose to do with this tartane, citoyen?”

Peyrol answered simply that the tartane was fit to go anywhere now, the very moment she took the water.

“You could go as far as Genoa and Naples and even further,” suggested the cripple.

“Much further,” said Peyrol.

“And you have been fitting her out like this for a voyage?”

“Certainly,” said Peyrol, using his brush steadily.

“Somehow I fancy it will not be a long one.”

Peyrol never checked the to-and-fro movement of his brush, but it was with an effort. The fact was that he had discovered in himself a distinct reluctance to go away from

the Escampobar Farm. His desire to have something of his own that could float was no longer associated with any desire to wander. The cripple was right. The voyage of the renovated tartane would not take her very far. What was surprising was the fellow being so very positive about it. He seemed able to read people's thoughts.

The dragging of the renovated tartane into the water was a great affair. Everybody in the hamlet, including the women, did a full day's work and there was never so much coin passed from hand to hand in the hamlet in all the days of its obscure history. Swinging between his crutches on a low sand-ridge the cripple surveyed the whole of the beach. It was he that had persuaded the villagers to lend a hand and had arranged the terms for their assistance. It was he also who through a very miserable-looking pedlar (the only one who frequented the peninsula) had got in touch with some rich persons in Frjus who had changed for Peyrol a few of his gold pieces for current money. He had expedited the course of the most exciting and interesting experience of his life, and now planted on the sand on his two sticks in the manner of a beacon he watched the last operation. The rover, as if about to launch himself upon a track of a thousand miles, walked up to shake hands with him and look once more at the soft eyes and the ironic smile.

"There is no denying it — -you are a man."

"Don't talk like this to me, citizen," said the cripple in a trembling voice. Till then, suspended between his two sticks and with his shoulders as high as his ears, he had not looked towards the approaching Peyrol. "This is too much of a compliment!"

"I tell you," insisted the rover roughly, and as if the insignificance of mortal envelopes had presented itself to him for the first time at the end of his roving life, "I tell you that there is that in you which would make a chum one would like to have alongside one in a tight place."

As he went away from the cripple towards the tartane, while the whole population of the hamlet disposed around her waited for his word, some on land and some waist-deep in the water holding ropes in their hands, Peyrol had a slight shudder at the thought: "Suppose I had been born like that." Ever since he had put his foot on his native land such thoughts had haunted him. They would have been impossible anywhere else. He could not have been like any blackamoor, good, bad, or indifferent, hale or crippled, king or slave; but here, on this Southern shore that had called to him irresistibly as he had approached the Straits of Gibraltar on what he had felt to be his last voyage, any woman, lean and old enough, might have been his mother; he might have been any Frenchman of them all, even one of those he pitied, even one of those he despised. He felt the grip of his origins from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet while he clambered on board the tartane as if for a long and distant voyage. As a matter of fact he knew very well that with a bit of luck it would be over in about an hour. When the tartane took the water the feeling of being afloat plucked at his very heart. Some Madrague fishermen had been persuaded by the cripple to help old Peyrol to sail the tartane round to the cove below the Escampobar Farm. A glorious sun shone upon that short passage and the cove itself was full of sparkling light when they arrived.

The few Escampobar goats wandering on the hillside pretending to feed where no grass was visible to the naked eye never even raised their heads. A gentle breeze drove the tartane, as fresh as paint could make her, opposite a narrow crack in the cliff which gave admittance to a tiny basin, no bigger than a village pond, concealed at the foot of the southern hill. It was there that old Peyrol, aided by the Madrague men, who had their boat with them, towed his ship, the first really that he ever owned.

Once in, the tartane nearly filled the little basin, and the fishermen, getting into their boat, rowed away for home. Peyrol, by spending the afternoon in dragging ropes ashore and fastening them to various boulders and dwarf trees, moored her to his complete satisfaction. She was as safe from the tempests there as a house ashore.

After he had made everything fast on board and had furled the sails neatly, a matter of some time for one man, Peyrol contemplated his arrangements which savoured of rest much more than of wandering, and found them good. Though he never meant to abandon his room at the farmhouse he felt that his true home was in the tartane, and he rejoiced at the idea that it was concealed from all eyes except perhaps the eyes of the goats when their arduous feeding took them on the southern slope. He lingered on board, he even threw open the sliding door of the little cabin, which now smelt of fresh paint, not of stale blood. Before he started for the farm the sun had travelled far beyond Spain and all the sky to the west was yellow, while on the side of Italy it presented a sombre canopy pierced here and there with the light of stars. Catherine put a plate on the table, but nobody asked him any questions.

He spent a lot of his time on board, going down early, coming up at midday "pour manger la soupe," and sleeping on board almost every night. He did not like to leave the tartane alone for so many hours. Often, having climbed a little way up to the house, he would turn round for a last look at her in the gathering dusk, and actually would go back again. After Michel had been enlisted for a crew and had taken his abode on board for good, Peyrol found it a much easier matter to spend his nights in the lantern-like room at the top of the farmhouse.

Often waking up at night he would get up to look at the starry sky out of all his three windows in succession, and think: "Now there is nothing in the world to prevent me getting out to sea in less than an hour." As a matter of fact it was possible for two men to manage the tartane. Thus Peyrol's thought was comfortingly true in every way, for he loved to feel himself free, and Michel of the lagoon, after the death of his depressed dog, had no tie on earth. It was a fine thought which somehow made it quite easy for Peyrol to go back to his four-poster and resume his slumbers.

Chapter 8

Perched sideways on the circular wall bordering the well, in the full blaze of the midday sun, the rover of the distant seas and the fisherman of the lagoon, sharing between them a most surprising secret, had the air of two men conferring in the dark. The first word that Peyrol said was, "Well?"

"All quiet," said the other.

"Have you fastened the cabin door properly?"

"You know what the fastenings are like."

Peyrol could not deny that. It was a sufficient answer. It shifted the responsibility on to his shoulders and all his life he had been accustomed to trust to the work of his own hands, in peace and in war. Yet he looked doubtfully at Michel before he remarked:

"Yes, but I know the man too."

There could be no greater contrast than those two faces: Peyrol's clean, like a carving of stone, and only very little softened by time, and that of the owner of the late dog, hirsute, with many silver threads, with something elusive in the features and the vagueness of expression of a baby in arms. "Yes, I know the man," repeated Peyrol. Michel's mouth fell open at this, a small oval set a little crookedly in the innocent face.

"He will never wake," he suggested timidly.

The possession of a common and momentous secret drawing men together, Peyrol condescended to explain.

"You don't know the thickness of his skull. I do."

He spoke as though he had made it himself. Michel, who in the face of that positive statement had forgotten to shut his mouth, had nothing to say.

"He breathes all right?" asked Peyrol.

"Yes. After I got out and locked the door I listened for a bit and I thought I heard him snore."

Peyrol looked interested and also slightly anxious.

"I had to come up and show myself this morning as if nothing had happened," he said. "The officer has been here for two days and he might have taken it into his head to go down to the tartane. I have been on the stretch all the morning. A goat jumping up was enough to give me a turn. Fancy him running up here with his broken head all bandaged up, with you after him."

This seemed to be too much for Michel. He said almost indignantly:

"The man's half killed."

"It takes a lot to even half kill a Brother of the Coast. There are men and men. You, for instance," Peyrol continued placidly, "you would have been altogether killed if it had been your head that got in the way. And there are animals, beasts twice your size, regular monsters, that may be killed with nothing more than just a tap on the nose. That's well known. I was really afraid he would overcome you in some way or other. . . ."

"Come, *matre*! One isn't a little child," protested Michel against this accumulation of improbabilities. He did it, however, only in a whisper and with childlike shyness. Peyrol folded his arms on his breast:

"Go, finish your soup," he commanded in a low voice, "and then go down to the *tartane*. You locked the cabin door properly, you said?"

"Yes, I have," protested Michel, staggered by this display of anxiety. "He could sooner burst the deck above his head, as you know."

"All the same, take a small spar and shore up that door against the heel of the mast. And then watch outside. Don't you go in to him on any account. Stay on deck and keep a lookout for me. There is a tangle here that won't be easily cleared and I must be very careful. I will try to slip away and get down as soon as I get rid of that officer."

The conference in the sunshine being ended, Peyrol walked leisurely out of the yard gate, and protruding his head beyond the corner of the house, saw Lieutenant Ral sitting on the bench. This he had expected to see. But he had not expected to see him there alone. It was just like this: wherever Arlette happened to be, there were worrying possibilities. But she might have been helping her aunt in the kitchen with her sleeves rolled up on such white arms as Peyrol had never seen on any woman before. The way she had taken to dressing her hair in a plait with a broad black velvet ribbon and an Arlesian cap was very becoming. She was wearing now her mother's clothes of which there were chestfuls, altered for her of course. The late mistress of the Escampobar Farm had been an Arlesienne. Well-to-do, too. Yes, even for women's clothes the Escampobar natives could do without intercourse with the outer world. It was quite time that this confounded lieutenant went back to Toulon. This was the third day. His short leave must be up. Peyrol's attitude towards naval officers had been always guarded and suspicious. His relations with them had been very mixed. They had been his enemies and his superiors. He had been chased by them. He had been trusted by them. The Revolution had made a clean cut across the consistency of his wild life — -Brother of the Coast and gunner in the national navy — -and yet he was always the same man. It was like that, too, with them. Officers of the King, officers of the Republic, it was only changing the skin. All alike looked askance at a free rover. Even this one could not forget his epaulettes when talking to him. Scorn and mistrust of epaulettes were rooted deeply in old Peyrol. Yet he did not absolutely hate Lieutenant Ral. Only the fellow's coming to the farm was generally a curse and his presence at that particular moment a confounded nuisance and to a certain extent even a danger. "I have no mind to be hauled to Toulon by the scruff of my neck," Peyrol

said to himself. There was no trusting those epaulette-wearers. Any one of them was capable of jumping on his best friend on account of some officer-like notion or other.

Peyrol, stepping round the corner, sat down by the side of Lieutenant Ral with the feeling somehow of coming to grips with a slippery customer. The lieutenant, as he sat there, unaware of Peyrol's survey of his person, gave no notion of slipperiness. On the contrary, he looked rather immovably established. Very much at home. Too much at home. Even after Peyrol sat down by his side he continued to look immovable — -or at least difficult to get rid of. In the still noonday heat the faint shrilling of cicadas was the only sound of life heard for quite a long time. Delicate, evanescent, cheerful, careless sort of life, yet not without passion. A sudden gloom seemed to be cast over the joy of the cicadas by the lieutenant's voice though the words were the most perfunctory possible.

"Tiens! Vous voil."

In the stress of the situation Peyrol at once asked himself: "Now why does he say that? Where did he expect me to be?" The lieutenant need not have spoken at all. He had known him now for about two years off and on, and it had happened many times that they had sat side by side on that bench in a sort of "at arm's length" equality without exchanging a single word. And why could he not have kept quiet now? That naval officer never spoke without an object, but what could one make of words like that? Peyrol achieved an insincere yawn and suggested mildly:

"A bit of siesta wouldn't be amiss. What do you think, lieutenant?"

And to himself he thought: "No fear, he won't go to his room." He would stay there and thereby keep him, Peyrol, from going down to the cove. He turned his eyes on that naval officer, and if extreme and concentrated desire and mere force of will could have had any effect Lieutenant Ral would certainly have been removed suddenly from that bench. But he didn't move. And Peyrol was astonished to see that man smile, but what astonished him still more was to hear him say:

"The trouble is that you have never been frank with me, Peyrol."

"Frank with you," repeated the rover. "You want me to be frank with you? Well, I have wished you to the devil many times."

"That's better," said Lieutenant Ral. "But why? I never tried to do you any harm."

"Me harm," cried Peyrol, "to me?" But he faltered in his indignation as if frightened at it and ended in a very quiet tone: "You have been nosing in a lot of dirty papers to find something against a man who was not doing you any harm and was a seaman before you were born."

"Quite a mistake. There was no nosing amongst papers. I came on them quite by accident. I won't deny I was intrigu finding a man of your sort living in this place. But don't be uneasy. Nobody would trouble his head about you. It's a long time since you have been forgotten. Have no fear."

"You! You talk to me of fear . . .? No," cried the rover, "it's enough to turn a fellow into a sans-culotte if it weren't for the sight of that specimen sneaking around here."

The lieutenant turned his head sharply, and for a moment the naval officer and the free sea-rover looked at each other gloomily. When Peyrol spoke again he had changed his mood.

“Why should I fear anybody? I owe nothing to anybody. I have given them up the prize ship in order and everything else, except my luck; and for that I account to nobody,” he added darkly.

“I don’t know what you are driving at,” the lieutenant said after a moment of thought. “All I know is that you seem to have given up your share of the prize money. There is no record of you ever claiming it.”

Peyrol did not like the sarcastic tone. “You have a nasty tongue,” he said, “with your damned trick of talking as if you were made of different clay.”

“No offence,” said the lieutenant, grave but a little puzzled. “Nobody will drag out that against you. It has been paid years ago to the Invalides fund. All this is buried and forgotten.”

Peyrol was grumbling and swearing to himself with such concentration that the lieutenant stopped and waited till he had finished.

“And there is no record of desertion or anything like that,” he continued then. “You stand there as *disparu*. I believe that after searching for you a little they came to the conclusion that you had come by your death somehow or other.”

“Did they? Well, perhaps old Peyrol is dead. At any rate he has buried himself here.” The rover suffered from great instability of feelings for he passed in a flash from melancholy into fierceness. “And he was quiet enough till you came sniffing around this hole. More than once in my life I had occasion to wonder how soon the jackals would have a chance to dig up my carcass; but to have a naval officer come scratching round here was the last thing. . . .” Again a change came over him. “What can you want here?” he whispered, suddenly depressed.

The lieutenant fell into the humour of that discourse. “I don’t want to disturb the dead,” he said, turning full to the rover who after his last words had fixed his eyes on the ground. “I want to talk to the gunner Peyrol.”

Peyrol, without raising his eyes from the ground, growled: “He isn’t here. He is *disparu*. Go and look at the papers again. Vanished. Nobody here.”

“That,” said Lieutenant Ral, in a conversational tone, “that is a lie. He was talking to me this morning on the hillside as we were looking at the English ship. He knows all about her. He told me he spent nights making plans for her capture. He seemed to be a fellow with his heart in the right place. *Un homme de cur*. You know him.”

Peyrol raised his big head slowly and looked at the lieutenant.

“Humph,” he grunted. A heavy, non-committal grunt. His old heart was stirred, but the tangle was such that he had to be on his guard with any man who wore epaulettes. His profile preserved the immobility of a head struck on a medal while he listened to the lieutenant assuring him that this time he had come to Escampobar on purpose to speak with the gunner Peyrol. That he had not done so before was because it was a very confidential matter. At this point the lieutenant stopped and Peyrol made no sign.

Inwardly he was asking himself what the lieutenant was driving at. But the lieutenant seemed to have shifted his ground. His tone, too, was slightly different. More practical.

"You say you have made a study of that English ship's movements. Well, for instance, suppose a breeze springs up, as it very likely will towards the evening, could you tell me where she will be to-night? I mean, what her captain is likely to do."

"No, I couldn't," said Peyrol.

"But you said you have been observing him minutely for weeks. There aren't so many alternatives, and taking the weather and everything into consideration, you can judge almost with certainty."

"No," said Peyrol again. "It so happens that I can't."

"Can't you? Then you are worse than any of the old admirals that you think so little of. Why can't you?"

"I will tell you why," said Peyrol after a pause and with a face more like a carving than ever. "It's because the fellow has never come so far this way before. Therefore I don't know what he has got in his mind, and in consequence I can't guess what he will do next. I may be able to tell you some other day but not to-day. Next time when you come . . . to see the old gunner."

"No, it must be this time."

"Do you mean you are going to stay here tonight?"

"Did you think I was here on leave? I tell you I am on service. Don't you believe me?"

Peyrol let out a heavy sigh. "Yes, I believe you. And so they are thinking of catching her alive. And you are sent on service. Well, that doesn't make it any easier for me to see you here."

"You are a strange man, Peyrol," said the lieutenant. "I believe you wish me dead."

"No. Only out of this. But you are right, Peyrol is no friend either to your face or to your voice. They have done harm enough already."

They had never attained to such intimate terms before. There was no need for them to look at each other. The lieutenant thought: "Ah! He can't keep his jealousy in." There was no scorn or malice in that thought. It was much more like despair. He said mildly:

"You snarl like an old dog, Peyrol."

"I have felt sometimes as if I could fly at your throat," said Peyrol in a sort of calm whisper. "And it amuses you the more."

"Amuses me? Do I look light-hearted?"

Again Peyrol turned his head slowly for a long, steady stare. And again the naval officer and the rover gazed at each other with a searching and sombre frankness. This new-born intimacy could go no further.

"Listen to me, Peyrol. . . ."

"No," said the other. "If you want to talk, talk to the gunner."

Though he seemed to have adopted the notion of a double personality the rover did not seem to be much easier in one character than in the other. Furrows of perplexity

appeared on his brow, and as the lieutenant did not speak at once Peyrol the gunner asked impatiently:

“So they are thinking of catching her alive?” It did not please him to hear the lieutenant say that it was not exactly this that the chiefs in Toulon had in their minds. Peyrol at once expressed the opinion that of all the naval chiefs that ever were, Citizen Renaud was the only one that was worth anything. Lieutenant Ral, disregarding the challenging tone, kept to the point.

“What they want to know is whether that English corvette interferes much with the coast traffic.”

“No, she doesn’t,” said Peyrol: “she leaves poor people alone, unless, I suppose, some craft acts suspiciously. I have seen her give chase to one or two. But even those she did not detain. Michel — - you know Michel — -has heard from the mainland people that she has captured several at various times. Of course, strictly speaking, nobody is safe.”

“Well, no. I wonder now what that Englishman would call ‘acting suspiciously.’ “

“Ah, now you are asking something. Don’t you know what an Englishman is? One day easy and casual, next day ready to pounce on you like a tiger. Hard in the morning, careless in the afternoon, and only reliable in a fight, whether with or against you, but for the rest perfectly fantastic. You might think a little touched in the head, and there again it would not do to trust to that notion either.”

The lieutenant lending an attentive ear, Peyrol smoothed his brow and discoursed with gusto of Englishmen as if they had been a strange, very little-known tribe. “In a manner of speaking,” he concluded, “the oldest bird of them all can be caught with chaff, but not every day.” He shook his head, smiling to himself faintly as if remembering a quaint passage or two.

“You didn’t get all that knowledge of the English while you were a gunner,” observed the lieutenant dryly.

“There you go again,” said Peyrol. “And what’s that to you where I learned it all? Suppose I learned it all from a man who is dead now. Put it down to that.”

“I see. It amounts to this, that one can’t get at the back of their minds very easily.”

“No,” said Peyrol, then added grumpily, “and some Frenchmen are not much better. I wish I could get at the back of your mind.”

“You would find a service matter there, gunner, that’s what you would find there, and a matter that seems nothing much at first sight, but when you look into it, is about as difficult to manage properly as anything you ever undertook in your life. It puzzled all the big-wigs. It must have, since I was called in. Of course I work on shore at the Admiralty and I was in the way. They showed me the order from Paris and I could see at once the difficulty of it. I pointed it out and I was told . . .”

“To come here,” struck in Peyrol.

“No. To make arrangements to carry it out.”

“And you began by coming here. You are always coming here.”

“I began by looking for a man,” said the naval officer with emphasis.

Peyrol looked at him searchingly. "Do you mean to say that in the whole fleet you couldn't have found a man?"

"I never attempted to look for one there. My chief agreed with me that it isn't a service for navy men."

"Well, it must be something nasty for a naval man to admit that much. What is the order? I don't suppose you came over here without being ready to show it to me."

The lieutenant plunged his hand into the inside pocket of his naval jacket and then brought it out empty.

"Understand, Peyrol," he said earnestly, "this is not a service of fighting. Good men are plentiful for that. The object is to play the enemy a trick."

"Trick?" said Peyrol in a judicial tone, "that's all right. I have seen in the Indian Seas Monsieur Surcouf play tricks on the English . . . seen them with my own eyes, deceptions, disguises, and such-like. . . . That's quite sound in war."

"Certainly. The order for this one comes from the First Consul himself, for it is no small matter. It's to deceive the English Admiral."

"What — -that Nelson? Ah! but he is a cunning one."

After expressing that opinion the old rover pulled out a red bandana handkerchief and after rubbing his face with it repeated his opinion deliberately: "Celui-l est un malin."

This time the lieutenant really brought out a paper from his pocket and saying, "I have copied the order for you to see," handed it to the rover, who took it from him with a doubtful air.

Lieutenant Ral watched old Peyrol handling it at arm's length, then with his arm bent trying to adjust the distance to his eyesight, and wondered whether he had copied it in a hand big enough to be read easily by the gunner Peyrol. The order ran like this: "You will make up a packet of dispatches and pretended private letters as if from officers, containing a clear statement besides hints calculated to convince the enemy that the destination of the fleet now fitting in Toulon is for Egypt and generally for the East. That packet you will send by sea in some small craft to Naples, taking care that the vessel shall fall into the enemy's hands." The Prefet Maritime had called Ral, had shown him the paragraph of the letter from Paris, had turned the page over and laid his finger on the signature, "Bonaparte." Then after giving him a meaning glance, the admiral locked up the paper in a drawer and put the key in his pocket. Lieutenant Ral had written the passage down from memory directly the notion of consulting Peyrol had occurred to him.

The rover, screwing his eyes and pursing his lips, had come to the end of it. The lieutenant extended his hand negligently and took the paper away: "Well, what do you think?" he asked. "You understand that there can be no question of any ship of war being sacrificed to that dodge. What do you think of it?"

"Easier said than done," opined Peyrol curtly.

"That's what I told my admiral."

"Is he a lubber, so that you had to explain it to him?"

"No, gunner, he is not. He listened to me, nodding his head."

"And what did he say when you finished?"

"He said: 'Parfaitement. Have you got any ideas about it?' And I said — -listen to me, gunner — -I said: 'Oui, Amiral, I think I've got a man,' and the admiral interrupted me at once: 'All right, you don't want to talk to me about him. I put you in charge of that affair and give you a week to arrange it. When it's done report to me. Meantime you may just as well take this packet.' They were already prepared, Peyrol, all those faked letters and dispatches. I carried it out of the admiral's room, a parcel done up in sail-cloth, properly corded and sealed. I have had it in my possession for three days. It's upstairs in my valise."

"That doesn't advance you very much," growled old Peyrol.

"No," admitted the lieutenant. "I can also dispose of a few thousand francs."

"Francs," repeated Peyrol. "Well, you had better get back to Toulon and try to bribe some man to put his head into the jaws of the English lion."

Ral reflected, then said slowly, "I wouldn't tell any man that. Of course a service of danger, that would be understood."

"It would be. And if you could get a fellow with some sense in his caboche, he would naturally try to slip past the English fleet and maybe do it, too. And then where's your trick?"

"We could give him a course to steer."

"Yes. And it may happen that your course would just take him clear of all Nelson's fleet, for you never can tell what the English are doing. They might be watering in Sardinia."

"Some cruisers are sure to be out and pick him up."

"Maybe. But that's not doing the job, that's taking a chance. Do you think you are talking to a toothless baby — -or what?"

"No, my gunner. It will take a strong man's teeth to undo that knot." A moment of silence followed. Then Peyrol assumed a dogmatic tone.

"I will tell you what it is, lieutenant. This seems to me just the sort of order that a landlubber would give to good seamen. You daren't deny that."

"I don't deny it," the lieutenant admitted. "And look at the whole difficulty. For supposing even that the tartane blunders right into the English fleet, as if it had been indeed arranged, they would just look into her hold or perhaps poke their noses here and there but it would never occur to them to search for dispatches, would it? Our man, of course, would have them well hidden, wouldn't he? He is not to know. And if he were ass enough to leave them lying about the decks the English would at once smell a rat there. But what I think he would do would be to throw the dispatches overboard."

"Yes — -unless he is told the nature of the job," said Peyrol.

"Evidently. But where's the bribe big enough to induce a man to taste of the English pontoons?"

“The man will take the bribe all right and then will do his best not to be caught; and if he can’t avoid that, he will take jolly good care that the English should find nothing on board his tartane. Oh no, lieutenant, any damn scallywag that owns a tartane will take a couple of thousand francs from your hand as tame as can be; but as to deceiving the English Admiral, it’s the very devil of an affair. Didn’t you think of all that before you spoke to the big epaulettes that gave you the job?”

“I did see it, and I put it all before him,” the lieutenant said, lowering his voice still more, for their conversation had been carried on in undertones though the house behind them was silent and solitude reigned round the approaches of Escampobar Farm. It was the hour of siesta — -for those that could sleep. The lieutenant, edging closer towards the old man, almost breathed the words in his ear.

“What I wanted was to hear you say all those things. Do you understand now what I meant this morning on the lookout? Don’t you remember what I said?”

Peyrol, gazing into space, spoke in a level murmur.

“I remember a naval officer trying to shake old Peyrol off his feet and not managing to do it. I may be disparu but I am too solid yet for any blancbec that loses his temper, devil only knows why. And it’s a good thing that you didn’t manage it, else I would have taken you down with me, and we would have made our last somersault together for the amusement of an English ship’s company. A pretty end that!”

“Don’t you remember me saying, when you mentioned that the English would have sent a boat to go through our pockets, that this would have been the perfect way?” In his stony immobility with the other man leaning towards his car, Peyrol seemed a mere insensible receptacle for whispers, and the lieutenant went on forcibly: “Well, it was in allusion to this affair, for, look here, gunner, what could be more convincing, if they had found the packet of dispatches on me! What would have been their surprise, their wonder! Not the slightest doubt could enter their heads. Could it, gunner? Of course it couldn’t. I can imagine the captain of that corvette crowding sail on her to get this packet into the Admiral’s hands. The secret of the Toulon fleet’s destination found on the body of a dead officer. Wouldn’t they have exulted at their enormous piece of luck! But they wouldn’t have called it accidental. Oh, no! They would have called it providential. I know the English a little too. They like to have God on their side — - the only ally they never need pay a subsidy to. Come, gunner, would it not have been a perfect way?”

Lieutenant Ral threw himself back and Peyrol, still like a carven image of grim dreaminess, growled softly:

“Time yet. The English ship is still in the Passe.” He waited a little in his uncanny living-statue manner before he added viciously: “You don’t seem in a hurry to go and take that leap.”

“Upon my word, I am almost sick enough of life to do it,” the lieutenant said in a conversational tone.

“Well, don’t forget to run upstairs and take that packet with you before you go,” said Peyrol as before. “But don’t wait for me; I am not sick of life. I am disparu, and that’s good enough. There’s no need for me to die.”

And at last he moved in his seat, swung his head from side to side as if to make sure that his neck had not been turned to stone, emitted a short laugh, and grumbled: “Disparu! Hein! Well, I am damned!” as if the word “vanished” had been a gross insult to enter against a man’s name in a register. It seemed to rankle, as Lieutenant Ral observed with some surprise; or else it was something inarticulate that rankled, manifesting itself in that funny way. The lieutenant, too, had a moment of anger which flamed and went out at once in the deadly cold philosophic reflection: “We are victims of the destiny which has brought us together.” Then again his resentment flamed. Why should he have stumbled against that girl or that woman, he didn’t know how he must think of her, and suffer so horribly for it? He who had endeavoured almost from a boy to destroy all the softer feelings within himself. His changing moods of distaste, of wonder at himself and at the unexpected turns of life, wore the aspect of profound abstraction from which he was recalled by an outburst of Peyrol’s, not loud but fierce enough.

“No,” cried Peyrol, “I am too old to break my bones for the sake of a lubberly soldier in Paris who fancies he has invented something clever.”

“I don’t ask you to,” the lieutenant said, with extreme severity, in what Peyrol would call an epaulette wearer’s voice. “You old sea-bandit. And it wouldn’t be for the sake of a soldier anyhow. You and I are Frenchmen after all.”

“You have discovered that, have you?”

“Yes,” said Ral. “This morning, listening to your talk on the hillside with that English corvette within one might say a stone’s throw.”

“Yes,” groaned Peyrol. “A French-built ship!” He struck his breast a resounding blow. “It hurts one there to see her. It seemed to me I could jump down on her deck single-handed.”

“Yes, there you and I understood each other,” said the lieutenant. “But look here, this affair is a much bigger thing than getting back a captured corvette. In reality it is much more than merely playing a trick on an admiral. It’s a part of a deep plan, Peyrol! It’s another stroke to help us on the way towards a great victory at sea.”

“Us!” said Peyrol. “I am a sea-bandit and you are a sea-officer. What do you mean by us?”

“I mean all Frenchmen,” said the lieutenant. “Or, let us say simply France, which you too have served.”

Peyrol, whose stone-effigy bearing had become humanized almost against his will, gave an appreciative nod, and said: “You’ve got something in your mind. Now what is it? If you will trust a sea-bandit.”

“No, I will trust a gunner of the Republic. It occurred to me that for this great affair we could make use of this corvette that you have been observing so long. For to count

on the capture of any old tartane by the fleet in a way that would not arouse suspicion is no use."

"A lubberly notion," assented Peyrol, with more heartiness than he had ever displayed towards Lieutenant Ral.

"Yes, but there's that corvette. Couldn't something be arranged to make them swallow the whole thing, somehow, some way? You laugh . . . Why?"

"I laugh because it would be a great joke," said Peyrol, whose hilarity was very short-lived. "That fellow on board, he thinks himself very clever. I never set my eyes on him, but I used to feel that I knew him as if he were my own brother; but now . . ."

He stopped short. Lieutenant Ral, after observing the sudden change on his countenance, said in an impressive manner:

"I think you have just had an idea."

"Not the slightest," said Peyrol, turning suddenly into stone as if by enchantment. The lieutenant did not feel discouraged and he was not surprised to hear the effigy of Peyrol pronounce: "All the same one could see." Then very abruptly: "You meant to stay here to-night?"

"Yes. I will only go down to Madrague and leave word with the sailing barge which was to come to-day from Toulon to go back without me."

"No, lieutenant. You must return to Toulon to-day. When you get there you must turn out some of those damned quill-drivers at the Port Office if it were midnight and have papers made out for a tartane — -oh, any name you like. Some sort of papers. And then you must come back as soon as you can. Why not go down to Madrague now and see whether the barge isn't already there? If she is, then by starting at once you may get back here some time about midnight."

He got up impetuously and the lieutenant stood up too. Hesitation was imprinted on his whole attitude. Peyrol's aspect was not animated, but his Roman face with its severe aspect gave him a great air of authority.

"Won't you tell me something more?" asked the lieutenant.

"No," said the rover. "Not till we meet again. If you return during the night don't you try to get into the house. Wait outside. Don't rouse anybody. I will be about, and if there is anything to say I will say it to you then. What are you looking about you for? You don't want to go up for your valise. Your pistols up in your room too? What do you want with pistols, only to go to Toulon and back with a naval boat's crew?" He actually laid his hand on the lieutenant's shoulder and impelled him gently towards the track leading to Madrague. Ral turned his head at the touch and their eyes met with the strained closeness of a wrestler's hug. It was the lieutenant who gave way before the unflinchingly direct stare of the old Brother of the Coast. He gave way under the cover of a sarcastic smile and a very airy, "I see you want me out of the way for some reason or other," which produced not the slightest effect upon Peyrol, who stood with his arm pointing towards Madrague. When the lieutenant turned his back

on him Peyrol's pointing arm fell down by his side; but he watched the lieutenant out of sight before he turned too and moved in a contrary direction.

Chapter 9

On losing sight of the perplexed lieutenant, Peyrol discovered that his own mind was a perfect blank. He started to get down to his tartane after one side-long look at the face of the house which contained quite a different problem. Let that wait. His head feeling strangely empty, he felt the pressing necessity of furnishing it with some thought without loss of time. He scrambled down steep places, caught at bushes, stepped from stone to stone, with the assurance of long practice, with mechanical precision and without for a moment relaxing his efforts to capture some definite scheme which he could put into his head. To his right the cove lay full of pale light, while the rest of the Mediterranean extended beyond it in a dark, unruffled blue. Peyrol was making for the little basin where his tartane had been hidden for years, like a jewel in a casket meant only for the secret rejoicing of his eye, of no more practical use than a miser's hoard — -and as precious! Coming upon a hollow in the ground where grew a few bushes and even a few blades of grass, Peyrol sat down to rest. In that position his visible world was limited to a stony slope, a few boulders, the bush against which he leaned and the vista of a piece of empty sea-horizon. He perceived that he detested that lieutenant much more when he didn't see him. There was something in the fellow. Well, at any rate he had got rid of him for say eight or ten hours. An uneasiness came over the old rover, a sense of the endangered stability of things, which was anything but welcome. He wondered at it, and the thought "I am growing old," intruded on him again. And yet he was aware of his sturdy body. He could still creep stealthily like an Indian and with his trusty cudgel knock a man over with a certain aim at the back of his head, and with force enough to fell him like a bullock. He had done that thing no further back than two o'clock the night before, not twelve hours ago, as easy as easy and without an undue sense of exertion. This fact cheered him up. But still he could not find an idea for his head. Not what one could call a real idea. It wouldn't come. It was no use sitting there.

He got up and after a few strides came to a stony ridge from which he could see the two white blunt mastheads of his tartane. Her hull was hidden from him by the formation of the shore, in which the most prominent feature was a big flat piece of rock. That was the spot on which not twelve hours before Peyrol, unable to rest in his bed and coming to seek sleep in his tartane, had seen by moonlight a man standing above his vessel and looking down at her, a characteristic forked black shape that certainly had no business to be there. Peyrol, by a sudden and logical deduction, had said to himself. "Landed from an English boat." Why, how, wherefore, he did not stay to consider. He acted at once like a man accustomed for many years to meet emergencies

of the most unexpected kind. The dark figure, lost in a sort of attentive amazement, heard nothing, suspected nothing. The impact of the thick end of the cudgel came down on its head like a thunderbolt from the blue. The sides of the little basin echoed the crash. But he could not have heard it. The force of the blow flung the senseless body over the edge of the flat rock and down headlong into the open hold of the tartane, which received it with the sound of a muffled drum. Peyrol could not have done the job better at the age of twenty. No. Not so well. There was swiftness, mature judgment — and the sound of the muffled drum was followed by a perfect silence, without a sigh, without a moan. Peyrol ran round a little promontory to where the shore shelved down to the level of the tartanes rail and got on board. And still the silence remained perfect in the cold moonlight and amongst the deep shadows of the rocks. It remained perfect because Michel, who always slept under the half-deck forward, being wakened by the thump which had made the whole tartane tremble, had lost the power of speech. With his head just protruding from under the half-deck, arrested on all fours and shivering violently like a dog that had been washed with hot water, he was kept from advancing further by his terror of this bewitched corpse that had come on board flying through the air. He would not have touched it for anything.

The “You there, Michel,” pronounced in an undertone, acted like a moral tonic. This then was not the doing of the Evil One; it was no sorcery! And even if it had been, now that Peyrol was there, Michel had lost all fear. He ventured not a single question while he helped Peyrol to turn over the limp body. Its face was covered with blood from the cut on the forehead which it had got by striking the sharp edge of the keelson. What accounted for the head not being completely smashed and for no limbs being broken was the fact that on its way through the air the victim of undue curiosity had come in contact with and had snapped like a carrot one of the foremast shrouds. Raising his eyes casually Peyrol noticed the broken rope, and at once put his hand on the man’s breast.

“His heart beats yet,” he murmured. “Go and light the cabin lamp, Michel.”

“You going to take that thing into the cabin?”

“Yes,” said Peyrol. “The cabin is used to that kind of thing,” and suddenly he felt very bitter. “It has been a death-trap for better people than this fellow, whoever he is.”

While Michel was away executing that order Peyrol’s eyes roamed all over the shores of the basin, for he could not divest himself of the idea that there must be more Englishmen dodging about. That one of the corvette’s boats was still in the cove he had not the slightest doubt. As to the motive of her coming, it was incomprehensible. Only that senseless form lying at his feet could perhaps have told him: but Peyrol had little hope that it would ever speak again. If his friends started to look for their shipmate there was just a bare chance that they would not discover the existence of the basin. Peyrol stooped and felt the body all over. He found no weapon of any kind on it. There was only a common clasp-knife on a lanyard round its neck.

That soul of obedience, Michel, returning from aft, was directed to throw a couple of bucketfuls of salt water upon the bloody head with its face upturned to the moon. The lowering of the body down into the cabin was a matter of some little difficulty. It was heavy. They laid it full length on a locker and after Michel with a strange tidiness had arranged its arms along its sides it looked incredibly rigid. The dripping head with soaked hair was like the head of a drowned man with a gaping pink gash on the forehead.

“Go on deck to keep a lookout,” said Peyrol. “We may have to fight yet before the night’s out.”

After Michel left him Peyrol began by flinging off his jacket and, without a pause, dragging his shirt off over his head. It was a very fine shirt. The Brothers of the Coast in their hours of ease were by no means a ragged crowd, and Peyrol the gunner had preserved a taste for fine linen. He tore the shirt into long strips, sat down on the locker and took the wet head on his knees. He bandaged it with some skill, working as calmly as though he had been practising on a dummy. Then the experienced Peyrol sought the lifeless hand and felt the pulse. The spirit had not fled yet. The rover, stripped to the waist, his powerful arms folded on the grizzled pelt of his bare breast, sat gazing down at the inert face in his lap with the eyes closed peacefully under the white band covering the forehead. He contemplated the heavy jaw combined oddly with a certain roundness of cheek, the noticeably broad nose with a sharp tip and a faint dent across the bridge, either natural or the result of some old injury. A face of brown clay, roughly modelled, with a lot of black eyelashes stuck on the closed lids and looking artificially youthful on that physiognomy forty years old or more. And Peyrol thought of his youth. Not his own youth; that he was never anxious to recapture. It was of that man’s youth that he thought, of how that face had looked twenty years ago. Suddenly he shifted his position, and putting his lips to the ear of that inanimate head, yelled with all the force of his lungs:

“Hullo! Hullo! Wake up, shipmate!”

It seemed enough to wake up the dead. A faint “Voil! Voil!” was the answer from a distance, and presently Michel put his head into the cabin with an anxious grin and a gleam in the round eyes.

“You called, matre?”

“Yes,” said Peyrol. “Come along and help me to shift him.”

“Overboard?” murmured Michel readily.

“No,” said Peyrol, “into that bunk. Steady! Don’t bang his head,” he cried with unexpected tenderness. “Throw a blanket over him. Stay in the cabin and keep his bandages wetted with salt water. I don’t think anybody will trouble you to-night. I am going to the house.”

“The day is not very far off,” remarked Michel.

This was one reason the more why Peyrol was in a hurry to get back to the house and steal up to his room unseen. He drew on his jacket over his bare skin, picked up his cudgel, recommended Michel not to let that strange bird get out of the cabin on

any account. As Michel was convinced that the man would never walk again in his life, he received those instructions without particular emotion.

The dawn had broken some time before Peyrol, on his way up to Escampobar, happened to look round and had the luck to actually see with his own eyes the English man-of-war's boat pulling out of the cove. This confirmed his surmises but did not enlighten him a bit as to the causes. Puzzled and uneasy, he approached the house through the farmyard — - Catherine, always the first up, stood at the open kitchen door. She moved aside and would have let him pass without remark, if Peyrol himself had not asked in a whisper: "Anything new?" She answered him in the same tone: "She has taken to roaming at night." Peyrol stole silently up to his bedroom, from which he descended an hour later as though he had spent all the night in his bed up there.

It was this nocturnal adventure which had affected the character of Peyrol's forenoon talk with the lieutenant. What with one thing and another he found it very trying. Now that he had got rid of Ral for several hours, the rover had to turn his attention to that other invader of the strained, questionable, and ominous in its origins, peace of the Escampobar Farm. As he sat on the flat rock with his eyes fixed idly on the few drops of blood betraying his last night's work to the high heaven, and trying to get hold of something definite that he could think about, Peyrol became aware of a faint thundering noise. Faint as it was it filled the whole basin. He soon guessed its nature, and his face lost its perplexity. He picked up his cudgel, got on his feet briskly, muttering to himself. "He's anything but dead," and hurried on board the tartane.

On the after-deck Michel was keeping a lookout. He had carried out the orders he had received by the well. Besides being secured by the very obvious padlock, the cabin door was shored up by a spar which made it stand as firm as a rock. The thundering noise seemed to issue from its immovable substance magically. It ceased for a moment, and a sort of distracted continuous growling could be heard. Then the thundering began again. Michel reported: "This is the third time he starts this game."

"Not much strength in this," remarked Peyrol gravely.

"That he can do it at all is a miracle," said Michel, showing a certain excitement. "He stands on the ladder and beats the door with his fists. He is getting better. He began about half an hour after I got back on board. He drummed for a bit and then fell off the ladder. I heard him. I had my ear against the scuttle. He lay there and talked to himself for a long time. Then he went at it again." Peyrol approached the scuttle while Michel added his opinion: "He will go on like that for ever. You can't stop him."

"Easy there," said Peyrol in a deep authoritative voice. "Time you finish that noise."

These words brought instantly a death-like silence. Michel ceased to grin. He wondered at the power of these few words of a foreign language.

Peyrol himself smiled faintly. It was ages since he had uttered a sentence of English. He waited complacently until Michel had unbarred and unlocked the door of the cabin. After it was thrown open he boomed out a warning: "Stand clear!" and, turning about, went down with great deliberation, ordering Michel to go forward and keep a lookout.

Down there the man with the bandaged head was hanging on to the table and swearing feebly without intermission. Peyrol, after listening for a time with an air of interested recognition as one would to a tune heard many years ago, stopped it by a deep-voiced:

“That will do.” After a short silence he added: “You look bien malade, hein? What you call sick,” in a tone which if not tender was certainly not hostile. “We will remedy that.”

“Who are you?” asked the prisoner, looking frightened and throwing his arm up quickly to guard his head against the coming blow. But Peyrol’s uplifted hand fell only on his shoulder in a hearty slap which made him sit down suddenly on a locker in a partly collapsed attitude and unable to speak. But though very much dazed he was able to watch Peyrol open a cupboard and produce from there a small demijohn and two tin cups. He took heart to say plaintively: “My throat’s like tinder,” and then suspiciously: “Was it you who broke my head?”

“It was me,” admitted Peyrol, sitting down on the opposite side of the table and leaning back to look at his prisoner comfortably.

“What the devil did you do that for?” inquired the other with a sort of faint fierceness which left Peyrol unmoved.

“Because you put your nose where you no business. Understand? I see you there under the moon, pench, eating my tartane with your eyes. You never hear me, hein?”

“I believe you walked on air. Did you mean to kill me?”

“Yes, in preference to letting you go and make a story of it on board your cursed corvette.”

“Well then, now’s your chance to finish me. I am as weak as a kitten.”

“How did you say that? Kitten? Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Peyrol. “You make a nice petit chat.” He seized the demijohn by the neck and filled the mugs. “There,” he went on, pushing one towards the prisoner — “it’s good drink — -that.”

Symons’ state was as though the blow had robbed him of all power of resistance, of all faculty of surprise and generally of all the means by which a man may assert himself except bitter resentment. His head was aching, it seemed to him enormous, too heavy for his neck and as if full of hot smoke. He took a drink under Peyrol’s fixed gaze and with uncertain movements put down the mug. He looked drowsy for a moment. Presently a little colour deepened his bronze; he hitched himself up on the locker and said in a strong voice:

“You played a damned dirty trick on me. Call yourself a man, walking on air behind a fellow’s back and felling him like a bullock?”

Peyrol nodded calmly and sipped from his mug.

“If I had met you anywhere else but looking at my tartane I would have done nothing to you. I would have permitted you to go back to your boat. Where was your damned boat?”

“How can I tell you? I can’t tell where I am. I’ve never been here before. How long have I been here?”

“Oh, about fourteen hours,” said Peyrol.

“My head feels as if it would fall off if I moved,” grumbled the other. . . . “You are a damned bungler, that’s what you are.”

“What for — -bungler?”

“For not finishing me off at once.”

He seized the mug and emptied it down his throat. Peyrol drank too, observing him all the time. He put the mug down with extreme gentleness and said slowly:

“How could I know it was you? I hit hard enough to crack the skull of any other man.”

“What do you mean? What do you know about my skull? What are you driving at? I don’t know you, you white-headed villain, going about at night knocking people on the head from behind. Did you do for our officer, too?”

“Oh yes! Your officer. What was he up to? What trouble did you people come to make here, anyhow?”

“Do you think they tell a boat’s crew? Go and ask our officer. He went up the gully and our coxswain got the jumps. He says to me: ‘You are light-footed, Sam, says he; ‘you just creep round the head of the cove and see if our boat can be seen across from the other side. Well, I couldn’t see anything. That was all right. But I thought I would climb a little higher amongst the rocks. . . .’”

He paused drowsily.

“That was a silly thing to do,” remarked Peyrol in an encouraging voice.

“I would’ve sooner expected to see an elephant inland than a craft lying in a pool that seemed no bigger than my hand. Could not understand how she got there. Couldn’t help going down to find out — -and the next thing I knew I was lying on my back with my head tied up, in a bunk in this kennel of a cabin here. Why couldn’t you have given me a hail and engaged me properly, yardarm to yardarm? You would have got me all the same, because all I had in the way of weapons was the clasp-knife which you have looted off me.”

“Up on the shelf there,” said Peyrol, looking round. “No, my friend, I wasn’t going to take the risk of seeing you spread your wings and fly.”

“You need not have been afraid for your tartane. Our boat was after no tartane. We wouldn’t have taken your tartane for a gift. Why, we see them by dozens every day — -those tartanes.”

Peyrol filled the two mugs again. “Ah,” he said, “I daresay you see many tartanes, but this one is not like the others. You a sailor — -and you couldn’t see that she was something extraordinary.”

“Hellfire and gunpowder!” cried the other. “How can you expect me to have seen anything? I just noticed that her sails were bent before your club hit me on the head.” He raised his hands to his head and groaned. “Oh lord, I feel as though I had been drunk for a month.”

Peyrol’s prisoner did look somewhat as though he had got his head broken in a drunken brawl. But to Peyrol his appearance was not repulsive. The rover preserved

a tender memory of his freebooter's life with its lawless spirit and its spacious scene of action, before the change in the state of affairs in the Indian Ocean, the astounding rumours from the outer world, made him reflect on its precarious character. It was true that he had deserted the French flag when quite a youngster; but at that time that flag was white; and now it was a flag of three colours. He had known the practice of liberty, equality and fraternity as understood in the haunts open or secret of the Brotherhood of the Coast. So the change, if one could believe what people talked about, could not be very great. The rover had also his own positive notions as to what these three words were worth. Liberty — -to hold your own in the world if you could. Equality — -yes! But no body of men ever accomplished anything without a chief. All this was worth what it was worth. He regarded fraternity somewhat differently. Of course brothers would quarrel amongst themselves; it was during a fierce quarrel that flamed up suddenly in a company of Brothers that he had received the most dangerous wound of his life. But for that Peyrol nursed no grudge against anybody. In his view the claim of the Brotherhood was a claim for help against the outside world. And here he was sitting opposite a Brother whose head he had broken on sufficient grounds. There he was across the table looking dishevelled and dazed, uncomprehending and aggrieved, and that head of his proved as hard as ages ago when the nickname of Testa Dura had been given to him by a Brother of Italian origin on some occasion or other, some butting match no doubt; just as he, Peyrol himself, was known for a time on both sides of the Mozambique Channel as Poigne-de-Fer, after an incident when in the presence of the Brothers he played at arm's length with the windpipe of an obstreperous negro sorcerer with an enormous girth of chest. The villagers brought out food with alacrity, and the sorcerer was never the same man again. It had been a great display.

Yes, no doubt it was Testa Dura; the young neophyte of the order (where and how picked up Peyrol never heard), strange to the camp, simpleminded and much impressed by the swaggering cosmopolitan company in which he found himself. He had attached himself to Peyrol in preference to some of his own countrymen of whom there were several in that band, and used to run after him like a little dog and certainly had acted a good shipmate's part on the occasion of that wound which had neither killed nor cowed Peyrol but merely had given him an opportunity to reflect at leisure on the conduct of his own life.

The first suspicion of that amazing fact had intruded on Peyrol while he was bandaging that head by the light of the smoky lamp. Since the fellow still lived, it was not in Peyrol to finish him off or let him lie unattended like a dog. And then this was a sailor. His being English was no obstacle to the development of Peyrol's mixed feelings in which hatred certainly had no place. Amongst the members of the Brotherhood it was the Englishmen whom he preferred. He had also found amongst them that particular and loyal appreciation, which a Frenchman of character and ability will receive from Englishmen sooner than from any other nation. Peyrol had at times been a leader, without ever trying for it very much, for he was not ambitious. The lead used to fall

to him mostly at a time of crisis of some sort; and when he had got the lead it was on the Englishmen that he used to depend most.

And so that youngster had turned into this English man-of-war's man! In the fact itself there was nothing impossible. You found Brothers of the Coast in all sorts of ships and in all sorts of places. Peyrol had found one once in a very ancient and hopeless cripple practising the profession of a beggar on the steps of Manila cathedral; and had left him the richer by two broad gold pieces to add to his secret hoard. There was a tale of a Brother of the Coast having become a mandarin in China, and Peyrol believed it. One never knew where and in what position one would find a Brother of the Coast. The wonderful thing was that this one should have come to seek him out, to put himself in the way of his cudgel. Peyrol's greatest concern had been all through that Sunday morning to conceal the whole adventure from Lieutenant Ral. As against a wearer of epaulettes, mutual protection was the first duty between Brothers of the Coast. The unexpectedness of that claim coming to him after twenty years invested it with an extraordinary strength. What he would do with the fellow he didn't know. But since that morning the situation had changed. Peyrol had received the lieutenant's confidence and had got on terms with him in a special way. He fell into profound thought.

"Sacre tte dure," he muttered without rousing himself. Peyrol was annoyed a little at not having been recognized. He could not conceive how difficult it would have been for Symons to identify this portly deliberate person with a white head of hair as the object of his youthful admiration, the black-ringed French Brother in the prime of life of whom everybody thought so much. Peyrol was roused by hearing the other declare suddenly:

"I am an Englishman, I am. I am not going to knuckle under to anybody. What are you going to do with me?"

"I will do what I please," said Peyrol, who had been asking himself exactly the same question.

"Well, then, be quick about it, whatever it is. I don't care a damn what you do, but — -be — -quick — - about it."

He tried to be emphatic; but as a matter of fact the last words came out in a faltering tone. And old Peyrol was touched. He thought that if he were to let him drink the mugful standing there, it would make him dead drunk. But he took the risk. So he said only:

"Allons. Drink." The other did not wait for a second invitation but could not control very well the movements of his arm extended towards the mug. Peyrol raised his on high.

"Trinquons, eh?" he proposed. But in his precarious condition the Englishman remained unforgiving.

"I'm damned if I do," he said indignantly, but so low that Peyrol had to turn his ear to catch the words. "You will have to explain to me first what you meant by knocking me on the head."

He drank, staring all the time at Peyrol in a manner which was meant to give offence but which struck Peyrol as so childlike that he burst into a laugh.

“Sacr imbcile, va! Did I not tell you it was because of the tartane? If it hadn’t been for the tartane I would have hidden from you. I would have crouched behind a bush like a — -what do you call them? — -livre.”

The other, who was feeling the effect of the d stared with frank incredulity.

“You are of no account,” continued Peyrol. “Ah! if you had been an officer I would have gone for you anywhere. Did you say your officer went up the gully?”

Symons sighed deeply and easily. “That’s the way he went. We had heard on board of a house thereabouts.”

“Oh, he went to the house!” said Peyrol. “Well, if he did get there he must be very sorry for himself. There is half a company of infantry billeted in the farm.”

This inspired fib went down easily with the English sailor. Soldiers were stationed in many parts of the coast as any seaman of the blockading fleet knew very well. To the many expressions which had passed over the face of that man recovering from a long period of unconsciousness, there was added the shade of dismay.

“What the devil have they stuck soldiers on this piece of rock for?” he asked.

“Oh, signalling post and things like that. I am not likely to tell you everything. Why! you might escape.”

That phrase reached the soberest spot in the whole of Symons’ individuality. Things were happening, then. Mr. Bolt was a prisoner. But the main idea evoked in his confused mind was that he would be given up to those soldiers before very long. The prospect of captivity made his heart sink and he resolved to give as much trouble as he could.

“You will have to get some of these soldiers to carry me up. I won’t walk. I won’t. Not after having had my brains nearly knocked out from behind. I tell you straight! I won’t walk. Not a step. They will have to carry me ashore.”

Peyrol only shook his head deprecatingly.

“Now you go and get a corporal with a file of men,” insisted Symons obstinately. “I want to be made a proper prisoner of. Who the devil are you? You had no right to interfere. I believe you are a civilian. A common marinero, whatever you may call yourself. You look to me a pretty fishy marinero at that. Where did you learn English? In prison — -eh? You ain’t going to keep me in this damned dog-hole, on board your rubbishy tartane. Go and get that corporal, I tell you.”

He looked suddenly very tired and only murmured: “I am an Englishman, I am.”

Peyrol’s patience was positively angelic.

“Don’t you talk about the tartane,” he said impressively, making his words as distinct as possible. “I told you she was not like the other tartanes. That is because she is a courier boat. Every time she goes to sea she makes a pied-de-nez, what you call thumb to the nose, to all your English cruisers. I do not mind telling you because you are my prisoner. You will soon learn French now.”

“Who are you? The caretaker of this thing or what?” asked the undaunted Symons. But Peyrol’s mysterious silence seemed to intimidate him at last. He became dejected and began to curse in a languid tone all boat expeditions, the coxswain of the gig and his own infernal luck.

Peyrol sat alert and attentive like a man interested in an experiment, while after a moment Symons’ face began to look as if he had been hit with a club again, but not as hard as before. A film came over his round eyes and the words “fishy mariners” made their way out of his lips in a sort of death-bed voice. Yet such was the hardness of his head that he actually rallied enough to address Peyrol in an ingratiating tone.

“Come, grandfather!” He tried to push the mug across the table and upset it. “Come! Let us finish what’s in that tiny bottle of yours.”

“No,” said Peyrol, drawing the demijohn to his side of the table and putting the cork in.

“No?” repeated Symons in an unbelieving voice and looking at the demijohn fixedly . . . “You must be a tinker” . . . He tried to say something more under Peyrol’s watchful eyes, failed once or twice, and suddenly pronounced the word “cochon” so correctly as to make old Peyrol start. After that it was no use looking at him any more. Peyrol busied himself in locking up the demijohn and the mugs. When he turned round most of his prisoner’s body was extended over the table and no sound came from it, not even a snore.

When Peyrol got outside, pulling to the door of the cuddy behind him, Michel hastened from forward to receive the master’s orders. But Peyrol stood so long on the after-deck meditating profoundly with his hand over his mouth that Michel became fidgety and ventured a cheerful: “It looks as if he were not going to die.”

“He is dead,” said Peyrol with grim jocularity. “Dead drunk. And you very likely will not see me till to-morrow sometime.”

“But what am I to do?” asked Michel timidly.

“Nothing,” said Peyrol. “Of course you must not let him set fire to the tartane.”

“But suppose,” insisted Michel, “he should give signs of escaping.”

“If you see him trying to escape,” said Peyrol with mock solemnity, “then, Michel, it will be a sign for you to get out of his way as quickly as you can. A man who would try to escape with a head like this on him would just swallow you at one mouthful.”

He picked up his cudgel and, stepping ashore, went off without as much as a look at his faithful henchman. Michel listened to him scrambling amongst the stones, and his habitual amiably vacant face acquired a sort of dignity from the utter and absolute blankness that came over it.

Chapter 10

It was only after reaching the level ground in front of the farmhouse that Peyrol took time to pause and resume his contact with the exterior world.

While he had been closeted with his prisoner the sky had got covered with a thin layer of cloud, in one of those swift changes of weather that are not unusual in the Mediterranean. This grey vapour, drifting high up, close against the disc of the sun, seemed to enlarge the space behind its veil, add to the vastness of a shadowless world no longer hard and brilliant but all softened in the contours of its masses and in the faint line of the horizon, as if ready to dissolve in the immensity of the Infinite.

Familiar and indifferent to his eyes, material and shadowy, the extent of the changeable sea had gone pale under the pale sun in a mysterious and emotional response. Mysterious too was the great oval patch of dark water to the west; and also a broad blue lane traced on the dull silver of the waters in a parabolic curve described magistrally by an invisible finger for a symbol of endless wandering. The face of the farmhouse might have been the face of a house from which all the inhabitants had fled suddenly. In the high part of the building the window of the lieutenant's room remained open, both glass and shutter. By the door of the *salle* the stable fork leaning against the wall seemed to have been forgotten by the *sans-culotte*. This aspect of abandonment struck Peyrol with more force than usual. He had been thinking so hard of all these people, that to find no one about seemed unnatural and even depressing. He had seen many abandoned places in his life, grass huts, mud forts, kings' palaces — -temples from which every white-robed soul had fled. Temples, however, never looked quite empty. The gods clung to their own. Peyrol's eyes rested on the bench against the wall of the *salle*. In the usual course of things it should have been occupied by the lieutenant who had the habit of sitting there with hardly a movement, for hours, like a spider watching for the coming of a fly. This paralyzing comparison held Peyrol motionless with a twisted mouth and a frown on his brow, before the evoked vision, coloured and precise, of the man more troubling than the reality had ever been.

He came to himself with a start. What sort of occupation was this, 'cr nom de nom, staring at a silly bench with no one on it? Was he going wrong in his head? Or was it that he was getting really old? He had noticed old men losing themselves like that. But he had something to do. First of all he had to go and see what the English sloop in the *Passe* was doing.

While he was making his way towards the lookout on the hill where the inclined pine hung peering over the cliff as if an insatiable curiosity were holding it in that precarious position, Peyrol had another view from above of the farmyard and of the buildings and

was again affected by their deserted appearance. Not a soul, not even an animal seemed to have been left; only on the roofs the pigeons walked with smart elegance. Peyrol hurried on and presently saw the English ship well over on the Porquerolles side with her yards braced tip and her head to the southward. There was a little wind in the Passe, while the dull silver of the open had a darkling rim of rippled water far away to the east in that quarter where, far or near, but mostly out of sight, the British Fleet kept its endless watch. Not a shadow of a spar or gleam of sail on the horizon betrayed its presence; but Peyrol would not have been surprised to see a crowd of ships surge up, people the horizon with hostile life, come in running, and dot the sea with their ordered groups all about Cape Cici, parading their damned impudence. Then indeed that corvette, the big factor of everyday life on that stretch of coast, would become very small potatoes indeed; and the man in command of her (he had been Peyrol's personal adversary in many imaginary encounters fought to a finish in the room upstairs) then indeed that Englishman would have to mind his steps. He would be ordered to come within hail of the Admiral, be sent here and there, made to run like a little dog and as likely as not get called on board the flagship and get a dressing down for something or other.

Peyrol thought for a moment that the impudence of this Englishman was going to take the form of running along the peninsula and looking into the very cove; for the corvette's head was falling off slowly. A fear for his tartane clutched Peyrol's heart till he remembered that the Englishman did not know of her existence. Of course not. His cudgel had been absolutely effective in stopping that bit of information. The only Englishman who knew of the existence of the tartane was that fellow with the broken head. Peyrol actually laughed at his momentary scare. Moreover, it was evident that the Englishman did not mean to parade in front of the peninsula. He did not mean to be impudent. The sloop's yards were swung right round and she came again to the wind but now heading to the northward back from where she came. Peyrol saw at once that the Englishman meant to pass to windward of Cape Esterel, probably with the intention of anchoring for the night off the long white beach which in a regular curve closes the roadstead of Hyres on that side.

Peyrol pictured her to himself, on the clouded night, not so very dark since the fall moon was but a day old, lying at anchor within hail of the low shore, with her sails furled and looking profoundly asleep, but with the watch on deck lying by the guns. He gnashed his teeth. It had come to this at last, that the captain of the Amelia could do nothing with his ship without putting Peyrol into a rage. Oh, for forty Brothers, or sixty, picked ones, he thought, to teach the fellow what it might cost him taking liberties along the French coast! Ships had been carried by surprise before, on nights when there was just light enough to see the whites of each other's eyes in a close tussle. And what would be the crew of that Englishman? Something between ninety and a hundred altogether, boys and landsman included. ... Peyrol shook his fist for a good-bye, just when Cape Esterel shut off the English sloop from his sight. But in his heart of hearts that seaman of cosmopolitan associations knew very well that no

forty or sixty, not any given hundred Brothers of the Coast would have been enough to capture that corvette making herself at home within ten miles of where he had first opened his eyes to the world.

He shook his head dismally at the leaning pine, his only companion. The disinherited soul of that rover ranging for so many years a lawless ocean with the coasts of two continents for a raiding ground, had come back to its crag, circling like a sea-bird in the dusk and longing for a great sea victory for its people: that inland multitude of which Peyrol knew nothing except the few individuals on that peninsula cut off from the rest of the land by the dead water of a salt lagoon; and where only a strain of manliness in a miserable cripple and an unaccountable charm of a half-crazed woman had found response in his heart.

This scheme of false dispatches was but a detail in a plan for a great, a destructive victory. just a detail, but not a trifle all the same. Nothing connected with the deception of an admiral could be called trifling. And such an admiral too. It was, Peyrol felt vaguely, a scheme that only a confounded landsman would invent. It behoved the sailors, however, to make a workable thing of it. It would have to be worked through that corvette.

And here Peyrol was brought up by the question that all his life had not been able to settle for him — - and that was whether the English were really very stupid or very acute. That difficulty had presented itself with every fresh case. The old rover had enough genius in him to have arrived at a general conclusion that if they were to be deceived at all it could not be done very well by words but rather by deeds; not by mere wriggling, but by deep craft concealed under some sort of straightforward action. That conviction, however, did not take him forward in this case, which was one in which much thinking would be necessary.

The Amelia had disappeared behind Cape Esterel, and Peyrol wondered with a certain anxiety whether this meant that the Englishman had given up his man for good. "If he has," said Peyrol to himself, "I am bound to see him pass out again from beyond Cape Esterel before it gets dark." If, however, he did not see the ship again within the next hour or two, then she would be anchored off the beach, to wait for the night before making some attempt to discover what had become of her man. This could be done only by sending out one or two boats to explore the coast, and no doubt to enter the cove — -perhaps even to land a small search party.

After coming to this conclusion Peyrol began deliberately to charge his pipe. Had he spared a moment for a glance inland he might have caught a whisk of a black skirt, the gleam of a white fichu — - Arlette running down the faint track leading from Escampobar to the village in the hollow; the same track in fact up which Citizen Scevola, while indulging in the strange freak to visit the church, had been chased by the incensed faithful. But Peyrol, while charging and lighting his pipe, had kept his eyes fastened on Cape Esterel. Then, throwing his arm affectionately over the trunk of the pine, he had settled himself to watch. Far below him the roadstead, with its play of grey and bright gleams, looked like a plaque of mother-of-pearl in a frame of yellow

rocks and dark green ravines set off inland by the masses of the hills displaying the tint of the finest purple; while above his head the sun, behind a cloud-veil, hung like a silver disc.

That afternoon, after waiting in vain for Lieutenant Ral to appear outside in the usual way, Arlette, the mistress of Escampobar, had gone unwillingly into the kitchen where Catherine sat upright in a heavy capacious wooden armchair, the back of which rose above the top of her white muslin cap. Even in her old age, even in her hours of ease, Catherine preserved the upright carriage of the family that had held Escampobar for so many generations. It would have been easy to believe that, like some characters famous in the world, Catherine would have wished to die standing up and with unbowed shoulders.

With her sense of hearing undecayed she detected the light footsteps in the *salle* long before Arlette entered the kitchen. That woman, who had faced alone and unaided (except for her brother's comprehending silence) the anguish of passion in a forbidden love, and of terrors comparable to those of the judgment Day, neither turned her face, quiet without serenity, nor her eyes, fearless but without fire, in the direction of her niece.

Arlette glanced on all sides, even at the walls, even at the mound of ashes under the big overmantel, nursing in its heart a spark of fire, before she sat down and leaned her elbow on the table.

"You wander about like a soul in pain," said her aunt, sitting by the hearth like an old queen on her throne.

"And you sit here eating your heart out."

"Formerly," remarked Catherine, "old women like me could always go over their prayers, but now . . ."

"I believe you have not been to church for years. I remember Scévola telling me that a long time ago. Was it because you didn't like people's eyes? I have fancied sometimes that most people in the world must have been massacred long ago."

Catherine turned her face away. Arlette rested her head on her half-closed hand, and her eyes, losing their steadiness, began to tremble amongst cruel visions. She got up suddenly and caressed the thin, half-averted, withered cheek with the tips of her fingers, and in a low voice, with that marvellous cadence that plucked at one's heart-strings, she said coaxingly:

"Those were dreams, weren't they?"

In her immobility the old woman called with all the might of her will for the presence of Peyrol. She had never been able to shake off a superstitious fear of that niece restored to her from the terrors of a Judgment Day in which the world had been given over to the devils. She was always afraid that this girl, wandering about with restless eyes and a dim smile on her silent lips, would suddenly say something atrocious, unfit to be heard, calling for vengeance from heaven, unless Peyrol were by. That stranger come from "*par delà les mers*" was out of it altogether, cared probably for no one in the world but had struck her imagination by his massive aspect, his deliberation

suggesting a mighty force like the reposeful attitude of a lion. Arlette desisted from caressing the irresponsive cheek, exclaimed petulantly: "I am awake now!" and went out of the kitchen without having asked her aunt the question she had meant to ask, which was whether she knew what had become of the lieutenant.

Her heart had failed her. She let herself drop on the bench outside the door of the salle. "What is the matter with them all?" she thought. "I can't make them out. What wonder is it that I have not been able to sleep?" Even Peyrol, so different from all mankind, who from the first moment when he stood before her had the power to soothe her aimless unrest, even Peyrol would now sit for hours with the lieutenant on the bench, gazing into the air and keeping him in talk about things without sense, as if on purpose to prevent him from thinking of her. Well, he could not do that. But the enormous change implied in the fact that every day had a to-morrow now, and that all the people around her had ceased to be mere phantoms for her wandering glances to glide over without concern, made her feel the need of support from somebody, from somewhere. She could have cried aloud for it.

She sprang up and walked along the whole front of the farm building. At the end of the wall enclosing the orchard she called out in a modulated undertone: "Eugne," not because she hoped that the lieutenant was anywhere within earshot, but for the pleasure of hearing the sound of the name uttered for once above a whisper. She turned about and at the end of the wall on the yard side she repeated her call, drinking in the sound that came from her lips, "Eugne, Eugne," with a sort of half-exulting despair. It was in such dizzy moments that she wanted a steadying support. But all was still. She heard no friendly murmur, not even a sigh. Above her head under the thin grey sky a big mulberry tree stirred no leaf. Step by step, as if unconsciously, she began to move down the track. At the end of fifty yards she opened the inland view, the roofs of the village between the green tops of the platanes overshadowing the fountain, and just beyond the flat blue-grey level of the salt lagoon, smooth and dull like a slab of lead. But what drew her on was the church-tower, where, in a round arch, she could see the black speck of the bell which escaping the requisitions of the Republican wars, and dwelling mute above the locked-up empty church, had only lately recovered its voice. She ran on, but when she had come near enough to make out the figures moving about the village fountain, she checked herself, hesitated a moment and then took the footpath leading to the presbytery.

She pushed open the little gate with the broken latch. The humble building of rough stones, from between which much mortar had crumbled out, looked as though it had been sinking slowly into the ground. The beds of the plot in front were choked with weeds, because the abb had no taste for gardening. When the heiress of Escampobar opened the door, he was walking up and down the largest room which was his bedroom and sitting room and where he also took his meals. He was a gaunt man with a long, as if convulsed, face. In his young days he had been tutor to the sons of a great noble, but he did not emigrate with his employer. Neither did he submit to the Republic. He had lived in his native land like a hunted wild beast, and there had been many tales of

his activities, warlike and others. When the hierarchy was re-established he found no favour in the eyes of his superiors. He had remained too much of a Royalist. He had accepted, without a word, the charge of this miserable parish, where he had acquired influence quickly enough. His sacerdotalism lay in him like a cold passion. Though accessible enough, he never walked abroad without his breviary, acknowledging the solemnly bared heads by a curt nod. He was not exactly feared, but some of the oldest inhabitants who remembered the previous incumbent, an old man who died in the garden after having been dragged out of bed by some patriots anxious to take him to prison in Hyres, jerked their heads sideways in a knowing manner when their cur was mentioned.

On seeing this apparition in an Arlesian cap and silk skirt, a white fichu, and otherwise as completely different as any princess could be from the rustics with whom he was in daily contact, his face expressed the blankest astonishment. Then — -for he knew enough of the gossip of his community — -his straight, thick eyebrows came together inimically. This was no doubt the woman of whom he had heard his parishioners talk with bated breath as having given herself and her property up to a Jacobin, a Toulon sans-culotte who had either delivered her parents to execution or had murdered them himself during the first three days of massacres. No one was very sure which it was, but the rest was current knowledge. The abb, though persuaded that any amount of moral turpitude was possible in a godless country, had not accepted all that tale literally. No doubt those people were republican and impious, and the state of affairs up there was scandalous and horrible. He struggled with his feelings of repulsion and managed to smooth his brow and waited. He could not imagine what that woman with mature form and a youthful face could want at the presbytery. Suddenly it occurred to him that perhaps she wanted to thank him — -it was a very old occurrence — -for interposing between the fury of the villagers and that man. He couldn't call him, even in his thoughts, her husband, for apart from all other circumstances, that connection could not imply any kind of marriage to a priest, even had there been legal form observed. His visitor was apparently disconcerted by the expression of his face, the austere aloofness of his attitude, and only a low murmur escaped her lips. He bent his head and was not very certain what he had heard.

“You come to seek my aid?” he asked in a doubting tone.

She nodded slightly, and the abb went to the door she had left half open and looked out. There was not a soul in sight between the presbytery and the village, or between the presbytery and the church. He went back to face her, saying:

“We are as alone as we can well be. The old woman in the kitchen is as deaf as a post.”

Now that he had been looking at Arlette closer the abb felt a sort of dread. The carmine of those lips, the pellucid, unstained, unfathomable blackness of those eyes, the pallor of her cheeks, suggested to him something provokingly pagan, something distastefully different from the common sinners of this earth. And now she was ready to speak. He arrested her with a raised hand.

“Wait,” he said. “I have never seen you before. I don’t even know properly who you are. None of you belong to my flock — -for you are from Escampobar. are you not?” Sombre under their bony arches, his eyes fastened on her face, noticed the delicacy of features, the naive pertinacity of her stare. She said:

“I am the daughter.”

“The daughter! . . . Oh! I see . . . Much evil is spoken of you.”

She said a little impatiently: “By that rabble?” and the priest remained mute for a moment. “What do they say? In my father’s time they wouldn’t have dared to say anything. The only thing I saw of them for years and years was when they were yelping like curs on the heels of Scevola.”

The absence of scorn in her tone was perfectly annihilating. Gentle sounds flowed from her lips and a disturbing charm from her strange equanimity. The abb frowned heavily at these fascinations, which seemed to have in them something diabolic.

“They are simple souls, neglected, fallen back into darkness. It isn’t their fault. They have natural feelings of humanity which were outraged. I saved him from their indignation. There are things that must be left to divine justice.”

He was exasperated by the unconsciousness of that fair face.

“That man whose name you have just pronounced and which I have heard coupled with the epithet of ‘blood-drinker’ is regarded as the master of Escampobar Farm. He has been living there for years. How is that?”

“Yes, it is a long time ago since he brought me back to the house. Years ago. Catherine let him stay.”

“Who is Catherine?” the abb asked harshly.

“She is my father’s sister who was left at home to wait. She had given up all hope of seeing any of us again, when one morning Scevola came with me to the door. Then she let him stay. He is a poor creature. What else could Catherine have done? And what is it to us up there how the people in the village regard him?” She dropped her eyes and seemed to fall into deep thought, then added, “It was only later that I discovered that he was a poor creature, even quite lately. They call him blood-drinker, do they? What of that? All the time he was afraid of his own shadow.”

She ceased but did not raise her eyes.

“You are no longer a child,” began the abb in a severe voice, frowning at her down-cast eyes, and he heard a murmur: “Not very long.” He disregarded it and continued: “I ask you, is this all that you have to tell me about that man? I hope that at least you are no hypocrite.”

“Monsieur l’Abb,” she said, raising her eyes fearlessly, “what more am I to tell you about him? I can tell you things that will make your hair stand on end, but it wouldn’t be about him.”

For all answer the abb made a weary gesture and turned away to walk up and down the room. His face expressed neither curiosity nor pity, but a sort of repugnance which he made an effort to overcome. He dropped into a deep and shabby old armchair, the only object of luxury in the room, and pointed to a wooden straight-backed stool.

Arlette sat down on it and began to speak. The abb listened, but looking far away; his big bony hands rested on the arms of the chair. After the first words he interrupted her: "This is your own story you are telling me."

"Yes," said Arlette.

"Is it necessary that I should know?"

"Yes, Monsieur l'Abb."

"But why?"

He bent his head a little, without, however, ceasing to look far away. Her voice now was very low. Suddenly the abb threw himself back.

"You want to tell me your story because you have fallen in love with a man?"

"No, because that has brought me back to myself. Nothing else could have done it."

He turned his head to look at her grimly, but he said nothing and looked away again. He listened. At the beginning he muttered once or twice, "Yes, I have heard that," and then kept silent, not looking at her at all. Once he interrupted her by a question: "You were confirmed before the convent was forcibly entered and the nuns dispersed?"

"Yes," she said, "a year before that or more."

"And then two of those ladies took you with them towards Toulon."

"Yes, the other girls had their relations near by. They took me with them thinking to communicate with my parents, but it was difficult. Then the English came and my parents sailed over to try and get some news of me. It was safe for my father to be in Toulon then. Perhaps you think that he was a traitor to his country?" she asked, and waited with parted lips. With an impassible face the abb murmured: "He was a good Royalist," in a tone of bitter fatalism, which seemed to absolve that man and all the other men of whose actions and errors he had ever heard.

For a long time, Arlette continued, her father could not discover the house where the nuns had taken refuge. He only obtained some information on the very day before the English evacuated Toulon. Late in the day he appeared before her and took her away. The town was full of retreating foreign troops. Her father left her with her mother and went out again to make preparations for sailing home that very night; but the tartane was no longer in the place where he had left her lying. The two Madrague men that he had for a crew had disappeared also. Thus the family was trapped in that town full of tumult and confusion. Ships and houses were bursting into flames. Appalling explosions of gunpowder shook the earth. She spent that night on her knees with her face hidden in her mother's lap, while her father kept watch by the barricaded door with a pistol in each hand.

In the morning the house was filled with savage yells. People were heard rushing up the stairs, and the door was burst in. She jumped up at the crash and flung herself down on her knees in a corner with her face to the wall. There was a murderous uproar, she heard two shots fired, then somebody seized her by the arm and pulled her up to her feet. It was Scevola. He dragged her to the door. The bodies of her father and mother were lying across the doorway. The room was full of gunpowder smoke. She wanted to fling herself on the bodies and cling to them, but Scevola took her under

the arms and lifted her over them. He seized her hand and made her run with him, or rather dragged her downstairs. Outside on the pavement some dreadful men and many fierce women with knives joined them. They ran along the streets brandishing pikes and sabres, pursuing other groups of unarmed people, who fled round corners with loud shrieks.

“I ran in the midst of them, Monsieur l’Abb,” Arlette went on in a breathless murmur. “Whenever I saw any water I wanted to throw myself into it, but I was surrounded on all sides, I was jostled and pushed and most of the time Scevola held my hand very tight. When they stopped at a wine shop, they would offer me some wine. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth and I drank. The wine, the pavements, the arms and faces, everything was red. I had red splashes all over me. I had to run with them all day, and all the time I felt as if I were falling down, and down, and down. The houses were nodding at me. The sun would go out at times. And suddenly I heard myself yelling exactly like the others. Do you understand, Monsieur l’Abb? The very same words!”

The eyes of the priest in their deep orbits glided towards her and then resumed their far-away fixity. Between his fatalism and his faith he was not very far from the belief of Satan taking possession of rebellious mankind, exposing the nakedness of hearts like flint and of the homicidal souls of the Revolution.

“I have heard something of that,” he whispered stealthily.

She affirmed with quiet earnestness: “Yet at that time I resisted with all my might.”

That night Scevola put her under the care of a woman called Perose. She was young and pretty and was a native of Arles, her mother’s country. She kept an inn. That woman locked her up in her own room, which was next to the room where the patriots kept on shouting, singing and making speeches far into the night. Several times the woman would look in for a moment, make a hopeless gesture at her with both arms, and vanish again. Later, on many other nights when all the band lay asleep on benches and on the floor, Perose would steal into the room, fall on her knees by the bed on which Arlette sat upright, open-eyed, and raving silently to herself, embrace her feet and cry herself to sleep. But in the morning she would jump up briskly and say: “Come. The great affair is to keep our life in our bodies. Come along to help in the work of justice”; and they would join the band that was making ready for another day of traitor hunting. But after a time the victims, of which the streets were full at first, had to be sought for in back-yards, ferreted out of their hiding-places, dragged up out of the cellars, or down from the garrets of the houses, which would be entered by the band with howls of death and vengeance.

“Then, Monsieur l’Abb,” said Arlette, “I let myself go at last. I could resist no longer. I said to myself. ‘If it is so then it must be right. But most of the time I was like a person half asleep and dreaming things that it is impossible to believe. About that time, I don’t know why, the woman Perose hinted to me that Scevola was a poor creature. Next night while all the band lay fast asleep in the big room Perose and Scevola helped me out of the window into the street and led me to the quay behind the arsenal. Scevola

had found our tartane lying at the pontoon and one of the Madrague men with her. The other had disappeared. Perose fell on my neck and cried a little. She gave me a kiss and said: "My time will come soon. You, Scevola, don't you show yourself in Toulon, because nobody believes in you any more. Adieu, Arlette. Vive la Nation!" and she vanished in the night. I waited on the pontoon shivering in my torn clothes, listening to Scevola and the man throwing dead bodies overboard out of the tartane. Splash, splash, splash. And suddenly I felt I must run away, but they were after me in a moment, dragged me back and threw me down into that cabin which smelt of blood. But when I got back to the farm all feeling had left me. I did not feel myself exist. I saw things round me here and there, but I couldn't look at anything for long. Something was gone out of me. I know now that it was not my heart, but then I didn't mind what it was. I felt light and empty, and a little cold all the time, but I could smile at people. Nothing could matter. Nothing could mean anything. I cared for no one. I wanted nothing. I wasn't alive at all, Monsieur l'Abb. People seemed to see me and would talk to me, and it seemed funny — -till one day I felt my heart beat."

"Why precisely did you come to me with this tale?" asked the abb in a low voice.

"Because you are a priest. Have you forgotten that I have been brought up in a convent? I have not forgotten how to pray. But I am afraid of the world now. What must I do?"

"Repent!" thundered the abb, getting up. He saw her candid gaze uplifted and lowered his voice forcibly. "You must look with fearless sincerity into the darkness of your soul. Remember whence the only true help can come. Those whom God has visited by a trial such as yours can not be held guiltless of their enormities. Withdraw from the world. Descend within yourself and abandon the vain thoughts of what people call happiness. Be an example to yourself of the sinfulness of our nature and of the weakness of our humanity. You may have been possessed. What do I know? Perhaps it was permitted in order to lead your soul to saintliness through a life of seclusion and prayer. To that it would be my duty to help you. Meantime you must pray to be given strength for a complete renunciation."

Arlette, lowering her eyes slowly, appealed to the abb as a symbolic figure of spiritual mystery. "What can be God's designs on this creature?" he asked himself.

"Monsieur le Cur," she said quietly, "I felt the need to pray to-day for the first time in many years. When I left home it was only to go to your church."

"The church stands open to the worst of sinners," said the abb.

"I know. But I would have had to pass before all those villagers: and you, abb, know well what they are capable of."

"Perhaps," murmured the abb, "it would be better not to put their charity to the test."

"I must pray before I go back again. I thought you would let me come in through the sacristy."

"It would be inhuman to refuse your request," he said, rousing himself and taking down a key that hung on the wall. He put on his broad-brimmed hat and without a

word led the way through the wicket gate and along the path which he always used himself and which was out of sight of the village fountain. After they had entered the damp and dilapidated sacristy he locked the door behind them and only then opened another, a smaller one, leading into the church. When he stood aside, Arlette became aware of the chilly odour as of freshly turned-up earth mingled with a faint scent of incense. In the deep dusk of the nave a single little flame glimmered before an image of the virgin. The abb whispered as she passed on:

“There before the great altar abase yourself and pray for grace and strength and mercy in this world full of crimes against God and men.”

She did not look at him. Through the thin soles of her shoes she could feel the chill of the flagstones. The abb left the door ajar, sat down on a rush-bottomed chair, the only one in the sacristy, folded his arms and let his chin fall on his breast. He seemed to be sleeping profoundly, but at the end of half an hour he got up and, going to the doorway, stood looking at the kneeling figure sunk low on the altar steps. Arlette’s face was buried in her hands in a passion of piety and prayer. The abb waited patiently for a good many minutes more, before he raised his voice in a grave murmur which filled the whole dark place.

“It is time for you to leave. I am going to ring for vespers.”

The view of her complete absorption before the Most High had touched him. He stepped back into the sacristy and after a time heard the faintest possible swish of the black silk skirt of the Escampobar daughter in her Arlesian costume. She entered the sacristy lightly with shining eyes, and the abb looked at her with some emotion.

“You have prayed well, my daughter,” he said. “No forgiveness will be refused to you, for you have suffered much. Put your trust in the grace of God.”

She raised her head and stayed her footsteps for a moment. In the dark little place he could see the gleam of her eyes swimming in tears.

“Yes, Monsieur l’Abb,” she said in her clear seductive voice. “I have prayed and I feel answered. I entreated the merciful God to keep the heart of the man I love always true to me or else to let me die before I set my eyes on him again.”

The abb paled under his tan of a village priest and leaned his shoulders against the wall without a word.

Chapter 11

After leaving the church by the sacristy door Arlette never looked back. The abb saw her flit past the presbytery, and the building hid her from his sight. He did not accuse her of duplicity. He had deceived himself. A heathen. White as her skin was, the blackness of her hair and of her eyes, the dusky red of her lips, suggested a strain of Saracen blood. He gave her up without a sigh.

Arlette walked rapidly towards Escampobar as if she could not get there soon enough; but as she neared the first enclosed field her steps became slower and after hesitating awhile she sat down between two olive trees, near a wall bordered by a growth of thin grass at the foot. "And if I have been possessed," she argued to herself, "as the abb said, what is it to me as I am now? That evil spirit cast my true self out of my body and then cast away the body too. For years I have been living empty. There has been no meaning in anything."

But now her true self had returned matured in its mysterious exile, hopeful and eager for love. She was certain that it had never been far away from that outcast body which Catherine had told her lately was fit for no man's arms. That was all that old woman knew about it, thought Arlette, not in scorn but rather in pity. She knew better, she had gone to heaven for truth in that long prostration with its ardent prayers and its moment of ecstasy before an unlighted altar.

She knew its meaning well, and also the meaning of another — -of a terrestrial revelation which had come to her that day at noon while she waited on the lieutenant. Everybody else was in the kitchen; she and Ral were as much alone together as had ever happened to them in their lives. That day she could not deny herself the delight to be near him, to watch him covertly, to hear him perhaps utter a few words, to experience that strange satisfying consciousness of her own existence which nothing but Ral's presence could give her; a sort of unimpassioned but all-absorbing bliss, warmth, courage, confidence! . . . She backed away from Ral's table, seated herself facing him and cast down her eyes. There was a great stillness in the salle except for the murmur of the voices in the kitchen. She had at first stolen a glance or two and then peeping again through her eyelashes, as it were, she saw his eyes rest on her with a peculiar meaning. This had never happened before. She jumped up, thinking that he wanted something, and while she stood in front of him with her hand resting on the table he stooped suddenly, pressed it to the table with his lips and began kissing it passionately without a sound, endlessly. . . . More startled than surprised at first, then infinitely happy, she was beginning to breathe quickly, when he left off and threw himself back in the chair. She walked away from the table and sat down again to gaze

at him openly, steadily, without a smile. But he was not looking at her. His passionate lips were set hard now and his face had an expression of stern despair. No word passed between them. Brusquely he got up with averted eyes and went outside, leaving the food before him unfinished.

In the usual course of things, on any other day, she would have got up and followed him, for she had always yielded to the fascination that had first roused her faculties. She would have gone out just to pass in front of him once or twice. But this time she had not obeyed what was stronger than fascination, something within herself which at the same time prompted and restrained her. She only raised her arm and looked at her hand. It was true. It had happened. He had kissed it. Formerly she cared not how gloomy he was as long as he remained somewhere where she could look at him — -which she would do at every opportunity with an open and unbridled innocence. But now she knew better than to do that. She had got up, had passed through the kitchen, meeting without embarrassment Catherine's inquisitive glance, and had gone upstairs. When she came down after a time, he was nowhere to be seen, and everybody else too seemed to have gone into hiding; Michel, Peyrol, Scevola . . . But if she had met Scevola she would not have spoken to him. It was now a very long time since she had volunteered a conversation with Scevola. She guessed, however, that Scevola had simply gone to lie down in his lair, a narrow shabby room lighted by one glazed little window high up in the end wall. Catherine had put him in there on the very day he had brought her niece home and he had retained it for his own ever since. She could even picture him to herself in there stretched on his pallet. She was capable of that now. Formerly, for years after her return, people that were out of her sight were out of her mind also. Had they run away and left her she would not have thought of them at all. She would have wandered in and out of the empty house and round the empty fields without giving anybody a thought. Peyrol was the first human being she had noticed for years. Peyrol, since he had come, had always existed for her. And as a matter of fact the rover was generally very much in evidence about the farm. That afternoon, however, even Peyrol was not to be seen. Her uneasiness began to grow, but she felt a strange reluctance to go into the kitchen where she knew her aunt would be sitting in the armchair like a presiding genius of the house taking its rest, and unreadable in her immobility. And yet she felt she must talk about Ral to somebody. This was how the idea of going down to the church had come to her. She would talk of him to the priest and to God. The force of old associations asserted itself. She had been taught to believe that one could tell everything to a priest, and that the omnipotent God who know everything could be prayed to, asked for grace, for strength, for mercy, for protection, for pity. She had done it and felt she had been heard.

Her heart had quietened down while she rested under the wall. Pulling out a long stalk of grass she twined it round her fingers absently. The veil of cloud had thickened over her head, early dusk had descended upon the earth, and she had not found out what had become of Ral. She jumped to her feet wildly. But directly she had done that she felt the need of self-control. It was with her usual light step that she approached

the front of the house and for the first time in her life perceived how barren and sombre it looked when Ral was not about. She slipped in quietly through the door of the main building and ran upstairs. It was dark on the landing. She passed by the door leading into the room occupied by her aunt and herself. It had been her father and mother's bedroom. The other big room was the lieutenant's during his visits to Escampobar. Without even a rustle of her dress, like a shadow, she glided along the passage, turned the handle without noise and went in. After shutting the door behind her she listened. There was no sound in the house. Scevola was either already down in the yard or still lying open-eyed on his tumbled pallet in raging sulks about something. She had once accidentally caught, him at it, down on his face, one eye and cheek of which were buried in the pillow, the other eye glaring savagely, and had been scared away by a thick mutter: "Keep off. Don't approach me." And all this had meant nothing to her then.

Having ascertained that the inside of the house was as still as the grave, Arlette walked across to the window, which when the lieutenant was occupying the room stood always open and with the shutter pushed right back against the wall. It was of course uncurtained, and as she came near to it Arlette caught sight of Peyrol coming down the hill on his return from the lookout. His white head gleamed like silver against the slope of the ground and by and by passed out of her sight, while her ear caught the sound of his footsteps below the window. They passed into the house, but she did not hear him come upstairs. He had gone into the kitchen. To Catherine. They would talk about her and Eugne. But what would they say? She was so new to life that everything appeared dangerous: talk, attitudes, glances. She felt frightened at the mere idea of silence between those two. It was possible. Suppose they didn't say anything to each other. That would be awful.

Yet she remained calm like a sensible person, who knows that rushing about in excitement is not the way to meet unknown dangers. She swept her eyes over the room and saw the lieutenant's valise in a corner. That was really what she had wanted to see. He wasn't gone then. But it didn't tell her, though she opened it, what had become of him. As to his return, she had no doubt whatever about that. He had always returned. She noticed particularly a large packet sewn up in sail-cloth and with three large red seals on the seam. It didn't, however, arrest her thoughts. Those were still hovering about Catherine and Peyrol downstairs. How changed they were. Had they ever thought that she was mad? She became indignant. "How could I have prevented that?" she asked herself with despair. She sat down on the edge of the bed in her usual attitude, her feet crossed, her hands lying in her lap. She felt on one of them the impress of Ral's lips, soothing, reassuring like every certitude, but she was aware of a still remaining confusion in her mind, an indefinite weariness like the strain of an imperfect vision trying to discern shifting outlines, floating shapes, incomprehensible signs. She could not resist the temptation of resting her tired body, just for a little while.

She lay down on the very edge of the bed, the kissed hand tucked under her cheek. The faculty of thinking abandoned her altogether, but she remained open-eyed, wide awake. In that position, without hearing the slightest sound, she saw the door handle move down as far as it would go, perfectly noiseless, as though the lock had been oiled not long before. Her impulse was to leap right out into the middle of the room, but she restrained herself and only swung herself into a sitting posture. The bed had not creaked. She lowered her feet gently to the ground, and by the time when holding her breath she put her ear against the door, the handle had come back into position. She had detected no sound outside. Not the faintest. Nothing. It never occurred to her to doubt her own eyes, but the whole thing had been so noiseless that it could not have disturbed the lightest sleeper. She was sure that had she been lying on her other side, that is with her back to the door, she would have known nothing. It was some time before she walked away from the door and sat on a chair which stood near a heavy and much-carved table, an heirloom more appropriate to a chateau than to a farmhouse. The dust of many months covered its smooth oval surface of dark, finely grained wood.

“It must have been Scevola,” thought Arlette. It could have been no one else. What could he have wanted? She gave herself up to thought, but really she did not care. The absent Ral occupied all her mind. With an unconscious slowness her finger traced in the dust on the table the initials E A and achieved a circle round them. Then she jumped up, unlocked the door and went downstairs. In the kitchen, as she fully expected, she found Scevola with the others. Directly she appeared he got up and ran upstairs, but returned almost immediately looking as if he had seen a ghost, and when Peyrol asked him some insignificant question his lips and even his chin trembled before he could command his voice. He avoided looking anybody in the face. The others too seemed shy of meeting each other’s eyes, and the evening meal of the Escampobar seemed haunted by the absent lieutenant. Peyrol, besides, had his prisoner to think of. His existence presented a most interesting problem, and the proceedings of the English ship were another, closely connected with it and full of dangerous possibilities. Catherine’s black and ungleaming eyes seemed to have sunk deeper in their sockets, but her face wore its habitual severe aloofness of expression. Suddenly Scevola spoke as if in answer to some thought of his own.

“What has lost us was moderation.”

Peyrol swallowed the piece of bread and butter which he had been masticating slowly, and asked:

“What are you alluding to, citizen?”

“I am alluding to the republic,” answered Scevola, in a more assured tone than usual. “Moderation I say. We patriots held our hand too soon. All the children of the ci-devants and all the children of traitors should have been killed together with their fathers and mothers. Contempt for civic virtues and love of tyranny were inborn in them all. They grow up and trample on all the sacred principles. . . . The work of the Terror is undone!”

“What do you propose to do about it?” growled Peyrol. “No use declaiming here or anywhere for that matter. You wouldn’t find anybody to listen to you — -you cannibal,” he added in a good-humoured tone. Arlette, leaning her head on her left hand, was tracing with the forefinger of her right invisible initials on the table-cloth. Catherine, stooping to light a four-beaked oil lamp mounted on a brass pedestal, turned her finely carved face over her shoulder. The sans-culotte jumped up, flinging his arms about. His hair was tousled from his sleepless tumbling on his pallet. The unbuttoned sleeves of his shirt flapped against his thin hairy forearms. He no longer looked as though he had seen a ghost. He opened a wide black mouth, but Peyrol raised his finger at him calmly.

“No, no. The time when your own people up La Boyre way — -don’t they live up there? — -trembled at the idea of you coming to visit them with a lot of patriot scallywags at your back is past. You have nobody at your back; and if you started spouting like this at large, people would rise up and hunt you down like a mad dog.”

Scevola, who had shut his mouth, glanced over his shoulder, and as if impressed by his unsupported state went out of the kitchen, reeling, like a man who had been drinking. He had drunk nothing but water. Peyrol looked thoughtfully at the door which the indignant sans-culotte had slammed after him. During the colloquy between the two men, Arlette had disappeared into the salle. Catherine, straightening her long back, put the oil lamp with its four smoky flames on the table. It lighted her face from below. Peyrol moved it slightly aside before he spoke.

“It was lucky for you,” he said, gazing upwards, “that Scevola hadn’t even one other like himself when he came here.”

“Yes,” she admitted. “I had to face him alone from first to last. But can you see me between him and Arlette? In those days he raved terribly, but he was dazed and tired out. Afterwards I recovered myself and I could argue with him firmly. I used to say to him, ‘Look, she is so young and she has no knowledge of herself. Why, for months the only thing she would say that one could understand was ‘Look how it spurts, look how it splashes!’ He talked to me of his republican virtue. He was not a profligate. He could wait. She was, he said, sacred to him, and things like that. He would walk up and down for hours talking of her and I would sit there listening to him with the key of the room the child was locked in, in my pocket. I temporized, and, as you say yourself, it was perhaps because he had no one at his back that he did not try to kill me, which he might have done any day. I temporized. And after all, why should he want to kill me? He told me more than once he was sure to have Arlette for his own. Many a time he made me shiver explaining why it must be so. She owed her life to him. Oh! that dreadful crazy life. You know he is one of those men that can be patient as far as women are concerned.”

Peyrol nodded understandingly. “Yes, some are like that. That kind is more impatient sometimes to spill blood. Still I think that your life was one long narrow escape, at least till I turned up here.”

"Things had settled down, somehow," murmured Catherine. "But all the same I was glad when you appeared here, a grey-headed man, serious."

"Grey hairs will come to any sort of man," observed Peyrol acidly, "and you did not know me. You don't know anything of me even now."

"There have been Peyrols living less than half a day's journey from here," observed Catherine in a reminiscent tone.

"That's all right," said the rover in such a peculiar tone that she asked him sharply: "What's the matter? Aren't you one of them? Isn't Peyrol your name?"

"I have had many names and this was one of them. So this name and my grey hair pleased you, Catherine? They gave you confidence in me, hein?"

"I wasn't sorry to see you come. Scevola too, I believe. He heard that patriots were being hunted down, here and there, and he was growing quieter every day. You roused the child wonderfully."

"And did that please Scevola too?"

"Before you came she never spoke to anybody unless first spoken to. She didn't seem to care where she was. At the same time," added Catherine after a pause, "she didn't care what happened to her either. Oh, I have had some heavy hours thinking it all over, in the daytime doing my work, and at night while I lay awake, listening to her breathing. And I growing older all the time, and, who knows, with my last hour ready to strike. I often thought that when I felt it coming I would speak to you as I am speaking to you now."

"Oh, you did think," said Peyrol in an undertone. "Because of my grey hairs, I suppose."

"Yes. And because you came from beyond the seas," Catherine said with unbending mien and in an unflinching voice. "Don't you know that the first time Arlette saw you she spoke to you and that it was the first time I heard her speak of her own accord since she had been brought back by that man, and I had to wash her from head to foot before I put her into her mother's bed."

"The first time," repeated Peyrol.

"It was like a miracle happening," said Catherine, "and it was you that had done it."

"Then it must be that some Indian witch has given me the power," muttered Peyrol, so low that Catherine could not hear the words. But she did not seem to care, and presently went on again:

"And the child took to you wonderfully. Some sentiment was aroused in her at last."

"Yes," assented Peyrol grimly. "She did take to me. She learned to talk to — -the old man."

"It's something in you that seems to have opened her mind and unloosed her tongue," said Catherine, speaking with a sort of regal composure down at Peyrol, like a chieftainess of a tribe. "I often used to look from afar at you two talking and wonder what she . . ."

"She talked like a child," struck in Peyrol abruptly. "And so you were going to speak to me before your last hour came. Why, you are not making ready to die yet?"

"Listen, Peyrol. If anybody's last hour is near it isn't mine. You just look about you a little. It was time I spoke to you."

"Why, I am not going to kill anybody," muttered Peyrol. "You are getting strange ideas into your head."

"It is as I said," insisted Catherine without animation. "Death seems to cling to her skirts. She has been running with it madly. Let us keep her feet out of more human blood."

Peyrol, who had let his head fall on his breast, jerked it up suddenly. "What on earth are you talking about?" he cried angrily. "I don't understand you at all."

"You have not seen the state she was in when I got her back into my hands," remarked Catherine. . . . "I suppose you know where the lieutenant is. What made him go off like that? Where did he go to?"

"I know," said Peyrol. "And he may be back to-night."

"You know where he is! And of course you know why he has gone away and why he is coming back," pronounced Catherine in an ominous voice. "Well, you had better tell him that unless he has a pair of eyes at the back of his head he had better not return here — -not return at all; for if he does, nothing can save him from a treacherous blow."

"No man was ever safe from treachery," opined Peyrol after a moment's silence. "I won't pretend not to understand what you mean."

"You heard as well as I what Scevola said just before he went out. The lieutenant is the child of some ci-devant and Arlette of a man they called a traitor to his country. You can see yourself what was in his mind."

"He is a chicken-hearted spouter," said Peyrol contemptuously, but it did not affect Catherine's attitude of an old sibyl risen from the tripod to prophesy calmly atrocious disasters. "It's all his republicanism," commented Peyrol with increased scorn. "He has got a fit of it on."

"No, that's jealousy," said Catherine. "Maybe he has ceased to care for her in all these years. It is a long time since he has left off worrying me. With a creature like that I thought that if I let him be master here . . . But no! I know that after the lieutenant started coming here his awful fancies have come back. He is not sleeping at night. His republicanism is always there. But don't you know, Peyrol, that there may be jealousy without love?"

"You think so," said the rover profoundly. He pondered full of his own experience. "And he has tasted blood too," he muttered after a pause. "You may be right."

"I may be right," repeated Catherine in a slightly indignant tone. "Every time I see Arlette near him I tremble lest it should come to words and to a bad blow. And when they are both out of my sight it is still worse. At this moment I am wondering where they are. They may be together and I daren't raise my voice to call her away for fear of rousing his fury."

“But it’s the lieutenant he is after,” observed Peyrol in a lowered voice. “Well, I can’t stop the lieutenant coming back.”

“Where is she? Where is he?” whispered Catherine in a tone betraying her secret anguish.

Peyrol rose quietly and went into the salle, leaving the door open. Catherine heard the latch of the outer door being lifted cautiously. In a few moments Peyrol returned as quietly as he had gone out.

“I stepped out to look at the weather. The moon is about to rise and the clouds have thinned down. One can see a star here and there.” He lowered his voice considerably. “Arlette is sitting on the bench humming a little song to herself. I really wonder whether she knew I was standing within a few feet of her.”

“She doesn’t want to hear or see anybody except one man,” affirmed Catherine, now in complete control of her voice. “And she was humming a song, did you say? She who would sit for hours without making a sound. And God knows what song it could have been!”

“Yes, there’s a great change in her,” admitted Peyrol with a heavy sigh. “This lieutenant,” he continued after a pause, “has always behaved coldly to her. I noticed him many times turn his face away when he saw her coming towards us. You know what these epaulette-wearers are, Catherine. And then this one has some worm of his own that is gnawing at him. I doubt whether he has ever forgotten that he was a *ci-devant* boy. Yet I do believe that she does not want to see and hear anybody but him. Is it because she has been deranged in her head for so long?”

“No, Peyrol,” said the old woman. “It isn’t that. You want to know how I can tell? For years nothing could make her either laugh or cry. You know that yourself. You have seen her every day. Would you believe that within the last month she has been both crying and laughing on my breast without knowing why?”

“This I don’t understand,” said Peyrol.

“But I do. That lieutenant has got only to whistle to make her run after him. Yes, Peyrol. That is so. She has no fear, no shame, no pride. I myself have been nearly like that.” Her fine brown face seemed to grow more impassive before she went on much lower and as if arguing with herself: “Only I at least was never blood-mad. I was fit for any man’s arms. . . . But then that man is not a priest.”

The last words made Peyrol start. He had almost forgotten that story. He said to himself: “She knows, she has had the experience.”

“Look here, Catherine,” he said decisively, “the lieutenant is coming back. He will be here probably about midnight. But one thing I can tell you: he is not coming back to whistle her away. Oh, no! It is not for her sake that he will come back.”

“Well, if it isn’t for her that he is coming back then it must be because death has beckoned to him,” she announced in a tone of solemn unemotional conviction. “A man who has received a sign from death — -nothing can stop him!”

Peyrol, who had seen death face to face many times, looked at Catherine’s fine brown profile curiously.

"It is a fact," he murmured, "that men who rush out to seek death do not often find it. So one must have a sign? What sort of sign would it be?"

"How is anybody to know?" asked Catherine, staring across the kitchen at the wall. "Even those to whom it is made do not recognize it for what it is. But they obey all the same. I tell you, Peyrol, nothing can stop them. It may be a glance, or a smile, or a shadow on the water, or a thought that passes through the head. For my poor brother and sister-in-law it was the face of their child."

Peyrol folded his arms on his breast and dropped his head. Melancholy was a sentiment to which he was a stranger; for what has melancholy to do with the life of a sea-rover, a Brother of the Coast, a simple, venturesome, precarious life, full of risks and leaving no time for introspection or for that momentary self-forgetfulness which is called gaiety. Sombre fury, fierce merriment, he had known in passing gusts, coming from outside; but never this intimate inward sense of the vanity of all things, that doubt of the power within himself.

"I wonder what the sign for me will be," he thought; and concluded with self-contempt that for him there would be no sign, that he would have to die in his bed like an old yard dog in his kennel. Having reached that depth of despondency, there was nothing more before him but a black gulf into which his consciousness sank like a stone.

The silence which had lasted perhaps a minute after Catherine had finished speaking was traversed suddenly by a clear high voice saying:

"What are you two plotting here?"

Arlette stood in the doorway of the salle. The gleam of light in the whites of her eyes set off her black and penetrating glance. The surprise was complete. The profile of Catherine, who was standing by the table, became if possible harder; a sharp carving of an old prophetess of some desert tribe. Arlette made three steps forward. In Peyrol even extreme astonishment was deliberate. He had been famous for never looking as though he had been caught unprepared. Age had accentuated that trait of a born leader. He only slipped off the edge of the table and said in his deep voice:

"Why, patronne! We haven't said a word to each other for ever so long."

Arlette moved nearer still. "I know," she cried. "It was horrible. I have been watching you two. Scevola came and dumped himself on the bench close to me. He began to talk to me, and so I went away. That man bores me. And here I find you people saying nothing. It's insupportable. What has come to you both? Say, you, Papa Peyrol — don't you like me any more?" Her voice filled the kitchen. Peyrol went to the salle door and shut it. While coming back he was staggered by the brilliance of life within her that seemed to pale the flames of the lamp. He said half in jest:

"I don't know whether I didn't like you better when you were quieter."

"And you would like best to see me still quieter in my grave."

She dazzled him. Vitality streamed out of her eyes, her lips, her whole person, enveloped her like a halo and . . . yes, truly, the faintest possible flush had appeared on her cheeks, played on them faintly rosy like the light of a distant flame on the

snow. She raised her arms up in the air and let her hands fall from on high on Peyrol's shoulders, captured his desperately dodging eyes with her black and compelling glance, put out all her instinctive seduction — - while he felt a growing fierceness in the grip of her fingers.

"No! I can't hold it in! Monsieur Peyrol, Papa Peyrol, old gunner, you horrid sea-wolf, be an angel and tell me where he is."

The rover, whom only that morning the powerful grasp of Lieutenant Ral found as unshakable as a rock, felt all his strength vanish under the hands of that woman. He said thickly:

"He has gone to Toulon. He had to go."

"What for? Speak the truth to me!"

"Truth is not for everybody to know," mumbled Peyrol, with a sinking sensation as though the very ground were going soft under his feet. "On service," he added in a growl.

Her hands slipped suddenly from his big shoulders. "On service?" she repeated. "What service?" Her voice sank and the words "Oh, yes! His service" were hardly heard by Peyrol, who as soon as her hands had left his shoulders felt his strength returning to him and the yielding earth grow firm again under his feet. Right in front of him Arlette, silent, with her arms hanging down before her with entwined fingers, seemed stunned because Lieutenant Ral was not free from all earthly connections, like a visiting angel from heaven depending only on God to whom she had prayed. She had to share him with some service that could order him about. She felt in herself a strength, a power, greater than any service.

"Peyrol," she cried low, "don't break my heart, my new heart, that has just begun to beat. Feel how it beats. Who could bear it?" She seized the rover's thick hairy paw and pressed it hard against her breast. "Tell me when he will be back."

"Listen, patronne, you had better go upstairs," began Peyrol with a great effort and snatching his captured hand away. He staggered backwards a little while Arlette shouted at him:

"You can't order me about as you used to do." In all the changes from entreaty to anger she never struck a false note, so that her emotional outburst had the heart-moving power of inspired art. She turned round with a tempestuous swish to Catherine who had neither stirred nor emitted a sound: "Nothing you two can do will make any difference now." The next moment she was facing Peyrol again. "You frighten me with your white hairs. Come! . . . am I to go on my knees to you? . . . There!"

The rover caught her under the elbows, swung her up clear of the ground, and set her down on her feet as if she had been a child. Directly he had let her go, she stamped her foot at him.

"Are you stupid?" she cried. "Don't you understand that something has happened to-day?"

Through all this scene Peyrol had kept his head as creditably as could have been expected, in the manner of a seaman caught by a white squall in the tropics. But at

those words a dozen thoughts tried to rush together through his mind, in chase of that startling declaration. Something had happened! Where? How? Whom to? What thing? It couldn't be anything between her and the lieutenant. He had, it seemed to him, never lost sight of the lieutenant from the first hour when they met in the morning till he had sent him off to Toulon by an actual push on the shoulder; except while he was having his dinner in the next room with the door open, and for the few minutes spent in talking with Michel in the yard. But that was only a very few minutes, and directly afterwards the first sight of the lieutenant sitting gloomily on the bench like a lonely crow did not suggest either elation or excitement or any emotion connected with a woman. In the face of these difficulties Peyrol's mind became suddenly a blank. "Voyons, patronne," he began, unable to think of anything else to say. "What's all this fuss about? I expect him to be back here about midnight."

He was extremely relieved to notice that she believed him. It was the truth. For indeed he did not know what he could have invented on the spur of the moment that would get her out of the way and induce her to go to bed. She treated him to a sinister frown and a terribly menacing, "If you have lied . . . Oh!"

He produced an indulgent smile. "Compose yourself. He will be here soon after midnight. You may go to sleep with an easy mind."

She turned her back on him contemptuously, and said curtly, "Come along, aunt," and went to the door leading to the passage. There she turned for a moment with her hand on the door handle.

"You are changed. I can't trust either of you. You are not the same people."

She went out. Only then did Catherine detach her gaze from the wall to meet Peyrol's eyes. "Did you hear what she said? We! Changed! It is she herself . . ."

Peyrol nodded twice and there was a long pause, during which even the flames of the lamp did not stir.

"Go after her, Mademoiselle Catherine," he said at last with a shade of sympathy in his tone. She did not move. "Allons — -du courage," he urged her deferentially as it were. "Try to put her to sleep."

Chapter 12

Upright and deliberate, Catherine left the kitchen, and in the passage outside found Arlette waiting for her with a lighted candle in her hand. Her heart was filled with sudden desolation by the beauty of that young face enhaloed in the patch of light, with the profound darkness as of a dungeon for a background. At once her niece led the way upstairs muttering savagely through her pretty teeth: "He thinks I could go to sleep. Old imbecile!"

Peyrol did not take his eyes off Catherine's straight back till the door had closed after her. Only then he relieved himself by letting the air escape through his pursed lips and rolling his eyes freely about. He picked up the lamp by the ring on the top of the central rod and went into the salle, closing behind him the door of the dark kitchen. He stood the lamp on the very table on which Lieutenant Ral had had his midday meal. A small white cloth was still spread on it and there was his chair askew as he had pushed it back when he got up. Another of the many chairs in the salle was turned round conspicuously to face the table. These things made Peyrol remark to himself bitterly: "She sat and stared at him as if he had been gilt all over, with three heads and seven arms on his body" — -a comparison reminiscent of certain idols he had seen in an Indian temple. Though not an iconoclast, Peyrol felt positively sick at the recollection, and hastened to step outside. The great cloud had broken up and the mighty fragments were moving to the westward in stately flight before the rising moon. Scevola, who had been lying extended full length on the bench, swung himself up suddenly, very upright.

"Had a little nap in the open?" asked Peyrol, letting his eyes roam through the luminous space under the departing rearguard of the clouds jostling each other up there.

"I did not sleep," said the sans-culotte. "I haven't closed my eyes-not for one moment."

"That must be because you weren't sleepy," suggested the deliberate Peyrol, whose thoughts were far away with the English ship. His mental eye contemplated her black image against the white beach of the Salins describing a sparkling curve under the moon, and meantime he went on slowly: "For it could not have been noise that kept you awake." On the level of Escampobar the shadows lay long on the ground while the side of the lookout hill remained yet black but edged with an increasing brightness. And the amenity of the stillness was such that if softened for a moment Peyrol's hard inward attitude towards all mankind, including even the captain of the English ship. The old rover savoured a moment of serenity in the midst of his cares.

"This is an accursed spot," declared Scevola suddenly.

Peyrol, without turning his head, looked at him sideways. Though he had sprung up from his reclining posture smartly enough, the citizen had gone slack all over and was sitting all in a heap. His shoulders were hunched up, his hands reposed on his knees. With his staring eyes he resembled a sick child in the moonlight.

"It's the very spot for hatching treacheries. One feels steeped in them up to the neck."

He shuddered and yawned a long irresistible nervous yawn with the gleam of unexpected long canines in a retracted, gaping mouth giving away the restless panther lurking in the man.

"Oh, yes, there's treachery about right enough. You couldn't conceive that, citizen?"

"Of course I couldn't," assented Peyrol with serene contempt. "What is this treachery that you are concocting?" he added carelessly, in a social way, while enjoying the charm of a moonlit evening. Scevola, who did not expect that turn, managed, however, to produce a rattling sort of laugh almost at once.

"That's a good one. Ha! ha! ha! . . . Me! . . . concocting! . . . Why me?"

"Well," said Peyrol carelessly, "there are not many of us to carry out treacheries about here. The women are gone upstairs; Michel is down at the tartane. There's me, and you would not dare suspect me of treachery. Well, there remains only you."

Scevola roused himself. "This is not much of a jest," he said. "I have been a treason-hunter. I . . ."

He checked that strain. He was full of purely emotional suspicions. Peyrol was talking like this only to annoy him and to get him out of the way; but in the particular state of his feelings Scevola was acutely aware of every syllable of these offensive remarks. "Aha," he thought to himself, "he doesn't mention the lieutenant." This omission seemed to the patriot of immense importance. If Peyrol had not mentioned the lieutenant it was because those two had been plotting some treachery together, all the afternoon on board that tartane. That's why nothing had been seen of them for the best part of the day. As a matter of fact, Scevola too had observed Peyrol returning to the farm in the evening, only he had observed him from another window than Arlette. This was a few minutes before his attempt to open the lieutenant's door, in order to find out whether Ral was in his room. He had tiptoed away, uncertain, and going into the kitchen had found only Catherine and Peyrol there. Directly Arlette joined them a sudden inspiration made him run upstairs and try the door again. It was open now! A clear proof that it was Arlette who had been locked up in there. The discovery that she made herself at home like this in the lieutenant's room gave Scevola such a sickening shock that he thought he would die of it. It was beyond doubt now that the lieutenant had been conspiring with Peyrol down on board that tartane; for what else could they have been doing there? "But why had not Ral come up in the evening with Peyrol?" Scevola asked himself, sitting on the bench with his hands clasped between his knees. . . . It's their cunning," he concluded suddenly. "Conspirators always avoid being seen together. Ha!"

It was as if somebody had let off a lot of fireworks in his brain. He was illuminated, dazzled, confused, with a hissing in his ears and showers of sparks before him. Peyrol had vanished. Scevola seemed to remember that he had heard somebody pronounce the word "good-night" and the door of the salle slam. And sure enough the door of the salle was shut now. A dim light shone in the window that was next to it. Peyrol had extinguished three of the lamp flames and was now reclining on one of the long tables with that faculty of accommodating himself to a plank an old sea-dog never loses. He had decided to remain below simply to be handy, and he didn't lie down on one of the benches along the wall because they were too narrow. He left one wick burning, so that the lieutenant should know where to look for him, and he was tired enough to think that he would snatch a couple of hours' sleep before Ral could return from Toulon. He settled himself with one arm under his head as if he were on the deck of a privateer, and it never occurred to him that Scevola was looking through the panes; but they were so small and dusty that the patriot could see nothing. His movement had been purely instinctive. He wasn't even aware that he had looked in. He went away from there, walked to the end of the building, spun round and walked back again to the other end; and it was as if he had been afraid of going beyond the wall against which he reeled sometimes. "Conspiracy, conspiracy," he thought. He was now absolutely certain that the lieutenant was still hiding in that tartane, and was only waiting till all was quiet to sneak back to his room in which Scevola had proof positive that Arlette was in the habit of making herself at home. To rob him of his right to Arlette was part of the conspiracy no doubt.

"Have I been a slave to those two women, have I waited all those years, only to see that corrupt creature go off infamously with a *ci-devant*, with a conspiring aristocrat?"

He became giddy with virtuous fury. There was enough evidence there for any revolutionary tribunal to cut all their heads off. Tribunal! There was no tribunal! No revolutionary justice! No patriots! He hit his shoulder against the wall in his distress with such force that he rebounded. This world was no place for patriots.

"If I had betrayed myself in the kitchen they would have murdered me in there."

As it was he thought that he had said too much. Too much. "Prudence! Caution!" he repeated to himself, gesticulating with both arms. Suddenly he stumbled and there was an amazing metallic clatter made by something that fell at his feet.

"They are trying to kill me now," he thought, shaking with fright. He gave himself up for dead. Profound silence reigned all round. Nothing more happened. He stooped fearfully to look and recognized his own stable fork lying on the ground. He remembered he had left it at noon leaning against the wall. His own foot had made it fall. He threw himself upon it greedily. "Here's what I need," he muttered feverishly. "I suppose that by now the lieutenant would think I am gone to bed."

He flattened himself upright against the wall with the fork held along his body like a grounded musket. The moon clearing the hill-top flooded suddenly the front of the house with its cold light, but he didn't know it; he imagined himself still to be

ambushed in the shadow and remained motionless, glaring at the path leading towards the cove. His teeth chattered with savage impatience.

He was so plainly visible in his death-like rigidity that Michel, coming up out of the ravine, stopped dead short, believing him an apparition not belonging to this earth. Scevola, on his side, noticed the moving shadow cast by a man — -that man! — -and charged forward without reflection, the prongs of the fork lowered like a bayonet. He didn't shout. He came straight on, growling like a dog, and lunged headlong with his weapon.

Michel, a primitive, untroubled by anything so uncertain as intelligence, executed an instantaneous sideways leap with the precision of a wild animal; but he was enough of a man to become afterwards paralyzed with astonishment. The impetus of the rush carried Scevola several yards down the hill, before he could turn round and assume an offensive attitude. Then the two adversaries recognized each other. The terrorist exclaimed: "Michel?" and Michel hastened to pick up a large stone from the ground.

"Hey, you, Scevola," he cried, not very loud but very threatening. "What are these tricks? . . . Keep away, or I will heave that piece of rock at your head, and I am good at that."

Scevola grounded the fork with a thud. "I didn't recognize you," he said.

"That's a story. Who did you think I was? Not the other! I haven't got a bandaged head, have I?"

Scevola began to scramble up. "What's this?" he asked. "What head, did you say?"

"I say that if you come near I will knock you over with that stone," answered Michel. "You aren't to be trusted when the moon is full. Not recognize! There's a silly excuse for flying at people like this. You haven't got anything against me, have you?"

"No," said the ex-terrorist in a dubious tone and keeping a watchful eye on Michel, who was still holding the stone in his hand.

"People have been saying for years that you are a kind of lunatic," Michel criticized fearlessly, because the other's discomfiture was evident enough to put heart into the timid hare. "If a fellow cannot come up now to get a snooze in the shed without being run at with a fork, well . . ."

"I was only going to put this fork away," Scevola burst out volubly. "I had left it leaning against the wall, and as I was passing along I suddenly saw it, so I thought I would put it in the stable before I went to bed. That's all."

Michel's mouth fell open a bit.

"Now what do you think I would want with a stable fork at this time of night, if it wasn't to put it away?" argued Scevola.

"What indeed!" mumbled Michel, who began to doubt the evidence of his senses.

"You go about mooning like a fool and imagine a lot of silly things, you great, stupid imbecile. All I wanted to do was to ask whether everything was all right down there, and you, idiot, bound to one side like a goat and pick up a stone. The moon has affected your head, not mine. Now drop it."

Michel, accustomed to do what he was told, opened his fingers slowly, not quite convinced but thinking there might be something in it. Scevola, perceiving his advantage, scolded on:

“You are dangerous. You ought to have your feet and hands tied every full moon. What did you say about a head just now? What head?”

“I said that I didn’t have a broken head.”

“Was that all?” said Scevola. He was asking himself what on earth could have happened down there during the afternoon to cause a broken head. Clearly, it must have been either a fight or an accident, but in any case he considered that it was for him a favourable circumstance, for obviously a man with a bandaged head is at a disadvantage. He was inclined to think it must have been some silly accident, and he regretted profoundly that the lieutenant had not killed himself outright. He turned sourly to Michel.

“Now you may go into the shed. And don’t try any of your tricks with me any more, because next time you pick up a stone I will shoot you like a dog.”

He began to move towards the yard gate which stood always open, throwing over his shoulder an order to Michel: “Go into the *salle*. Somebody has left a light in there. They all seem to have gone crazy to-day. Take the lamp into the kitchen and put it out and see that the door into the yard is shut. I am going to bed.” He passed through the gateway, but he did not penetrate into the yard very far. He stopped to watch Michel obeying the order. Scevola, advancing his head cautiously beyond the pillar of the gate, waited till he had seen Michel open the door of the *salle* and then bounded out again across the level space and down the ravine path. It was a matter of less than a minute. His fork was still on his shoulder. His only desire was not to be interfered with, and for the rest he did not care what they all did, what they would think and how they would behave. The fixed idea had taken complete possession of him. He had no plan, but he had a principle on which to act; and that was to get at the lieutenant unawares, and if the fellow died without knowing what hand had struck him, so much the better. Scevola was going to act in the cause of virtue and justice. It was not to be a matter of personal contest at all. Meantime, Michel, having gone into the *salle*, had discovered Peyrol fast asleep on a table. Though his reverence for Peyrol was unbounded, his simplicity was such that he shook his master by the shoulder as he would have done any common mortal. The rover passed from a state of inertia into a sitting posture so quickly that Michel stepped back a pace and waited to be addressed. But as Peyrol only stared at him, Michel took the initiative in a concise phrase:

“He’s at it!”

Peyrol did not seem completely awake: “What is it you mean?” he asked.

“He is making motions to escape.”

Peyrol was wide awake now. He even swung his feet off the table.

“Is he? Haven’t you locked the cabin door?”

Michel, very frightened, explained that he had never been told to do that.

“No?” remarked Peyrol placidly. “I must have forgotten.” But Michel remained agitated and murmured: “He is escaping.”

“That’s all right,” said Peyrol. “What are you fussing about? How far can he escape, do you think?”

A slow grin appeared on Michel’s face. “If he tries to scramble over the top of the rocks, he will get a broken neck in a very short time,” he said. “And he certainly won’t get very far, that’s a fact.”

“Well — -you see,” said Peyrol.

“And he doesn’t seem strong either. He crawled out of the cabin door and got as far as the little water cask and he dipped and dipped into it. It must be half empty by now. After that he got on to his legs. I cleared out ashore directly I heard him move,” he went on in a tone of intense self-approval. “I hid myself behind a rock and watched him.;;

“Quite right,” observed Peyrol. After that word of commendation, Michel’s face wore a constant grin.

“He sat on the after-deck,” he went on as if relating an immense joke, “with his feet dangling down the hold, and may the devil take me if I don’t think he had a nap with his back against the cask. He was nodding and catching himself up, with that big white head of his. Well, I got tired of watching that, and as you told me to keep out of his way, I thought I would come up here and sleep in the shed. That was right, wasn’t it?”

“Quite right,” repeated Peyrol. “Well, you go now into the shed. And so you left him sitting on the after-deck?”

“Yes,” said Michel. “But he was rousing himself. I hadn’t got away more than ten yards when I heard an awful thump on board. I think he tried to get up and fell down the hold.”

“Fell down the hold?” repeated Peyrol sharply.

“Yes, notre matre. I thought at first I would go back and see, but you had warned me against him, hadn’t you? And I really think that nothing can kill him.”

Peyrol got down from the table with an air of concern which would have astonished Michel, if he had not been utterly incapable of observing things.

“This must be seen to,” murmured the rover, buttoning the waistband of his trousers. “My cudgel there, in the corner. Now you go to the shed. What the devil are you doing at the door? Don’t you know the way to the shed?” This last observation was caused by Michel remaining in the doorway of the salle with his head out and looking to right and left along the front of the house. “What’s come to you? You don’t suppose he has been able to follow you so quick as this up here?”

“Oh no, notre matre, quite impossible. I saw that sacr Scevola promenading up and down here. I don’t want to meet him again.”

“Was he promenading outside?” asked Peyrol, with annoyance. “Well, what do you think he can do to you? What notions have you got in your silly head? You are getting worse and worse. Out you go.”

Peyrol extinguished the lamp and, going out, closed the door without the slightest noise. The intelligence about Scevola being on the move did not please him very much, but he reflected that probably the sans-culotte had fallen asleep again and after waking up was on his way to bed when Michel caught sight of him. He had his own view of the patriot's psychology and did not think the women were in any danger. Nevertheless he went to the shed and heard the rustling of straw as Michel settled himself for the night.

"Debout," he cried low. "Sh, don't make any noise. I want you to go into the house and sleep at the bottom of the stairs. If you hear voices, go up, and if you see Scevola about, knock him down. You aren't afraid of him, are you?"

"No, if you tell me not to be," said Michel, who, picking up his shoes, a present from Peyrol, walked barefoot towards the house. The rover watched him slipping noiselessly through the salle door. Having thus, so to speak, guarded his base, Peyrol proceeded down the ravine with a very deliberate caution. When he got as far as the little hollow in the ground from which the mastheads of the tartane could be seen, he squatted and waited. He didn't know what his prisoner had done or was doing and he did not want to blunder into the way of his escape. The day-old moon was high enough to have shortened the shadows almost to nothing and all the rocks were inundated by a yellow sheen, while the bushes by contrast looked very black. Peyrol reflected that he was not very well concealed. The continued silence impressed him in the end. "He has got away," he thought. Yet he was not sure. Nobody could be sure. He reckoned it was about an hour since Michel had left the tartane; time enough for a man, even on all fours, to crawl down to the shore of the cove. Peyrol wished he had not hit so hard. His object could have been attained with half the force. On the other hand all the proceedings of his prisoner, as reported by Michel, seemed quite rational. Naturally the fellow was badly shaken. Peyrol felt as though he wanted to go on board and give him some encouragement, and even active assistance.

The report of a gun from seaward cut his breath short as he lay there meditating. Within a minute there was a second report, sending another wave of deep sound among the crags and hills of the peninsula. The ensuing silence was so profound that it seemed to extend to the very inside of Peyrol's head, and lull all his thoughts for a moment. But he had understood. He said to himself that after this his prisoner, if he had life enough left in him to stir a limb, would rather die than not try to make his way to the seashore. The ship was calling to her man.

In fact those two guns had proceeded from the Amelia. After passing beyond Cape Esterel, Captain Vincent dropped an anchor under foot off the beach just as Peyrol had surmised he would do. From about six o'clock till nine the Amelia lay there with her unfurled sails hanging in the gear. Just before the moon rose the captain came up on deck and after a short conference with his first lieutenant, directed the master to get the ship under way and put her head again for the Petite Passe. Then he went below, and presently word was passed on deck that the captain wanted Mr. Bolt. When the master's mate appeared in his cabin, Captain Vincent motioned him to a chair.

“I don’t think I ought to have listened to you,” he said. “Still, the idea was fascinating, but how it would strike other people it is hard to say. The losing of our man is the worst feature. I have an idea that we might recover him. He may have been captured by the peasants or have met with an accident. It’s unbearable to think of him lying at the foot of some rock with a broken leg. I have ordered the first and second cutters to be manned, and I propose that you should take command of them, enter the cove and, if necessary, advance a little inland to investigate. As far as we know there have never been any troops on that peninsula. The first thing you will do is to examine the coast.”

He talked for some time, giving more minute instructions, and then went on deck. The Amelia, with the two cutters towing alongside, reached about half-way down the Passe and then the boats were ordered to proceed. just before they shoved off, two guns were fired in quick succession.

“Like this, Bolt,” explained Captain Vincent, “Symons will guess that we are looking for him; and if he is hiding anywhere near the shore he will be sure to come down where he can be seen by you.”

Chapter 13

The motive force of a fixed idea is very great. In the case of Scevola it was great enough to launch him down the slope and to rob him for the moment of all caution. He bounded amongst the boulders, using the handle of the stable fork for a staff. He paid no regard to the nature of the ground, till he got a fall and found himself sprawling on his face, while the stable fork went clattering down until it was stopped by a bush. It was this circumstance which saved Peyrol's prisoner from being caught unawares. Since he had got out of the little cabin, simply because after coming to himself he had perceived it was open, Symons had been greatly refreshed by long drinks of cold water and by his little nap in the fresh air. Every moment he was feeling in better command of his limbs. As to the command of his thoughts, that was coming to him too rather quickly. The advantage of having a very thick skull became evident in the fact that as soon as he had dragged himself out of that cabin he knew where he was. The next thing he did was to look at the moon, to judge of the passage of time. Then he gave way to an immense surprise at the fact of being alone aboard the tartane. As he sat with his legs dangling into the open hold he tried to guess how it came about that the cabin had been left unlocked and unguarded.

He went on thinking about this unexpected situation. What could have become of that white-headed villain? Was he dodging about somewhere watching for a chance to give him another tap on the head? Symons felt suddenly very unsafe sitting there on the after-deck in the full light of the moon. Instinct rather than reason suggested to him that he ought to get down into the dark hold. It seemed a great undertaking at first, but once he started he accomplished it with the greatest ease, though he could not avoid knocking down a small spar which was leaning up against the deck. It preceded him into the hold with a loud crash which gave poor Symons an attack of palpitation of the heart. He sat on the keelson of the tartane and gasped, but after a while reflected that all this did not matter. His head felt very big, his neck was very painful and one shoulder was certainly very stiff. He could never stand up against that old ruffian. But what had become of him? Why! He had gone to fetch the soldiers! After that conclusion Symons became more composed. He began to try to remember things. When he had last seen that old fellow it was daylight, and now-Symons looked up at the moon again — -it must be near six bells in the first watch. No doubt the old scoundrel was sitting in a wine shop drinking with the soldiers. They would be here soon enough! The idea of being a prisoner of war made his heart sink a little. His ship appeared to him invested with an extraordinary number of lovable features which included Captain Vincent and the first lieutenant. He would have been glad to shake

hands even with the corporal, a surly and malicious marine acting as master-at-arms of the ship. "I wonder where she is now," he thought dismally, feeling his distaste for captivity grow with the increase of his strength.

It was at this moment that he heard the noise of Scevola's fall. It was pretty close; but afterwards he heard no voices and footsteps heralding the approach of a body of men. If this was the old ruffian coming back, then he was coming back alone. At once Symons started on all fours for the fore-end of the tartane. He had an idea that ensconced under the fore-deck he would be in a better position to parley with the enemy and that perhaps he could find there a handspike or some piece of iron to defend himself with. Just as he had settled himself in his hiding-place Scevola stepped from the shore on to the after-deck.

At the very first glance Symons perceived that this one was very unlike the man he expected to see. He felt rather disappointed. As Scevola stood still in full moonlight Symons congratulated himself on having taken up a position under the fore-deck. That fellow, who had a beard, was like a sparrow in body compared with the other; but he was armed dangerously with something that looked to Symons like either a trident or fishgrains on a staff. "A devil of a weapon that," he thought, appalled. And what on earth did that beggar want on board? What could he be after?

The new-comer acted strangely at first. He stood stock-still, craning his neck here and there, peering along the whole length of the tartane, then crossing the deck he repeated all those performances on the other side. "He has noticed that the cabin door is open. He's trying to see where I've got to. He will be coming forward to look for me," said Symons to himself. "If he corners me here with that beastly pronged affair I am done for." For a moment he debated within himself whether it wouldn't be better to make a dash for it and scramble ashore; but in the end he mistrusted his strength. "He would run me down for sure," he concluded. "And he means no good, that's certain. No man would go about at night with a confounded thing like that if he didn't mean to do for somebody."

Scevola, after keeping perfectly still, straining his ears for any sound from below where he supposed Lieutenant Ral to be, stooped down to the cabin scuttle and called in a low voice: "Are you there, lieutenant?" Symons saw these motions and could not imagine their purport. That excellent able seaman of proved courage in many cutting-out expeditions broke into a slight perspiration. In the light of the moon the prongs of the fork polished by much use shone like silver, and the whole aspect of the stranger was weird and dangerous in the extreme. Whom could that man be after but him, himself?

Scevola, receiving no answer, remained in a stooping position. He could not detect the slightest sound of breathing down there. He remained in this position so long that Symons became quite interested. "He must think I am still down there," he whispered to himself. The next proceeding was quite astonishing. The man, taking up a position on one side of the cuddy scuttle and holding his horrid weapon as one would a boarding pike, uttered a terrific whoop and went on yelling in French with such volubility that he

quite frightened Symons. Suddenly he left off, moved away from the scuttle and looked at a loss what to do next. Anybody who could have seen then Symons protruded head with his face turned aft would have seen on it an expression of horror, "The cunning beast," he thought. "If I had been down there, with the row he made I would have surely rushed on deck and then he would have had me." Symons experienced the feeling of a very narrow escape; yet it brought not much relief. It was simply a matter of time. The fellow's homicidal purpose was evident. He was bound before long to come forward. Symons saw him move, and thought, "Now he's coming," and prepared himself for a dash. "If I can dodge past those blamed prongs I might be able to take him by the throat," he reflected, without, however, feeling much confidence in himself.

But to his great relief Scevola's purpose was simply to conceal the fork in the hold in such a manner that the handle of it just reached the edge of the after-deck. In that position it was of course invisible to anybody coming from the shore. Scevola had made up his mind that the lieutenant was out of the tartane. He had wandered away along the shore and would probably be back in a moment. Meantime it had occurred to him to see if he could discover anything compromising in the cabin. He did not take the fork down with him because in that confined space it would have been useless and rather a source of embarrassment than otherwise, should the returning lieutenant find him there. He cast a circular glance around the basin and then prepared to go down.

Every movement of his was watched by Symons. He guessed Scevola's purpose by his movements and said to himself: "Here's my only chance, and not a second to be lost either." Directly Scevola turned his back on the forepart of the tartane in order to go down the little cabin ladder, Symons crawled out from his concealment. He ran along the hold on all fours for fear the other should turn his head round before disappearing below, but directly he judged that the man had touched bottom, he stood on his feet and catching hold of the main rigging swung himself on the after-deck and, as it were in the same movement, flung himself on the doors of the cabin which came together with a crash. How he could secure them he had not thought, but as a matter of fact he saw the padlock hanging on a staple on one side; the key was in it, and it was a matter of a fraction of a second to secure the doors effectually.

Almost simultaneously with the crash of the cabin door there was a shrill exclamation of surprise down there, and just as Symons had turned the key the man he had trapped made an effort to break out. That, however, did not disturb Symons. He knew the strength of that door. His first action was to get possession of the stable fork. At once he felt himself a match for any single man or even two men unless they had fire-arms. He had no hope, however, of being able to resist the soldiers and really had no intention of doing so. He expected to see them appear at any moment led by that confounded mariner. As to what the farmer man had come for on board the tartane he had not the slightest doubt about it. Not being troubled by too much imagination, it seemed to him obvious that it was to kill an Englishman and for nothing else. "Well, I am jiggered," he exclaimed mentally. "The damned savage! I haven't done anything to him. They must be a murderous lot hereabouts." He looked anxiously up the slope.

He would have welcomed the arrival of soldiers. He wanted more than ever to be made a proper prisoner, but a profound stillness reigned on the shore and a most absolute silence down below in the cabin. Absolute. No word, no movement. The silence of the grave. "He's scared to death," thought Symons, hitting in his simplicity on the exact truth. "It would serve him jolly well right if I went down there and ran him through with that thing. I would do it for a shilling, too." He was getting angry. It occurred to him also that there was some wine down there too. He discovered he was very thirsty and he felt rather faint. He sat down on the little skylight to think the matter over while awaiting the soldiers. He even gave a friendly thought to Peyrol himself. He was quite aware that he could have gone ashore and hidden himself for a time, but that meant in the end being hunted among the rocks and, certainly, captured; with the additional risk of getting a musket ball through his body.

The first gun of the *Amelia* lifted him to his feet as though he had been snatched up by the hair of his head. He intended to give a resounding cheer, but produced only a feeble gurgle in his throat. His ship was talking to him. They hadn't given him up. At the second report he scrambled ashore with the agility of a cat — in fact, with so much agility that he had a fit of giddiness. After it passed off he returned deliberately to the tartane to get hold of the stable fork. Then trembling with emotion, he staggered off quietly and resolutely with the only purpose of getting down to the seashore. He knew that as long as he kept downhill he would be all right. The ground in this part being a smooth rocky surface and Symons being barefooted, he passed at no great distance from Peyrol without being heard. When he got on rough ground he used the stable fork for a staff. Slowly as he moved he was not really strong enough to be sure-footed. Ten minutes later or so Peyrol, lying ensconced behind a bush, heard the noise of a rolling stone far away in the direction of the cove. Instantly the patient Peyrol got on his feet and started towards the cove himself. Perhaps he would have smiled if the importance and gravity of the affair in which he was engaged had not given all his thoughts a serious cast. Pursuing a higher path than the one followed by Symons, he had presently the satisfaction of seeing the fugitive, made very noticeable by the white bandages about his head, engaged in the last part of the steep descent. No nurse could have watched with more anxiety the adventure of a little boy than Peyrol the progress of his former prisoner. He was very glad to perceive that he had had the sense to take what looked like the tartane's boathook to help himself with. As Symons' figure sank lower and lower in his descent Peyrol moved on, step by step, till at last he saw him from above sitting down on the seashore, looking very forlorn and lonely, with his bandaged head between his hands. Instantly Peyrol sat down too, protected by a projecting rock. And it is safe to say that with that there came a complete cessation of all sound and movement on the lonely head of the peninsula for a full half hour.

Peyrol was not in doubt as to what was going to happen. He was as certain that the corvette's boat or boats were now on the way to the cove as though he had seen them leave the side of the *Amelia*. But he began to get a little impatient. He wanted to see the end of this episode. Most of the time he was watching Symons. "Sacre tte

ture," he thought. "He has gone to sleep." Indeed Symons immobility was so complete that he might have been dead from his exertions: only Peyrol had a conviction that his once youthful chum was not the sort of person that dies easily. The part of the cove he had reached was all right for Peyrol's purpose. But it would have been quite easy for a boat or boats to fail to notice Symons, and the consequence of that would be that the English would probably land in several parties for a search, discover the tartane. Peyrol shuddered.

Suddenly he made out a boat just clear of the eastern point of the cove. Mr. Bolt had been hugging the coast and progressing very slowly, according to his instructions, till he had reached the edge of the point's shadow where it lay ragged and black on the moonlit water. Peyrol could see the oars rise and fall. Then another boat glided into view. Peyrol's alarm for his tartane grew intolerable. "Wake up, animal, wake up," he mumbled through his teeth. Slowly they glided on, and the first cutter was on the point of passing by the man on the shore when Peyrol was relieved by the hail of "Boat ahoy" reaching him faintly where he knelt leaning forward, an absorbed spectator.

He saw the boat heading for Symons, who was standing up now and making desperate signs with both arms. Then he saw him dragged in over the bows, the boat back out, and then both of them tossed oars and floated side by side on the sparkling water of the cove.

Peyrol got up from his knees. They had their man now. But perhaps they would persist in landing since there must have been some other purpose at first in the mind of the captain of the English corvette. This suspense did not last long. Peyrol saw the oars fall in the water, and in a very few minutes the boats, pulling round, disappeared one after another behind the eastern point of the cove.

"That's done," muttered Peyrol to himself. "I will never see the silly hard-head again." He had a strange notion that those English boats had carried off something belonging to him, not a man but a part of his own life, the sensation of a regained touch with the far-off days in the Indian Ocean. He walked down quickly as if to examine the spot from which Testa Dura had left the soil of France. He was in a hurry now to get back to the farmhouse and meet Lieutenant Ral, who would be due back from Toulon. The way by the cove was as short as any other. When he got down he surveyed the empty shore and wondered at a feeling of emptiness within himself. While walking up towards the foot of the ravine he saw an object lying on the ground. It was a stable fork. He stood over it asking himself, "How on earth did this thing come here?" as though he had been too surprised to pick it up. Even after he had done so he remained motionless, meditating on it. He connected it with some activity of Scevola, since he was the man to whom it belonged, but that was no sort of explanation of its presence on that spot, unless . . .

"Could he have drowned himself?" thought Peyrol, looking at the smooth and luminous water of the cove. It could give him no answer. Then at arm's length he contemplated his find. At last he shook his head, shouldered the fork, and with slow steps continued on his way.

Chapter 14

The midnight meeting of Lieutenant Ral and Peyrol was perfectly silent. Peyrol, sitting on the bench outside the salle, had heard the footsteps coming up the Madrague track long before the lieutenant became visible. But he did not move. He did not even look at him. The lieutenant, unbuckling his sword-belt, sat down without uttering a word. The moon, the only witness of the meeting, seemed to shine on two friends so identical in thought and feeling that they could commune with each other without words. It was Peyrol who spoke first.

“You are up to time.”

“I had the deuce of a job to hunt up the people and get the certificate stamped. Everything was shut up. The Port-Admiral was giving a dinner-party, but he came out to speak to me when I sent in my name. And all the time, do you know, gunner, I was wondering whether I would ever see you again in my life. Even after I had the certificate, such as it is, in my pocket, I wondered whether I would.”

“What the devil did you think was going to happen to me?” growled Peyrol perfunctorily. He had thrown the incomprehensible stable fork under the narrow bench, and with his feet drawn in he could feel it there, lying against the wall.

“No, the question with me was whether I would ever come here again.”

Ral drew a folded paper from his pocket and dropped it on the bench. Peyrol picked it up carelessly. That thing was meant only to throw dust into Englishmen’s eyes. The lieutenant, after a moment’s silence, went on with the sincerity of a man who suffered too much to keep his trouble to himself.

“I had a hard struggle.”

“That was too late,” said Peyrol, very positively. “You had to come back here for very shame; and now you have come, you don’t look very happy.”

“Never mind my looks, gunner. I have made up my mind.”

A ferocious, not unpleasing thought flashed through Peyrol’s mind. It was that this intruder on the Escampobar sinister solitude in which he, Peyrol, kept order was under a delusion. Mind! Pah! His mind had nothing to do with his return. He had returned because in Catherine’s words, “death had made a sign to him.” Meantime, Lieutenant Ral raised his hat to wipe his moist brow.

“I made up my mind to play the part of dispatch-bearer. As you have said yourself, Peyrol, one could not bribe a man — -I mean an honest man — -so you will have to find the vessel and leave the rest to me. In two or three days . . . You are under a moral obligation to let me have your tartane.”

Peyrol did not answer. He was thinking that Ral had got his sign, but whether it meant death from starvation or disease on board an English prison hulk, or in some other way, it was impossible to say. This naval officer was not a man he could trust; to whom he could, for instance, tell the story of his prisoner and what he had done with him. Indeed, the story was altogether incredible. The Englishman commanding that corvette had no visible, conceivable or probable reason for sending a boat ashore to the cove of all places in the world. Peyrol himself could hardly believe that it had happened. And he thought: "If I were to tell that lieutenant he would only think that I was an old scoundrel who had been in treasonable communication with the English for God knows how long. No words of mine could persuade him that this was as unforeseen to me as the moon falling from the sky."

"I wonder," he burst out, but not very loud, "what made you keep on coming back here time after time!" Ral leaned his back against the wall and folded his arms in the familiar attitude of their leisurely talks.

"Ennui, Peyrol," he said in a far-away tone. "Confounded boredom."

Peyrol also, as if unable to resist the force of example, assumed the same attitude, and said:

"You seem to be a man that makes no friends."

"True, Peyrol. I think I am that sort of man."

"What, no friends at all? Not even a little friend of any sort?"

Lieutenant Ral leaned the back of his head against the wall and made no answer. Peyrol got on his legs.

"Oh, then, it wouldn't matter to anybody if you were to disappear for years in an English hulk. And so if I were to give you my tartane you would go?"

"Yes, I would go this moment."

Peyrol laughed quite loud, tilting his head back. All at once the laugh stopped short and the lieutenant was amazed to see him reel as though he had been hit in the chest. While giving way to his bitter mirth, the rover had caught sight of Arlette's face at the open window of the lieutenant's room. He sat heavily on the bench and was unable to make a sound. The lieutenant was startled enough to detach the back of his head from the wall to look at him. Peyrol stooped low suddenly, and began to drag the stable fork from its concealment. Then he got on his feet and stood leaning on it, glaring down at Ral, who gazed upwards with languid surprise. Peyrol was asking himself, "Shall I pick him up on that pair of prongs, carry him down and fling him in the sea?" He felt suddenly overcome by a heaviness of arms and a heaviness of heart that made all movement impossible. His stiffened and powerless limbs refused all service. . . . Let Catherine look after her niece. He was sure that the old woman was not very far away. The lieutenant saw him absorbed in examining the points of the prongs carefully. There was something queer about all this.

"Hallo, Peyrol! What's the matter?" he couldn't help asking.

"I was just looking," said Peyrol. "One prong is chipped a little. I found this thing in a most unlikely place."

The lieutenant still gazed at him curiously.

"I know! It was under the bench."

"H'm," said Peyrol, who had recovered some self-control. "It belongs to Scevola."

"Does it?" said the lieutenant, falling back again.

His interest seemed exhausted, but Peyrol didn't move.

"You go about with a face fit for a funeral," he remarked suddenly in a deep voice. "Hang it all, lieutenant, I have heard you laugh once or twice, but the devil take me if I ever saw you smile. It is as if you had been bewitched in your cradle."

Lieutenant Ral got up as if moved by a spring. "Bewitched," he repeated, standing very stiff: "In my cradle, eh? . . . No, I don't think it was so early as that."

He walked forward with a tense still face straight at Peyrol as though he had been blind. Startled, the rover stepped out of the way and, turning on his heels, followed him with his eyes. The lieutenant paced on, as if drawn by a magnet, in the direction of the door of the house. Peyrol, his eyes fastened on Ral's back, let him nearly reach it before he called out tentatively: "I say, lieutenant!" To his extreme surprise, Ral swung round as if to a touch.

"Oh, yes," he answered, also in an undertone. "We will have to discuss that matter to-morrow."

Peyrol, who had approached him close, said in a whisper which sounded quite fierce: "Discuss? No! We will have to carry it out to-morrow. I have been waiting half the night just to tell you that."

Lieutenant Ral nodded. The expression on his face was so stony that Peyrol doubted whether he had understood. He added:

"It isn't going to be child's play." The lieutenant was about to open the door when Peyrol said: "A moment," and again the lieutenant turned about silently.

"Michel is sleeping somewhere on the stairs. Will you just stir him up and tell him I am waiting outside? We two will have to finish our night on board the tartane, and start work at break of day to get her ready for sea. Yes, lieutenant, by noon. In twelve hours' time you will be saying good-bye to la belle France."

Lieutenant Ral's eyes staring over his shoulder, seemed glazed and motionless in the moonlight like the eyes of a dead man. But he went in. Peyrol heard presently sounds within of somebody staggering in the passage and Michel projected himself outside headlong, but after a stumble or two pulled up, scratching his head and looking on every side in the moonlight without perceiving Peyrol, who was regarding him from a distance of five feet. At last Peyrol said:

"Come, wake up! Michel! Michel!"

"Voil, notre matre."

"Look at what I have picked up," said Peyrol. "Take it and put it away."

Michel didn't offer to touch the stable fork extended to him by Peyrol.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Peyrol.

"Nothing, nothing! Only last time I saw it, it was on Scevola's shoulder." He glanced up at the sky.

“A little better than an hour ago.”

“What was he doing?”

“Going into the yard to put it away.”

“Well, now you go into the yard to put it away,” said Peyrol, “and don’t be long about it.” He waited with his hand over his chin till his henchman reappeared before him. But Michel had not got over his surprise.

“He was going to bed, you know,” he said.

“Eh, what? He was going. . . . He hasn’t gone to sleep in the stable, perchance? He does sometimes, you know.”

“I know. I looked. He isn’t there,” said Michel, very awake and round-eyed.

Peyrol started towards the cove. After three or four steps he turned round and found Michel motionless where he had left him.

“Come on,” he cried, “we will have to fit the tartane for sea directly the day breaks.”

Standing in the lieutenant’s room just clear of the open window, Arlette listened to their voices and to the sound of their footsteps diminishing down the slope. Before they had quite died out she became aware of a light tread approaching the door of the room.

Lieutenant Ral had spoken the truth. While in Toulon he had more than once said to himself that he could never go back to that fatal farmhouse. His mental state was quite pitiable. Honour, decency, every principle forbade him to trifle with the feelings of a poor creature with her mind darkened by a very terrifying, atrocious and, as it were, guilty experience. And suddenly he had given way to a base impulse and had betrayed himself by kissing her hand! He recognized with despair that this was no trifling, but that the impulse had come from the very depths of his being. It was an awful discovery for a man who on emerging from boyhood had laid for himself a rigidly straight line of conduct amongst the unbridled passions and the clamouring falsehoods of revolution which seemed to have destroyed in him all capacity for the softer emotions. Taciturn and guarded, he had formed no intimacies. Relations he had none. He had kept clear of social connections. It was in his character. At first he visited Escampobar because when he took his leave he had no place in the world to go to, and a few days there were a complete change from the odious town. He enjoyed the sense of remoteness from ordinary mankind. He had developed a liking for old Peyrol, the only man who had nothing to do with the revolution — -who had not even seen it at work. The sincere lawlessness of the ex-Brother of the Coast was refreshing. That one was neither a hypocrite nor a fool. When he robbed or killed it was not in the name of the sacred revolutionary principles or for the love of humanity.

Of course Ral had remarked at once Arlette’s black, profound and unquiet eyes and the persistent dim smile on her lips, her mysterious silences and the rare sound of her voice which made a caress of every word. He heard something of her story from the reluctant Peyrol who did not care to talk about it. It awakened in Ral more bitter indignation than pity. But it stimulated his imagination, confirmed him in that scorn and angry loathing for the revolution he had felt as a boy and had nursed secretly ever

since. She attracted him by her unapproachable aspect. Later he tried not to notice that, in common parlance, she was inclined to hang about him. He used to catch her gazing at him stealthily. But he was free from masculine vanity. It was one day in Toulon that it suddenly dawned on him what her mute interest in his person might mean. He was then sitting outside a caf sipping some drink or other with three or four officers, and not listening to their uninteresting conversation. He marvelled that this sort of illumination should come to him like this, under these circumstances; that he should have thought of her while seated in the street with these men round him, in the midst of more or less professional talk! And then it suddenly dawned on him that he had been thinking of nothing but that woman for days.

He got up brusquely, flung the money for his drink on the table, and without a word left his companions. But he had the reputation of an eccentric man and they did not even comment on his abrupt departure. It was a clear evening. He walked straight out of town, and that night wandered beyond the fortifications, not noticing the direction he took. All the countryside was asleep. There was not a human being stirring, and his progress in that desolate part of the country between the forts could have been traced only by the barking of dogs in the rare hamlets and scattered habitations.

“What has become of my rectitude, of my self-respect, of the firmness of my mind?” he asked himself pedantically. “I have let myself be mastered by an unworthy passion for a mere mortal envelope, stained with crime and without a mind.”

His despair at this awful discovery was so profound that if he had not been in uniform he would have tried to commit suicide with the small pistol he had in his pocket. He shrank from the act, and the thought of the sensation it would produce, from the gossip and comments it would raise, the dishonouring suspicions it would provoke. “No,” he said to himself, “what I will have to do is to unmark my linen, put on civilian old clothes and walk out much farther away, miles beyond the forts, hide myself in some wood or in an overgrown hollow and put an end to my life there. The gendarmes or a garde-champetre discovering my body after a few days, a complete stranger without marks of identity, and being unable to find out anything about me, will give me an obscure burial in some village churchyard.”

On that resolution he turned back abruptly and at daybreak found himself outside the gate of the town. He had to wait till it was opened, and then the morning was so far advanced that he had to go straight to work at his office at the Toulon Admiralty. Nobody noticed anything peculiar about him that day. He went through his routine tasks with outward composure, but all the same he never ceased arguing with himself. By the time he returned to his quarters he had come to the conclusion that as an officer in war-time he had no right to take his own life. His principles would not permit him to do that. In this reasoning he was perfectly sincere. During a deadly struggle against an irreconcilable enemy his life belonged to his country. But there were moments when his loneliness, haunted by the forbidden vision of Escampobar with the figure of that distracted girl, mysterious, awful, pale, irresistible in her strangeness, passing along the walls, appearing on the hill-paths, looking out of the window, became unbearable.

He spent hours of solitary anguish shut up in his quarters, and the opinion amongst his comrades was that Ral's misanthropy was getting beyond all bounds.

One day it dawned upon him clearly that he could not stand this. It affected his power of thinking. "I shall begin to talk nonsense to people," he said to himself. "Hasn't there been once a poor devil who fell in love with a picture or a statue? He used to go and contemplate it. His misfortune cannot be compared with mine! Well, I will go to look at her as at a picture too; a picture as untouchable as if it had been under glass." And he went on a visit to Escampobar at the very first opportunity. He made up for himself a repellent face, he clung to Peyrol for society, out there on the bench, both with their arms folded and gazing into space. But whenever Arlette crossed his line of sight it was as if something had moved in his breast. Yet these visits made life just bearable; they enabled him to attend to his work without beginning to talk nonsense to people. He said to himself that he was strong enough to rise above temptation, that he would never overstep the line; but it had happened to him upstairs in his room at the farm, to weep tears of sheer tenderness while thinking of his fate. These tears would put out for a while the gnawing fire of his passion. He assumed austerity like an armour and in his prudence he, as a matter of fact, looked very seldom at Arlette for fear of being caught in the act.

The discovery that she had taken to wandering at night had upset him all the same, because that sort of thing was unaccountable. It gave him a shock which unsettled, not his resolution, but his fortitude. That morning he had allowed himself, while she was waiting on him, to be caught looking at her and then, losing his self-control, had given her that kiss on the hand. Directly he had done it he was appalled. He had overstepped the line. Under the circumstances this was an absolute moral disaster. The full consciousness of it came to him slowly. In fact this moment of fatal weakness was one of the reasons why he had let himself be sent off so unceremoniously by Peyrol to Toulon. Even while crossing over he thought the only thing was not to come back any more. Yet while battling with himself he went on with the execution of the plan. A bitter irony presided over his dual state. Before leaving the Admiral who had received him in full uniform in a room lighted by a single candle, he was suddenly moved to say: "I suppose if there is no other way I am authorized to go myself," and the Admiral had answered: "I didn't contemplate that, but if you are willing I don't see any objection. I would only advise you to go in uniform in the character of an officer entrusted with dispatches. No doubt in time the Government would arrange for your exchange. But bear in mind that it would be a long captivity, and you must understand it might affect your promotion."

At the foot of the grand staircase in the lighted hall of the official building Ral suddenly thought: "And now I must go back to Escampobar." Indeed he had to go to Escampobar because the false dispatches were there in the valise he had left behind. He couldn't go back to the Admiral and explain that he had lost them. They would look on him as an unutterable idiot or a man gone mad. While walking to the quay

where the naval boat was waiting for him he said to himself. "This, in truth, is my last visit for years — - perhaps for life."

Going back in the boat, notwithstanding that the breeze was very light, he would not let the men take to the oars. He didn't want to return before the women had gone to bed. He said to himself that the proper and honest thing to do was not to see Arlette again. He even managed to persuade himself that his uncontrolled impulse had had no meaning for that witless and unhappy creature. She had neither started nor exclaimed; she had made no sign. She had remained passive and then she had backed away and sat down quietly. He could not even remember that she had coloured at all. As to himself, he had enough self-control to rise from the table and go out without looking at her again. Neither did she make a sign. What could startle that body without mind? She had made nothing of it, he thought with self-contempt. "Body without mind! Body without mind!" he repeated with angry derision directed at himself. And all at once he thought: "No. It isn't that. All in her is mystery, seduction, enchantment. And then — -what do I care for her mind!"

This thought wrung from him a faint groan so that the coxswain asked respectfully: "Are you in pain, lieutenant?" "It's nothing," he muttered and set his teeth with the desperation of a man under torture.

While talking with Peyrol outside the house, the words "I won't see her again," and "body without mind" rang through his head. By the time he had left Peyrol and walked up the stairs his endurance was absolutely at an end. All he wanted was to be alone. Going along the dark, passage he noticed that the door of Catherine's room was standing ajar. But that did not arrest his attention. He was approaching a state of insensibility. As he put his hand on the door handle of his room he said to himself. "It will soon be over!"

He was so tired out that he was almost unable to hold up his head, and on going in he didn't see Arlette, who stood against the wall on one side of the window, out of the moonlight and in the darkest corner of the room. He only became aware of somebody's presence in the room as she flitted past him with the faintest possible rustle, when he staggered back two paces and heard behind him the key being turned in the lock. If the whole house had fallen into ruins, bringing him to the ground, lie could not have been more overwhelmed and, in a manner, more utterly bereft of all his senses. The first that came back to him was the sense of touch when Arlette seized his hand. He regained his hearing next. She was whispering to him: "At last. At last! But you are careless. If it had been Scevola instead of me in this room you would have been dead now. I have seen him at work." He felt a significant pressure on his hand, but he couldn't see her properly yet, though he was aware of her nearness with every fibre of his body. "It wasn't yesterday though," she added in a low tone. Then suddenly: "Come to the window so that I may look at you."

A great square of moonlight lay on the floor. He obeyed the tug like a little child. She caught hold of his other hand as it hung by his side. He was rigid all over, without joints, and it did not seem to him that he was breathing. With her face a little below

his she stared at him closely, whispering gently: "Eugne, Eugne," and suddenly the livid immobility of his face frightened her. "You say nothing. You look ill. What is the matter? Are you hurt?" She let go his insensitive hands and began to feel him all over for evidence of some injury. She even snatched off his hat and flung it away in her haste to discover that his head was unharmed; but finding no sign of bodily damage, she calmed down like a sensible, practical person. With her hands clasped round his neck she hung back a little. Her little even teeth gleamed, her black eyes, immensely profound, looked into his, not with a transport of passion or fear but with a sort of reposeful satisfaction, with a searching and appropriating expression. He came back to life with a low and reckless exclamation, felt horribly insecure at once as if he were standing on a lofty pinnacle above a noise as of breaking waves in his ears, in fear lest her fingers should part and she would fall off and be lost to him for ever. He flung his arms round her waist and hugged her close to his breast. In the great silence, in the bright moonlight falling through the window, they stood like that for a long, long time. He looked at her head resting on his shoulder. Her eyes were closed and the expression of her unsmiling face was that of a delightful dream, something infinitely ethereal, peaceful and, as it were, eternal. Its appeal pierced his heart with a pointed sweetness. "She is exquisite. It's a miracle," he thought with a snort of terror. "It's impossible."

She made a movement to disengage herself, and instinctively he resisted, pressing her closer to his breast. She yielded for a moment and then tried again. He let her go. She stood at arm's length, her hands on his shoulders, and her charm struck him suddenly as funny in the seriousness of expression as of a very capable, practical woman.

"All this is very well," she said in a businesslike undertone. "We will have to think how to get away from here. I don't mean now, this moment," she added, feeling his slight start. "Scevola is thirsting for your blood." She detached one hand to point a finger at the inner wall of the room, and lowered her voice. "He's there, you know. Don't trust Peyrol either. I was looking at you two out there. He has changed. I can trust him no longer." Her murmur vibrated. "He and Catherine behave strangely. I don't know what came to them. He doesn't talk to me. When I sit down near him he turns his shoulder to me. . . ."

She felt Ral sway under her hands, paused in concern and said: "You are tired." But as he didn't move, she actually led him to a chair, pushed him into it, and sat on the floor at his feet. She rested her head against his knees and kept possession of one of his hands. A sigh escaped her. "I knew this was going to be," she said very low. "But I was taken by surprise."

"Oh, you knew it was going to be," he repeated faintly.

"Yes! I had prayed for it. Have you ever been prayed for, Eugne?" she asked, lingering on his name.

"Not since I was a child," answered Ral in a sombre tone.

"Oh yes! You have been prayed for to-day. I went down to the church. . . ." Ral could hardly believe his ears. . . . The abb let me in by the sacristy door. He told me

to renounce the world. I was ready to renounce anything for you.” Ral, turning his face to the darkest part of the room, seemed to see the spectre of fatality awaiting its time to move forward and crush that calm, confident joy. He shook off the dreadful illusion, raised her hand to his lips for a lingering kiss, and then asked:

“So you knew that it was going to be? Everything? Yes! And of me, what did you think?”

She pressed strongly the hand to which she had been clinging all the time. “I thought this.”

“But what did you think of my conduct at times? You see, I did not know what was going to be. I . . . I was afraid,” he added under his breath.

“Conduct? What conduct? You came, you went. When you were not here I thought of you, and when you were here I could look my fill at you. I tell you I knew how it was going to be. I was not afraid then.”

“You went about with a little smile,” he whispered, as one would mention an inconceivable marvel.

“I was warm and quiet,” murmured Arlette, as if on the borders of dreamland. Tender murmurs flowed from her lips describing a state of blissful tranquillity in phrases that sounded like the veriest nonsense, incredible, convincing and soothing to Ral’s conscience.

“You were perfect,” it went on. “Whenever you came near me everything seemed different.”

“What do you mean? How different?”

“Altogether. The light, the very stones of the house, the hills, the little flowers amongst the rocks! Even Nanette was different.”

Nanette was a white Angora with long silken hair, a pet that lived mostly in the yard.

“Oh, Nanette was different too,” said Ral, whom delight in the modulations of that voice had cut off from all reality, and even from a consciousness of himself, while he sat stooping over that head resting against his knee, the soft grip of her hand being his only contact with the world.

“Yes. Prettier. It’s only the people. . . . She ceased on an uncertain note. The crested wave of enchantment seemed to have passed over his head ebbing out faster than the sea, leaving the dreary expanses of the sand. He felt a chill at the roots of his hair.

“What people?” he asked.

“They are so changed. Listen, to-night while you were away — -why did you go away? — -I caught those two in the kitchen, saying nothing to each other. That Peyrol — -he is terrible.”

He was struck by the tone of awe, by its profound conviction. He could not know that Peyrol, unforeseen, unexpected, inexplicable, had given by his mere appearance at Escampobar a moral and even a physical jolt to all her being, that he was to her an immense figure, like a messenger from the unknown entering the solitude of

Escampobar; something immensely strong, with inexhaustible power, unaffected by familiarity and remaining invincible.

“He will say nothing, he will listen to nothing. He can do what he likes.”

“Can he?” muttered Ral.

She sat up on the floor, moved her head up and down several times as if to say that there could be no doubt about that.

“Is he, too, thirsting for my blood?” asked Ral bitterly.

“No, no. It isn’t that. You could defend yourself. I could watch over you. I have been watching over you. Only two nights ago I thought I heard noises outside and I went downstairs, fearing for you; your window was open but I could see nobody, and yet I felt. . . . No, it isn’t that! It’s worse. I don’t know what he wants to do. I can’t help being fond of him, but I begin to fear him now. When he first came here and I saw him he was just the same — -only his hair was not so white — -big, quiet. It seemed to me that something moved in my head. He was gentle, you know. I had to smile at him. It was as if I had recognized him. I said to myself. ‘That’s he, the man himself.’ “

“And when I came?” asked Ral with a feeling of dismay.

“You! You were expected,” she said in a low tone with a slight tinge of surprise at the question, but still evidently thinking of the Peyrol mystery. “Yes, I caught them at it last evening, he and Catherine in the kitchen, looking at each other and as quiet as mice. I told him he couldn’t order me about. Oh, mon chri, mon chri, don’t you listen to Peyrol — - don’t let him . . .”

With only a slight touch on his knee she sprang to her feet. Ral stood up too.

“He can do nothing to me,” he mumbled.

“Don’t tell him anything. Nobody can guess what he thinks, and now even I cannot tell what he means when he speaks. It was as if he knew a secret.” She put an accent into those words which made Ral feel moved almost to tears. He repeated that Peyrol could have no influence over him, and he felt that he was speaking the truth. He was in the power of his own word. Ever since he had left the Admiral in a gold-embroidered uniform, impatient to return to his guests, he was on a service for which he had volunteered. For a moment he had the sensation of an iron hoop very tight round his chest. She peered at his face closely, and it was more than he could bear.

“All right. I’ll be careful,” he said. “And Catherine, is she also dangerous?”

In the sheen of the moonlight Arlette, her neck and head above the gleams of the fichu, visible and elusive, smiled at him and moved a step closer.

“Poor Aunt Catherine,” she said. . . . “Put your arm round me, Eugne. . . . She can do nothing. She used to follow me with her eyes always. She thought I didn’t notice, but I did. And now she seems unable to look me in the face. Peyrol too, for that matter. He used to follow me with his eyes. Often I wondered what made them look at me like that. Can you tell, Eugne? But it’s all changed now.”

“Yes, it is all changed,” said Ral in a tone which he tried to make as light as possible. “Does Catherine know you are here?”

“When we went upstairs this evening I lay down all dressed on my bed and she sat on hers. The candle was out, but in the moonlight I could see her quite plainly with her hands on her lap. When I could lie still no longer I simply got up and went out of the room. She was still sitting at the foot of her bed. All I did was to put my finger on my lips and then she dropped her head. I don’t think I quite closed the door. . . . Hold me tighter, Eugne, I am tired. . . . Strange, you know! Formerly, a long time ago, before I ever saw you, I never rested and never felt tired.” She stopped her murmur suddenly and lifted a finger recommending silence. She listened and Ral listened too, he did not know for what; and in this sudden concentration on a point, all that had happened since he had entered the room seemed to him a dream in its improbability and in the more than life-like force dreams have in their inconsequence. Even the woman letting herself go on his arm seemed to have no weight as it might have happened in a dream.

“She is there,” breathed Arlette suddenly, rising on tiptoe to reach up to his ear. “She must have heard you go past.”

“Where is she?” asked Ral with the same intense secrecy.

“Outside the door. She must have been listening to the murmur of our voices. . . .” Arlette breathed into his ear as if relating an enormity. “She told me one day that I was one of those who are fit for no man’s arms.”

At this he flung his other arm round her and looked into her enlarged as if frightened eyes, while she clasped him with all her strength and they stood like that a long time, lips pressed on lips without a kiss, and breathless in the closeness of their contact. To him the stillness seemed to extend to the limits of the universe. The thought “Am I going to die?” flashed through that stillness and lost itself in it like a spark flying in an everlasting night. The only result of it was the tightening of his hold on Arlette.

An aged and uncertain voice was heard uttering the word “Arlette.” Catherine, who had been listening to their murmurs, could not bear the long silence. They heard her trembling tones as distinctly as though she had been in the room. Ral felt as if it had saved his life. They separated silently.

“Go away,” called out Arlette.

“Arl — — — . . .”

“Be quiet,” she cried louder. “You can do nothing.”

“Arlette,” came through the door, tremulous and commanding.

“She will wake up Scevola,” remarked Arlette to Ral in a conversational tone. And they both waited for sounds that did not come. Arlette pointed her finger at the wall. “He is there, you know.”

“He is asleep,” muttered Ral. But the thought “I am lost” which he formulated in his mind had no reference to Scevola.

“He is afraid,” said Arlette contemptuously in an undertone. “But that means little. He would quake with fright one moment and rush out to do murder the next.”

Slowly, as if drawn by the irresistible authority of the old woman, they had been moving towards the door. Ral thought with the sudden enlightenment of passion: “If she does not go now I won’t have the strength to part from her in the morning.” He

had no image of death before his eyes but of a long and intolerable separation. A sigh verging upon a moan reached them from the other side of the door and made the air around them heavy with sorrow against which locks and keys will not avail.

“You had better go to her,” he whispered in a penetrating tone.

“Of course I will,” said Arlette with some feeling. “Poor old thing. She and I have only each other in the world, but I am the daughter here, she must do what I tell her.” With one of her hands on Ral’s shoulder she put her mouth close to the door and said distinctly:

“I am coming directly. Go back to your room and wait for me,” as if she had no doubt of being obeyed.

A profound silence ensued. Perhaps Catherine had gone already. Ral and Arlette stood still for a whole minute as if both had been changed into stone.

“Go now,” said Ral in a hoarse, hardly audible voice.

She gave him a quick kiss on the lips and again they stood like a pair of enchanted lovers bewitched into immobility.

“If she stays on,” thought Ral, “I shall never have the courage to tear myself away, and then I shall have to blow my brains out.” But when at last she moved he seized her again and held her as if she had been his very life. When he let her go he was appalled by hearing a very faint laugh of her secret joy.

“Why do you laugh?” he asked in a scared tone.

She stopped to answer him over her shoulder.

“I laughed because I thought of all the days to come. Days and days and days. Have you thought of them?”

“Yes,” Ral faltered, like a man stabbed to the heart, holding the door half open. And he was glad to have something to hold on to.

She slipped out with a soft rustle of her silk skirt, but before he had time to close the door behind her she put back her arm for an instant. He had just time to press the palm of her hand to his lips. It was cool. She snatched it away and he had the strength of mind to shut the door after her. He felt like a man chained to the wall and dying of thirst, from whom a cold drink is snatched away. The room became dark suddenly. He thought, “A cloud over the moon, a cloud over the moon, an enormous cloud,” while he walked rigidly to the window, insecure and swaying as if on a tight rope. After a moment he perceived the moon in a sky on which there was no sign of the smallest cloud anywhere. He said to himself, “I suppose I nearly died just now. But no,” he went on thinking with deliberate cruelty, “Oh, no, I shall not die. I shall only suffer, suffer, suffer. . . .”

“Suffer, suffer.” Only by stumbling against the side of the bed did he discover that he had gone away from the window. At once he flung himself violently on the bed with his face buried in the pillow, which he bit to restrain the cry of distress about to burst through his lips. Natures schooled into insensibility when once overcome by a mastering passion are like vanquished giants ready for despair. He, a man on service, felt himself shrinking from death and that doubt contained in itself all possible doubts

of his own fortitude. The only thing he knew was that he would be gone to-morrow morning. He shuddered along his whole extended length, then lay still gripping a handful of bedclothes in each hand to prevent himself from leaping up in panicky restlessness. He was saying to himself pedantically, "I must lie down and rest, I must rest to have strength for to-morrow, I must rest," while the tremendous struggle to keep still broke out in waves of perspiration on his forehead. At last sudden oblivion must have descended on him because he turned over and sat up suddenly with the sound of the word "Ecoutez" in his ears.

A strange, dim, cold light filled the room; a light he did not recognize for anything he had known before, and at the foot of his bed stood a figure in dark garments with a dark shawl over its head, with a fleshless predatory face and dark hollows for its eyes, silent, expectant, implacable. . . . Is this death?" he asked himself, staring at it terrified. It resembled Catherine. It said again: "Ecoutez." He took away his eyes from it and glancing down noticed that his clothes were torn open on his chest. He would not look up at that thing, whatever it was, spectre or old woman, and said:

"Yes, I hear you."

"You are an honest man." It was Catherine's unemotional voice. "The day has broken. You will go away."

"Yes," he said without raising his head.

"She is asleep," went on Catherine or whoever it was, "exhausted, and you would have to shake her hard before she would wake. You will go. You know," the voice continued inflexibly, "she is my niece, and you know that there is death in the folds of her skirt and blood about her feet. She is for no man."

Ral felt all the anguish of an unearthly experience. This thing that looked like Catherine and spoke like a cruel fate had to be faced. He raised his head in this light that seemed to him appalling and not of this world.

"Listen well to me, you too," he said. "If she had all the madness of the world and the sin of all the murders of the Revolution on her shoulders, I would still hug her to my breast. Do you understand?"

The apparition which resembled Catherine lowered and raised its hooded head slowly. "There was a time when I could have hugged l'enfer mme to my breast. He went away. He had his vow. You have only your honesty. You will go."

"I have my duty," said Lieutenant Ral in measured tones, as if calmed by the excess of horror that old woman inspired him with.

"Go without disturbing her, without looking at her."

"I will carry my shoes in my hand," he said. He sighed deeply and felt as if sleepy. "It is very early," he muttered.

"Peyrol is already down at the well," announced Catherine. "What can he be doing there all this time?" she added in a troubled voice. Ral, with his feet now on the ground, gave her a side glance; but she was already gliding away, and when he looked again she had vanished from the room and the door was shut.

Chapter 15

Catherine, going downstairs, found Peyrol still at the well. He seemed to be looking into it with extreme interest.

“Your coffee is ready, Peyrol,” she shouted to him from the doorway.

He turned very sharply like a man surprised and came along smiling.

“That’s pleasant news, Mademoiselle Catherine,” he said. “You are down early.”

“Yes,” she admitted, “but you too, Peyrol. Is Michel about? Let him come and have some coffee too.”

“Michel’s at the tartane. Perhaps you don’t know that she is going to make a little voyage.” He drank a mouthful of coffee and took a bite out of a slice of bread. He was hungry. He had been up all night and had even had a conversation with Citizen Scevola. He had also done some work with Michel after daylight; however, there had not been much to do because the tartane was always kept ready for sea. Then after having again locked up Citizen Scevola, who was extremely concerned as to what was going to happen to him but was left in a state of uncertainty, he had come up to the farm, had gone upstairs where he was busy with various things for a time, and then had stolen down very cautiously to the well, where Catherine, whom he had not expected downstairs so early, had seen him before she went into Lieutenant Ral’s room. While he enjoyed his coffee he listened without any signs of surprise to Catherine’s comments upon the disappearance of Scevola. She had looked into his den. He had not slept on his pallet last night, of that she was certain, and he was nowhere to be seen, not even in the most distant field, from the points of vantage around the farm. It was inconceivable that he should have slipped away to Madrague, where he disliked to go, or to the village, where he was afraid to go. Peyrol remarked that whatever happened to him he was no great loss, but Catherine was not to be soothed.

“It frightens a body,” she said. “He may be hiding somewhere to jump on one treacherously. You know what I mean, Peyrol.”

“Well, the lieutenant will have nothing to fear, as he’s going away. As to myself, Scevola and I are good friends. I had a long talk with him quite recently. You two women can manage him perfectly; and then, who knows, perhaps he has gone away for good.”

Catherine stared at him, if such a word as stare can be applied to a profound contemplative gaze. “The lieutenant has nothing to fear from him,” she repeated cautiously.

“No, he is going away. Didn’t you know it?” The old woman continued to look at him profoundly. “Yes, he is on service.”

For another minute or so Catherine continued silent in her contemplative attitude. Then her hesitation came to an end. She could not resist the desire to inform Peyrol of the events of the night. As she went on Peyrol forgot the half-full bowl of coffee and his half-eaten piece of bread. Catherine's voice flowed with austerity. She stood there, imposing and solemn like a peasant-priestess. The relation of what had been to her a soul-shaking experience did not take much time, and she finished with the words, "The lieutenant is an honest man." And after a pause she insisted further: "There is no denying it. He has acted like an honest man."

For a moment longer Peyrol continued to look at the coffee in the bowl, then without warning got up with such violence that the chair behind him was thrown back upon the flagstones.

"Where is he, that honest man?" he shouted suddenly in stentorian tones which not only caused Catherine to raise her hands, but frightened himself, and he dropped at once to a mere forcible utterance. "Where is that man? Let me see him."

Even Catherine's hieratic composure was disturbed. "Why," she said, looking really disconcerted, "he will be down here directly. This bowl of coffee is for him."

Peyrol made as if to leave the kitchen, but Catherine stopped him. "For God's sake, Monsieur Peyrol," she said, half in entreaty and half in command, "don't wake up the child. Let her sleep. Oh, let her sleep! Don't wake her up. God only knows how long it is since she has slept properly. I could not tell you. I daren't think of it." She was shocked by hearing Peyrol declare: "All this is confounded nonsense." But he sat down again, seemed to catch sight of the coffee bowl and emptied what was left in it down his throat.

"I don't want her on my hands more crazy than she has been before," said Catherine, in a sort of exasperation but in a very low tone. This phrase in its selfish form expressed a real and profound compassion for her niece. She dreaded the moment when that fatal Arlette would wake up and the dreadful complications of life which her slumbers had suspended would have to be picked up again. Peyrol fidgeted on his seat.

"And so he told you he was going? He actually did tell you that?" he asked.

"He promised to go before the child wakes up. . . . At once."

"But, sacr nom d'un chien, there is never any wind before eleven o'clock," Peyrol exclaimed in a tone of profound annoyance, yet trying to moderate his voice, while Catherine, indulgent to his changing moods, only compressed her lips and nodded at him soothingly. "It is impossible to work with people like that," he mumbled.

"Do you know, Monsieur Peyrol, that she has been to see the priest?" Catherine was heard suddenly, towering above her end of the table. The two women had had a talk before Arlette had been induced by her aunt to lie down. Peyrol gave a start.

"What? Priest? . . . Now look here, Catherine," he went on with repressed ferocity, "do you imagine that all this interests me in the least?"

"I can think of nothing but that niece of mine. We two have nobody but each other in the world," she went on, reproducing the very phrase Arlette had used to Ral. She seemed to be thinking aloud, but noticed that Peyrol was listening with attention. "He

wanted to shut her up from everybody,” and the old woman clasped her meagre hands with a sudden gesture. “I suppose there are still some convents about the world.”

“You and the patronne are mad together,” declared Peyrol. “All this only shows what an ass the cur is. I don’t know much about these things, though I have seen some nuns in my time, and some very queer ones too, but it seems to me that they don’t take crazy people into convents. Don’t you be afraid. I tell you that.” He stopped because the inner door of the kitchen came open and Lieutenant Ral stepped in. His sword hung on his forearm by the belt, his hat was on his head. He dropped his little valise on the floor and sat down in the nearest chair to put on his shoes which he had brought down in his other hand. Then he came up to the table. Peyrol, who had kept his eyes on him, thought: “Here is one who looks like a moth scorched in the fire.” Ral’s eyes were sunk, his cheeks seemed hollowed and the whole face had an arid and dry aspect.

“Well, you are in a fine state for the work of deceiving the enemy,” Peyrol observed. “Why, to look at you, nobody would believe a word you said. You are not going to be ill, I hope. You are on service. You haven’t got the right to be ill. I say, Mademoiselle Catherine, produce the bottle — -you know, my private bottle. . . .” He snatched it from Catherine’s hand, poured some brandy into the lieutenant’s coffee, pushed the bowl towards him and waited. “Nom de nom!” he said forcibly, “don’t you know what this is for? It’s for you to drink.” Ral obeyed with a strange, automatic docility. “And now,” said Peyrol, getting up, “I will go to my room and shave. This is a great day — -the day we are going to see the lieutenant off.”

Till then Ral had not uttered a word, but directly the door closed behind Peyrol he raised his head.

“Catherine!” His voice was like a rustle in his throat. She was looking at him steadily and he continued: “Listen, when she finds I am gone you tell her I will return soon. To-morrow. Always to-morrow.”

“Yes, my good Monsieur,” said Catherine in an unmoved voice but clasping her hands convulsively. “There is nothing else I would dare tell her!”

“She will believe you,” whispered Ral wildly.

“Yes! She will believe me,” repeated Catherine in a mournful tone.

Ral got up, put the sword-belt over his head, picked up the valise. There was a little flush on his cheeks.

“Adieu,” he said to the silent old woman. She made no answer, but as he turned away she raised her hand a little, hesitated, and let it fall again. It seemed to her that the women of Escampobar had been singled out for divine wrath. Her niece appeared to her like the scapegoat charged with all the murders and blasphemies of the Revolution. She herself too had been cast out from the grace of God. But that had been a long time ago. She had made her peace with Heaven since. Again she raised her hand and, this time, made in the air the sign of the cross at the back of Lieutenant Ral.

Meanwhile upstairs Peyrol, scraping his big flat cheek with an English razor-blade at the window, saw Lieutenant Ral on the path to the shore; and high above there,

commanding a vast view of sea and land, he shrugged his shoulders impatiently with no visible provocation. One could not trust those epaulette-wearers. They would cram a fellow's head with notions either for their own sake or for the sake of the service. Still, he was too old a bird to be caught with chaff; and besides, that long-legged stiff beggar going down the path with all his officer airs, was honest enough. At any rate he knew a seaman when he saw one, though he was as cold-blooded as a fish. Peyrol had a smile which was a little awry.

Cleaning the razor-blade (one of a set of twelve in a case) he had a vision of a brilliantly hazy ocean and an English Indiaman with her yards braced all ways, her canvas blowing loose above her bloodstained decks overrun by a lot of privateersmen and with the island of Ceylon swelling like a thin blue cloud on the far horizon. He had always wished to own a set of English blades and there he had got it, fell over it as it were, lying on the floor of a cabin which had been already ransacked. "For good steel — -it was good steel," he thought looking at the blade fixedly. And there it was, nearly worn out. The others too. That steel! And here he was holding the case in his hand as though he had just picked it up from the floor. Same case. Same man. And the steel worn out.

He shut the case brusquely, flung it into his sea-chest which was standing open, and slammed the lid down. The feeling which was in his breast and had been known to more articulate men than himself, was that life was a dream less substantial than the vision of Ceylon lying like a cloud on the sea. Dream left astern. Dream straight ahead. This disenchanted philosophy took the shape of fierce swearing. "Sacr nom de nom de nom. . . . Tonnerre de bon Dieu!"

While tying his neckcloth he handled it with fury as though he meant to strangle himself with it. He rammed a soft cap on to his venerable locks recklessly, seized his cudgel — -but before leaving the room walked up to the window giving on the east. He could not see the Petite Passe on account of the lookout hill, but to the left a great portion of the Hyres roadstead lay spread out before him, pale grey in the morning light, with the land about Cape Blanc swelling in the distance with all its details blurred as yet and only one conspicuous object presenting to his sight something that might have been a lighthouse by its shape, but which Peyrol knew very well was the English corvette already under way and with all her canvas set.

This sight pleased Peyrol mainly because he had expected it. The Englishman was doing exactly what he had expected he would do, and Peyrol looked towards the English cruiser with a smile of malicious triumph as if he were confronting her captain. For some reason or other he imagined Captain Vincent as long-faced, with yellow teeth and a wig, whereas that officer wore his own hair and had a set of teeth which would have done honour to a London belle and was really the hidden cause of Captain Vincent appearing so often wreathed in smiles.

That ship at this great distance and steering in his direction held Peyrol at the window long enough for the increasing light of the morning to burst into sunshine, colouring and filling-in the flat outline of the land with tints of wood and rock and

field, with clear dots of buildings enlivening the view. The sun threw a sort of halo around the ship. Recollecting himself, Peyrol left the room and shut the door quietly. Quietly too he descended the stairs from his garret. On the landing he underwent a short inward struggle, at the end of which he approached the door of Catherine's room and opening it a little, put his head in. Across the whole width of it he saw Arlette fast asleep. Her aunt had thrown a light coverlet over her. Her low shoes stood at the foot of the bed. Her black hair lay loose on the pillow; and Peyrol's gaze became arrested by the long eyelashes on her pale cheek. Suddenly he fancied she moved, and he withdrew his head sharply, pulling the door to. He listened for a moment as if tempted to open it again, but judging it too risky, continued on his way downstairs. At his reappearance in the kitchen Catherine turned sharply. She was dressed for the day, with a big white cap on her head, a black bodice and a brown skirt with ample folds. She had a pair of varnished sabots on her feet over her shoes.

"No signs of Scevola," she said, advancing towards Peyrol. "And Michel too has not been here yet."

Peyrol thought that if she had been only shorter, what with her black eyes and slightly curved nose she would have looked like a witch. But witches can read people's thoughts, and he looked openly at Catherine with the pleasant conviction that she could not read his thoughts. He said:

"I took good care not to make any noise upstairs, Mademoiselle Catherine. When I am gone the house will be empty and quiet enough."

She had a curious expression. She struck Peyrol suddenly as if she were lost in that kitchen in which she had reigned for many years. He continued:

"You will be alone all the morning."

She seemed to be listening to some distant sound, and after Peyrol had added, "Everything is all right now," she nodded and after a moment said in a manner that for her was unexpectedly impulsive:

"Monsieur Peyrol, I am tired of life."

He shrugged his shoulders and with somewhat sinister jocosity remarked:

"I will tell you what it is; you ought to have been married."

She turned her back on him abruptly.

"No offence," Peyrol excused himself in a tone of gloom rather than of apology. "It is no use to attach any importance to things. What is this life? Phew! Nobody can remember one-tenth of it. Here I am; and, you know, I would bet that if one of my old-time chums came along and saw me like this, here with you — -I mean one of those chums that stand up for a fellow in a scrimmage and look after him should he be hurt — -well, I bet," he repeated, "he wouldn't know me. He would say to himself perhaps, 'Hullo! here's a comfortable married couple.'"

He paused. Catherine, with her back to him and calling him, not "Monsieur," but "Peyrol," tout court, remarked, not exactly with displeasure, but rather with an ominous accent that this was no time for idle talk. Peyrol, however, continued, though his tone was very far from being that of idle talk:

“But you see, Mademoiselle Catherine, you were not like the others. You allowed yourself to be struck all of a heap, and at the same time you were too hard on yourself.”

Her long thin frame, bent low to work the bellows under the enormous overmantel, she assented: “Perhaps! We Escampobar women were always hard on ourselves.”

“That’s what I say. If you had had things happen to you which happened to me. . . .”

“But you men, you are different. It doesn’t matter what you do. You have got your own strength. You need not be hard on yourselves. You go from one thing to another thoughtlessly.”

He remained looking at her searchingly with something like a hint of a smile on his shaven lips, but she turned away to the sink where one of the women working about the farm had deposited a great pile of vegetables. She started on them with a broken-bladed knife, preserving her sibylline air even in that homely occupation.

“It will be a good soup, I see, at noon to-day,” said the rover suddenly. He turned on his heels and went out through the *salle*. The whole world lay open to him, or at any rate the whole of the Mediterranean, viewed down the ravine between the two hills. The bell of the farm’s milch-cow, which had a talent for keeping herself invisible, reached him from the right, but he could not see as much as the tips of her horns, though he looked for them. He stepped out sturdily. He had not gone twenty yards down the ravine when another sound made him stand still as if changed into stone. It was a faint noise resembling very much the hollow rumble an empty farm-cart would make on a stony road, but Peyrol looked up at the sky, and though it was perfectly clear, he did not seem pleased with its aspect. He had a hill on each side of him and the placid cove below his feet. He muttered “H’m! Thunder at sunrise. It must be in the west. It only wanted that!” He feared it would first kill the little breeze there was and then knock the weather up altogether. For a moment all his faculties seemed paralyzed by that faint sound. On that sea ruled by the gods of Olympus he might have been a pagan mariner subject to Jupiter’s caprices; but like a defiant pagan he shook his fist vaguely at space which answered him by a short and threatening mutter. Then he swung on his way till he caught sight of the two mastheads of the *tartane*, when he stopped to listen. No sound of any sort reached him from there, and he went on his way thinking, “Go from one thing to another thoughtlessly! Indeed! . . . That’s all old Catherine knows about it.” He had so many things to think of that he did not know which to lay hold of first. He just let them lie jumbled up in his head. His feelings too were in a state of confusion, and vaguely he felt that his conduct was at the mercy of an internal conflict. The consciousness of that fact accounted perhaps for his sardonic attitude towards himself and outwardly towards those whom he perceived on board the *tartane*; and especially towards the lieutenant whom he saw sitting on the deck leaning against the head of the rudder, characteristically aloof from the two other persons on board. Michel, also characteristically, was standing on the top of the little cabin scuttle, obviously looking out for his “*matre*.” Citizen Scevola, sitting on deck, seemed at first sight to be at liberty, but as a matter of fact he was not. He was loosely

tied up to a stanchion by three turns of the mainsheet with the knot in such a position that he could not get at it without attracting attention; and that situation seemed also somewhat characteristic of Citizen Scevola with its air of half liberty, half suspicion and, as it were, contemptuous restraint. The sans-culotte, whose late experiences had nearly unsettled his reason, first by their utter incomprehensibility and afterwards by the enigmatical attitude of Peyrol, had dropped his head and folded his arms on his breast. And that attitude was dubious too. It might have been resignation or it might have been profound sleep. The rover addressed himself first to the lieutenant.

“Le moment approche,” said Peyrol with a queer twitch at a corner of his lip, while under his soft woollen cap his venerable locks stirred in the breath of a suddenly warm air. “The great moment — -eh?”

He leaned over the big tiller, and seemed to be hovering above the lieutenant’s shoulder.

“What’s this infernal company?” murmured the latter without even looking at Peyrol.

“All old friends — -quoi?” said Peyrol in a homely tone. “We will keep that little affair amongst ourselves. The fewer the men the greater the glory. Catherine is getting the vegetables ready for the noonday soup and the Englishman is coming down towards the Passe where he will arrive about noon too, ready to have his eye put out. You know, lieutenant, that will be your job. You may depend on me for sending you off when the moment comes. For what is it to you? You have no friends, you have not even a petite amie. As to expecting an old rover like me — -oh no, lieutenant! Of course liberty is sweet, but what do you know of it, you epaulette-wearers? Moreover, I am no good for quarter-deck talks and all that politeness.”

“I wish, Peyrol, you would not talk so much,” said Lieutenant Ral, turning his head slightly. He was struck by the strange expression on the old rover’s face. “And I don’t see what the actual moment matters. I am going to look for the fleet. All you have to do is to hoist the sails for me and then scramble ashore.”

“Very simple,” observed Peyrol through his teeth, and then began to sing:

“Quoique leurs chapeaux sont bien laids God-dam! Moi, j’aime les Anglais Ils ont un si bon caractre!”

“H! Citoyen!” and then remarked confidentially to Ral: “He isn’t asleep, you know, but he isn’t like the English, he has a sacr mauvais caractre. He got into his head,” continued Peyrol, in a loud and innocent tone, “that you locked him up in this cabin last night. Did you notice the venomous glance he gave you just now?”

Both Lieutenant Ral and the innocent Michel appeared surprised at his boisterousness; but all the time Peyrol was thinking: “I wish to goodness I knew how that thunderstorm is getting on and what course it is shaping. I can’t find that out unless I go up to the farm and get a view to the westward. It may be as far as the Rhne Valley; no doubt it is and it will come out of it too, curses on it. One won’t be able to reckon on half an hour of steady wind from any quarter.” He directed a look of ironic gaiety at all the faces in turn. Michel met it with a faithful-dog gaze and innocently

open mouth. Scevola kept his chin buried on his chest. Lieutenant Ral was insensible to outward impressions and his absent stare made nothing of Peyrol. The rover himself presently fell into thought. The last stir of air died out in the little basin, and the sun clearing Porquerolles inundated it with a sudden light in which Michel blinked like an owl.

“It’s hot early,” he announced aloud but only because he had formed the habit of talking to himself. He would not have presumed to offer an opinion unless asked by Peyrol.

His voice having recalled Peyrol to himself, he proposed to masthead the yards and even asked Lieutenant Ral to help in that operation which was accomplished in silence except for the faint squeaking of the blocks. The sails, however, were kept hauled up in the gear.

“Like this,” said Peyrol, “you have only to let go the ropes and you will be under canvas at once.”

Without answering Ral returned to his position by the rudder-head. He was saying to himself — “I am sneaking off. No, there is honour, duty. And of course I will return. But when? They will forget all about me and I shall never be exchanged. This war may last for years, — -” and illogically he wished he could have had a God to whom he could pray for relief in his anguish. “She will be in despair,” he thought, writhing inwardly at the mental picture of a distracted Arlette. Life, however, had embittered his spirit early, and he said to himself: “But in a month’s time will she even give me a thought?” Instantly he felt remorseful with a remorse strong enough to lift him to his feet as if he were morally obliged to go up again and confess to Arlette this sacrilegious cynicism of thought. “I am mad,” he muttered, perching himself on the low rail. His lapse from faith plunged him into such a depth of unhappiness that he felt all his strength of will go out of him. He sat there apathetic and suffering. He meditated dully: “Young men have been known to die suddenly; why should not I? I am, as a matter of fact, at the end of my endurance. I am half dead already. Yes! but what is left of that life does not belong to me now.”

“Peyrol,” he said in such a piercing tone that even Scevola jerked his head up; but he made an effort to reduce his shrillness and went on speaking very carefully: “I have left a letter for the Secretary General at the Majorit to pay twenty-five hundred francs to Jean — -you are Jean, are you not? — -Peyrol, price of the tartane in which I sail. Is that right?”

“What did you do that for?” asked Peyrol with an extremely stony face. “To get me into trouble?”

“Don’t be a fool, gunner, nobody remembers your, name. It is buried under a stack of blackened paper. I must ask you to go there and tell them that you have seen with your own eyes Lieutenant Ral sail away on his mission.”

The stoniness of Peyrol persisted but his eyes were full of fury. “Oh, yes, I see myself going there. Twenty-five hundred francs! Twenty-five hundred fiddlesticks.” His tone changed suddenly. “I heard some one say that you were an honest man, and I suppose

this is a proof of it. Well, to the devil with your honesty.” He glared at the lieutenant and then thought: “He doesn’t even pretend to listen to what I say” — -and another sort of anger, partly contemptuous and with something of dim sympathy in it, replaced his downright fury. “Pah!” he said, spat over the side, and walking up to Ral with great deliberation, slapped him on the shoulder. The only effect of this proceeding was to make Ral look up at him without any expression whatever.

Peyrol then picked up the lieutenant’s valise and carried it down into the cuddy. As he passed by, Citizen Scevola uttered the word “Citoyen” but it was only when he came back again that Peyrol condescended to say, “Well?”

“What are you going to do with me?” asked Scevola.

“You would not give me an account of how you came on board this tartane,” said Peyrol in a tone that sounded almost friendly, “therefore I need not tell you what I will do with you.”

A low muttering of thunder followed so close upon his words that it might have come out of Peyrol’s own lips. The rover gazed uneasily at the sky. It was still clear overhead, and at the bottom of that little basin surrounded by rocks there was no view in any other direction; but even as he gazed there was a sort of flicker in the sunshine succeeded by a mighty but distant clap of thunder. For the next half hour Peyrol and Michel were busy ashore taking a long line from the tartane to the entrance of the little basin where they fastened the end of it to a bush. This was for the purpose of hauling the tartane out into the cove. Then they came aboard again. The bit of sky above their heads was still clear, but while walking with the hauling line near the cove Peyrol had got a glimpse of the edge of the cloud. The sun grew scorching all of a sudden, and in the stagnating air a mysterious change seemed to come over the quality and the colour of the light. Peyrol flung his cap on the deck, baring his head to the subtle menace of the breathless stillness of the air.

“Phew! a chauffe,” he muttered, rolling up the sleeves of his jacket. He wiped his forehead with his mighty forearm upon which a mermaid with an immensely long fishtail was tattooed. Perceiving the lieutenant’s belted sword lying on the deck, he picked it up and without any ceremony threw it down the cabin stairs. As he was passing again near Scevola, the sans-culotte raised his voice.

“I believe you are one of those wretches corrupted by English gold,” he cried like one inspired. His shining eyes, his red cheeks, testified to the fire of patriotism burning in his breast, and he used that conventional phrase of revolutionary time, a time when, intoxicated with oratory, he used to run about dealing death to traitors of both sexes and all ages. But his denunciation was received in such profound silence that his own belief in it wavered. His words had sunk into an abysmal stillness and the next sound was Peyrol speaking to Ral.

“I am afraid you will get very wet, lieutenant, before long,” and then, looking at Ral, he thought with great conviction: “Wet! He wouldn’t mind getting drowned.” Standing stock-still he fretted and fumed inwardly, wondering where precisely the English ship

was by this time and where the devil that thunderstorm had got to: for the sky had become as mute as the oppressed earth. Ral asked:

“Is it not time to haul out, gunner?” And Peyrol said:

“There is not a breath of wind anywhere for miles.” He was gratified by the fairly loud mutter rolling apparently along the inland hills. Over the pool a little ragged cloud torn from the purple robe of the storm floated, arrested and thin like a bit of dark gauze.

Above at the farm Catherine had heard too the ominous mutter and came to the door of the *salle*. From there she could see the purple cloud itself, convoluted and solid, and its sinister shadow lying over the hills. The oncoming of the storm added to her sense of uneasiness at finding herself all alone in the house. Michel had not come up. She would have welcomed Michel, to whom she hardly ever spoke, simply as a person belonging to the usual order of things. She was not talkative, but somehow she would have liked somebody to speak to just for a moment. This cessation of all sound, voices or footsteps, around the buildings was not welcome; but looking at the cloud, she thought that there would be noise enough presently. However, stepping back into the kitchen, she was met by a sound that made her regret the oppressive silence, by its piercing and terrifying character; it was a shriek in the upper part of the house where, as far as she knew, there was only Arlette asleep. In her attempt to cross the kitchen to the foot of the stairs the weight of her accumulated years fell upon the old woman. She felt suddenly very feeble and hardly able to breathe. And all at once the thought, “Scevola! Was he murdering her up there?” paralyzed the last remnant of her physical powers. What else could it be? She fell, as if shot, into a chair under the first shock and found herself unable to move. Only her brain remained active, and she raised her hands to her eyes as if to shut out the image of the horrors upstairs. She heard nothing more from above. Arlette was dead. She thought that now it was her turn. While her body quailed before the brutal violence, her weary spirit longed ardently for the end. Let him come! Let all this be over at last, with a blow on the head or a stab in the breast. She had not the courage to uncover her eyes. She waited. But after about a minute — -it seemed to her interminable — -she heard rapid footsteps overhead. Arlette was running here and there. Catherine uncovered her eyes and was about to rise when she heard at the top of the stairs the name of Peyrol shouted with a desperate accent. Then, again, after the shortest of pauses, the cry of: “Peyrol, Peyrol!” and then the sound of feet running downstairs. There was another shriek, “Peyrol!” just outside the door before it flew open. Who was pursuing her? Catherine managed to stand up. Steadying herself with one hand on the table she presented an undaunted front to her niece who ran into the kitchen with loose hair flying and the appearance of wildest distraction in her eyes.

The staircase door had slammed to behind her. Nobody was pursuing her; and Catherine, putting forth her lean brown arm, arrested Arlette’s flight with such a jerk that the two women swung against each other. She seized her niece by the shoulders.

“What is this, in Heaven’s name? Where are you rushing to?” she cried, and the other, as if suddenly exhausted, whispered:

“I woke up from an awful dream.”

The kitchen grew dark under the cloud that hung over the house now. There was a feeble flicker of lightning and a faint crash, far away.

The old woman gave her niece a little shake.

“Dreams are nothing,” she said. “You are awake now. . . .” And indeed Catherine thought that no dream could be so bad as the realities which kept hold of one through the long waking hours.

“They were killing him,” moaned Arlette, beginning to tremble and struggle in her aunt’s arms. “I tell you they were killing him.”

“Be quiet. Were you dreaming of Peyrol?”

She became still in a moment and then whispered: “No. Eugne.”

She had seen Ral set upon by a mob of men and women, all dripping with blood, in a livid cold light, in front of a stretch of mere shells of houses with cracked walls and broken windows, and going down in the midst of a forest of raised arms brandishing sabres, clubs, knives, axes. There was also a man flourishing a red rag on a stick, while another was beating a drum which boomed above the sickening sound of broken glass falling like rain on the pavement. And away round the corner of an empty street came Peyrol whom she recognized by his white head, walking without haste, swinging his cudgel regularly. The terrible thing was that Peyrol looked straight at her, not noticing anything, composed, without a frown or a smile, unseeing and deaf, while she waved her arms and shrieked desperately to him for help. She woke up with the piercing sound of his name in her ears and with the impression of the dream so powerful that even now, looking distractedly into her aunt’s face, she could see the bare arms of that murderous crowd raised above Ral’s sinking head. Yet the name that had sprung to her lips on waking was the name of Peyrol. She pushed her aunt away with such force that the old woman staggered backwards and to save herself had to catch hold of the overmantel above her head. Arlette ran to the door of the *salle*, looked in, came back to her aunt and shouted: “Where is he?”

Catherine really did not know which path the lieutenant had taken. She understood very well that “he” meant Ral.

She said: “He went away a long time ago” grasped her niece’s arm and added with an effort to steady her voice: “He is coming back, Arlette — -for nothing will keep him away from you.”

Arlette, as if mechanically, was whispering to herself the magic name, “Peyrol, Peyrol!” then cried: “I want Eugne now. This moment.”

Catherine’s face wore a look of unflinching patience. “He has departed on service,” she said. Her niece looked at her with enormous eyes, coal-black, profound, and immovable, while in a forcible and distracted tone she said: “You and Peyrol have been plotting to rob me of my reason. But I will know how to make that old man give him

up. He is mine!" She spun round wildly like a person looking for a way of escape from a deadly peril, and rushed out blindly.

About Escampobar the air was murky but calm, and the silence was so profound that it was possible to hear the first heavy drops of rain striking the ground. In the intimidating shadow of the storm-cloud, Arlette stood irresolute for a moment, but it was to Peyrol, the man of mystery and power, that her thoughts turned. She was ready to embrace his knees, to entreat and to scold. "Peyrol, Peyrol!" she cried twice, and lent her ear as if expecting an answer. Then she shouted: "I want him back."

Catherine, alone in the kitchen, moving with dignity, sat down in the armchair with the tall back, like a senator in his curule chair awaiting the blow of a barbarous fate.

Arlette flew down the slope. The first sign of her coming was a faint thin scream which really the rover alone heard and understood. He pressed his lips in a particular way, showing his appreciation of the coming difficulty. The next moment he saw, poised on a detached boulder and thinly veiled by the first perpendicular shower, Arlette, who, catching sight of the tartane with the men on board of her, let out a prolonged shriek of mingled triumph and despair: "Peyrol! Help! Pey — — — rol!"

Ral jumped to his feet with an extremely scared face, but Peyrol extended an arresting arm. "She is calling to me," he said, gazing at the figure poised on the rock. "Well leaped! Sacr nom! . . . Well leaped!" And he muttered to himself soberly: "She will break her legs or her neck."

"I see you, Peyrol," screamed Arlette, who seemed to be flying through the air. "Don't you dare."

"Yes, here I am," shouted the rover, striking his breast with his fist.

Lieutenant Ral put both his hands over his face. Michel looked on open-mouthed, very much as if watching a performance in a circus; but Scevola cast his eyes down. Arlette came on board with such an impetus that Peyrol had to step forward and save her from a fall which would have stunned her. She struggled in his arms with extreme violence. The heiress of Escampobar with her loose black hair seemed the incarnation of pale fury. "Misrable! Don't you dare!" A roll of thunder covered her voice, but when it had passed away she was heard again in suppliant tones. "Peyrol, my friend, my dear old friend. Give him back to me," and all the time her body writhed in the arms of the old seaman. "You used to love me, Peyrol," she cried without ceasing to struggle, and suddenly struck the rover twice in the face with her clenched fist. Peyrol's head received the two blows as if it had been made of marble, but he felt with fear her body become still, grow rigid in his arms. A heavy squall enveloped the group of people on board the tartane. Peyrol laid Arlette gently on the deck. Her eyes were closed, her hands remained clenched; every sign of life had left her white face. Peyrol stood up and looked at the tall rocks streaming with water. The rain swept over the tartane with an angry swishing roar to which was added the sound of water rushing violently down the folds and seams of the precipitous shore vanishing gradually from his sight, as if this had been the beginning of a destroying and universal deluge — -the end of all things.

Lieutenant Ral, kneeling on one knee, contemplated the pale face of Arlette. Distinct, yet mingling with the faint growl of distant thunder, Peyrol's voice was heard saying:

"We can't put her ashore and leave her lying in the rain. She must be taken up to the house." Arlette's soaked clothes clung to her limbs while the lieutenant, his bare head dripping with rain water, looked as if he had just saved her from drowning. Peyrol gazed down inscrutably at the woman stretched on the deck and at the kneeling man. "She has fainted from rage at her old Peyrol," he went on rather dreamily. "Strange things do happen. However, lieutenant, you had better take her under the arms and step ashore first. I will help you. Ready? Lift."

The movements of the two men had to be careful and their progress was slow on the lower, steep part of the slope. After going up more than two-thirds of the way, they rested their insensible burden on a flat stone. Ral continued to sustain the shoulders but Peyrol lowered the feet gently.

"Ha!" he said. "You will be able to carry her yourself the rest of the way and give her up to old Catherine. Get a firm footing and I will lift her and place her in your arms. You can walk the distance quite easily. There. . . . Hold her a little higher, or her feet will be catching on the stones."

Arlette's hair was hanging far below the lieutenant's arm in an inert and heavy mass. The thunderstorm was passing away, leaving a cloudy sky. And Peyrol thought with a profound sigh: "I am tired."

"She is light," said Ral.

"Parbleu, she is light. If she were dead, you would find her heavy enough. Allons, lieutenant. No! I am not coming. What's the good? I'll stay down here. I have no mind to listen to Catherine's scolding."

The lieutenant, looking absorbed into the face resting in the hollow of his arm, never averted his gaze — -not even when Peyrol, stooping over Arlette, kissed the white forehead near the roots of the hair, black as a raven's wing.

"What am I to do?" muttered Ral.

"Do? Why, give her up to old Catherine. And you may just as well tell her that I will be coming along directly. That will cheer her up. I used to count for something in that house. Allez. For our time is very short."

With these words he turned away and walked slowly down to the tartane. A breeze had sprung up. He felt it on his wet neck and was grateful for the cool touch which recalled him to himself, to his old wandering self which had known no softness and no hesitation in the face of any risk offered by life.

As he stepped on board, the shower passed away. Michel, wet to the skin, was still in the very same attitude gazing up the slope. Citizen Scevola had drawn his knees up and was holding his head in his hands; whether because of rain or cold or for some other reason, his teeth were chattering audibly with a continuous and distressing rattle. Peyrol flung off his jacket, heavy with water, with a strange air as if it was of no more use to his mortal envelope, squared his broad shoulders and directed Michel in a deep, quiet voice to let go the lines holding the tartane to the shore. The faithful

henchman was taken aback and required one of Peyrol's authoritative "Allez" to put him in motion. Meantime the rover cast off the tiller lines and laid his hand with an air of mastery on the stout piece of wood projecting horizontally from the rudder-head about the level of his hip. The voices and the movements of his companions caused Citizen Scevola to master the desperate trembling of his jaw. He wriggled a little in his bonds and the question that had been on his lips for a good many hours was uttered again.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"What do you think of a little promenade at sea?" Peyrol asked in a tone that was not unkindly.

Citizen Scevola, who had seemed totally and completely cast down and subdued, let out a most unexpected screech.

"Unbind me. Put me ashore."

Michel, busy forward, was moved to smile as though he had possessed a cultivated sense of incongruity. Peyrol remained serious.

"You shall be untied presently," he assured the blood-drinking patriot, who had been for so many years the reputed possessor not only of Escampobar, but of the Escampobar heiress that, living on appearances, he had almost come to believe in that ownership himself. No wonder he screeched at this rude awakening. Peyrol raised his voice: "Haul on the line, Michel."

As, directly the ropes had been let go, the tartane had swung clear of the shore, the movement given her by Michel carried her towards the entrance by which the basin communicated with the cove. Peyrol attended to the helm, and in a moment, gliding through the narrow gap, the tartane carrying her way, shot out almost into the middle of the cove.

A little wind could be felt, running light wrinkles over the water, but outside the overshadowed sea was already speckled with white caps. Peyrol helped Michel to haul aft the sheets and then went back to the tiller. The pretty spick-and-span craft that had been lying idle for so long began to glide into the wide world. Michel gazed at the shore as if lost in admiration. Citizen Scevola's head had fallen on his knees while his nerveless hands clasped his legs loosely. He was the very image of dejection.

"H, Michel! Come here and cast loose the citizen. It is only fair that he should be untied for a little excursion at sea."

When his order had been executed, Peyrol addressed himself to the desolate figure on the deck.

"Like this, should the tartane get capsized in a squall, you will have an equal chance with us to swim for your life."

Scevola disdained to answer. He was engaged in biting his knee with rage in a stealthy fashion.

"You came on board for some murderous purpose. Who you were after unless it was myself, God only knows. I feel quite justified in giving you a little outing at sea."

I won't conceal from you, citizen, that it may not be without risk to life or limb. But you have only yourself to thank for being here."

As the tartane drew clear of the cove, she felt more the weight of the breeze and darted forward with a lively motion. A vaguely contented smile lighted up Michel's hairy countenance.

"She feels the sea," said Peyrol, who enjoyed the swift movement of his vessel. "This is different from your lagoon, Michel."

"To be sure," said Michel with becoming gravity.

"Doesn't it seem funny to you, as you look back at the shore, to think that you have left nothing and nobody behind?"

Michel assumed the aspect of a man confronted by an intellectual problem. Since he had become Peyrol's henchman he had lost the habit of thinking altogether. Directions and orders were easy things to apprehend; but a conversation with him whom he called "notre matre" was a serious matter demanding great and concentrated attention.

"Possibly," he murmured, looking strangely self-conscious.

"Well, you are lucky, take my word for it," said the rover, watching the course of his little vessel along the head of the peninsula. "You have not even a dog to miss you."

"I have only you, Matre Peyrol."

"That's what I was thinking," said Peyrol half to himself, while Michel, who had good sea-legs, kept his balance to the movements of the craft without taking his eyes from the rover's face.

"No," Peyrol exclaimed suddenly, after a moment of meditation, "I could not leave you behind." He extended his open palm towards Michel.

"Put your hand in there," he said.

Michel hesitated for a moment before this extraordinary proposal. At last he did so, and Peyrol, holding the bereaved fisherman's hand in a powerful grip, said:

"If I had gone away by myself, I would have left you marooned on this earth like a man thrown out to die on a desert island." Some dim perception of the solemnity of the occasion seemed to enter Michel's primitive brain. He connected Peyrol's words with the sense of his own insignificant position at the tail of all mankind; and, timidly, he murmured with his clear, innocent glance unclouded, the fundamental axiom of his philosophy:

"Somebody must be last in this world."

"Well, then, you will have to forgive me all that may happen between this and the hour of sunset."

The tartane, obeying the helm, fell off before the wind, with her head to the eastward.

Peyrol murmured: "She has not forgotten how to walk the seas." His unsubdued heart, heavy for so many days, had a moment of buoyancy — -the illusion of immense freedom.

At that moment Ral, amazed at finding no tartane in the basin, was running madly towards the cove, where he was sure Peyrol must be waiting to give her up to him. He

ran out on to the very rock on which Peyrol's late prisoner had sat after his escape, too tired to care, yet cheered by the hope of liberty. But Ral was in a worse plight. He could see no shadowy form through the thin veil of rain which pitted the sheltered piece of water framed in the rocks. The little craft had been spirited away. Impossible! There must be something wrong with his eyes! Again the barren hillsides echoed the name of "Peyrol," shouted with all the force of Ral's lungs. He shouted it only once, and about five minutes afterwards appeared at the kitchen-door, panting, streaming with water as if he had fought his way up from the bottom of the sea. In the tall-backed armchair Arlette lay, with her limbs relaxed, her head on Catherine's arm, her face white as death. He saw her open her black eyes, enormous and as if not of this world; he saw old Catherine turn her head, heard a cry of surprise, and saw a sort of struggle beginning between the two women. He screamed at them like a madman: "Peyrol has betrayed me!" and in an instant, with a bang of the door, he was gone.

The rain had ceased. Above his head the unbroken mass of clouds moved to the eastward, and he moved in the same direction as if he too were driven by the wind up the hillside, towards the lookout. When he reached the spot and, gasping, flung one arm round the trunk of the leaning tree, the only thing he was aware of during the sombre pause in the unrest of the elements was the distracting turmoil of his thoughts. After a moment he perceived through the rain the English ship with her topsails lowered on the caps, forging ahead slowly across the northern entrance of the Petite Passe. His distress fastened insanely on the notion of there being a connection between that enemy ship and Peyrol's inexplicable conduct. That old man had always meant to go himself! And when a moment after, looking to the southward, he made out the shadow of the tartane coming round the land in the midst of another squall, he muttered to himself a bitter: "Of course!" She had both her sails set. Peyrol was indeed pressing her to the utmost in his shameful haste to traffic with the enemy. The truth was that from the position in which Ral first saw him, Peyrol could not yet see the English ship, and held confidently on his course up the middle of the strait. The man-of-war and the little tartane saw each other quite unexpectedly at a distance that was very little over a mile. Peyrol's heart flew into his mouth at finding himself so close to the enemy. On board the Amelia at first no notice was taken. It was simply a tartane making for shelter on the north side of Porquerolles. But when Peyrol suddenly altered his course, the master of the man-of-war, noticing the manuvre, took up the long glass for a look. Captain Vincent was on deck and agreed with the master's remark that "there was a craft acting suspiciously." Before the Amelia could come round in the heavy squall, Peyrol was already under the battery of Porquerolles and, so far, safe from capture. Captain Vincent had no mind to bring his ship within reach of the battery and risk damage in his rigging or hull for the sake of a small coaster. However, the tale brought on board by Symons of his discovery of a hidden craft, of his capture, and his wonderful escape, had made every tartane an object of interest to the whole ship's company. The Amelia remained hove to in the strait while her officers watched the lateen sails gliding to and fro under the protecting muzzles of the guns. Captain Vincent himself had been

impressed by Peyrol's manuvre. Coasting craft as a rule were not afraid of the Amelia. After taking a few turns on the quarter-deck he ordered Symons to be called aft.

The hero of a unique and mysterious adventure, which had been the only subject of talk on board the corvette for the last twenty-four hours, came along rolling, hat in hand, and enjoying a secret sense of his importance.

"Take the glass," said the captain, "and have a look at that vessel under the land. Is she anything like the tartane that you say you have been aboard of?"

Symons was very positive. "I think I can swear to those painted mastheads, your honour. It is the last thing I remember before that murderous ruffian knocked me senseless. The moon shone on them. I can make them out now with the glass." As to the fellow boasting to him that the tartane was a dispatch-boat and had already made some trips, well, Symons begged his honour to believe that the beggar was not sober at the time. He did not care what he blurted out. The best proof of his condition was that he went away to fetch the soldiers and forgot to come back. The murderous old ruffian! "You see, your honour," continued Symons, "he thought I was not likely to escape after getting a blow that would have killed nine out of any ten men. So he went away to boast of what he had done before the people ashore; because one of his chums, worse than himself, came down thinking he would kill me with a dam big manure fork, saving your honour's presence. A regular savage he was."

Symons paused, staring, as if astonished at the marvels of his own tale. The old master, standing at his captain's elbow, observed in a dispassionate tone that, anyway, that peninsula was not a bad jumping-off place for a craft intending to slip through the blockade. Symons, not being dismissed, waited hat in hand while Captain Vincent directed the master to fill on the ship and stand a little nearer to the battery. It was done, and presently there was a flash of a gun low down on the water's edge and a shot came skipping in the direction of the Amelia. It fell very short, but Captain Vincent judged the ship was close enough and ordered her to be hove to again. Then Symons was told to take a look through the glass once more. After a long interval he lowered it and spoke impressively to his captain:

"I can make out three heads aboard, your honour, and one is white. I would swear to that white head anywhere."

Captain Vincent made no answer. All this seemed very odd to him; but after all it was possible. The craft had certainly acted suspiciously. He spoke to the first lieutenant in a half-vexed tone.

"He has done a rather smart thing. He will dodge here till dark and then get away. It is perfectly absurd. I don't want to send the boats too close to the battery. And if I do he may simply sail away from them and be round the land long before we are ready to give him chase. Darkness will be his best friend. However, we will keep a watch on him in case he is tempted to give us the slip late in the afternoon. In that case we will have a good try to catch him. If he has anything aboard I should like to get hold of it. It may be of some importance, after all."

On board the tartane Peyrol put his own interpretation on the ship's movements. His object had been attained. The corvette had marked him for her prey. Satisfied as to that, Peyrol watched his opportunity and taking advantage of a long squall, with rain thick enough to blur the form of the English ship, he left the shelter of the battery to lead the Englishman a dance and keep up his character of a man anxious to avoid capture.

Ral, from his position on the lookout, saw in the thinning downpour the pointed lateen sails glide round the north end of Porquerolles and vanish behind the land. Some time afterwards the Amelia made sail in a manner that put it beyond doubt that she meant to chase. Her lofty canvas was shut off too presently by the land of Porquerolles. When she had disappeared Ral turned to Arlette.

"Let us go," he said.

Arlette, stimulated by the short glimpse of Ral at the kitchen door, whom she had taken for a vision of a lost man calling her to follow him to the end of the world, had torn herself out of the old woman's thin, bony arms which could not cope with the struggles of her body and the fierceness of her spirit. She had run straight to the lookout, though there was nothing to guide her there except a blind impulse to seek Ral wherever he might be. He was not aware of her having found him until she seized hold of his arm with a suddenness, energy and determination of which no one with a clouded mind could have been capable. He felt himself being taken possession of in a way that tore all his scruples out of his breast. Holding on to the trunk of the tree, he threw his other arm round her waist, and when she confessed to him that she did not know why she had run up there, but that if she had not found him she would have thrown herself over the cliff, he tightened his clasp with sudden exultation, as though she had been a gift prayed for instead of a stumbling block for his pedantic conscience. Together they walked back. In the failing light the buildings awaited them, lifeless, the walls darkened by rain and the big slopes of the roofs glistening and sinister under the flying desolation of the clouds. In the kitchen Catherine heard their mingled footsteps, and rigid in the tall armchair awaited their coming. Arlette threw her arms round the old woman's neck while Ral stood on one side, looking on. Thought after thought flew through his mind and vanished in the strong feeling of the irrevocable nature of the event handing him to the woman whom, in the revulsion of his feelings, he was inclined to think more sane than himself Arlette, with one arm over the old woman's shoulders, kissed the wrinkled forehead under the white band of linen that, on the erect head, had the effect of a rustic diadem.

"To-morrow you and I will have to walk down to the church."

The austere dignity of Catherine's pose seemed to be shaken by this proposal to lead before the God, with whom she had made her peace long ago, that unhappy girl chosen to share in the guilt of impious and unspeakable horrors which had darkened her mind.

Arlette, still stooping over her aunt's face, extended a hand towards Ral, who, making a step forward, took it silently into his grasp.

“Oh, yes, you will, Aunt,” insisted Arlette. “You will have to come with me to pray for Peyrol, whom you and I shall never see any more.”

Catherine’s head dropped, whether in assent or grief; and Ral felt an unexpected and profound emotion, for he, too, was convinced that none of the three persons in the farm would ever see Peyrol again. It was as though the rover of the wide seas had left them to themselves on a sudden impulse of scorn, of magnanimity, of a passion weary of itself. However come by, Ral was ready to clasp for ever to his breast that woman touched by the red hand of the Revolution; for she, whose little feet had run ankle-deep through the terrors of death, had brought to him the sense of triumphant life.

Chapter 16

Astern of the tartane, the sun, about to set, kindled a streak of dull crimson glow between the darkening sea and the overcast sky. The peninsula of Giens and the islands of Hyres formed one mass of land detaching itself very black against the fiery girdle of the horizon; but to the north the long stretch of the Alpine coast continued beyond sight its endless sinuosities under the stooping clouds.

The tartane seemed to be rushing together with the run of the waves into the arms of the oncoming night. A little more than a mile away on her lee quarter, the Amelia, under all plain sail, pressed to the end of the chase. It had lasted now for a good many hours, for Peyrol, when slipping away, had managed to get the advantage of the Amelia from the very start. While still within the large sheet of smooth water which is called the Hyres roadstead, the tartane, which was really a craft of extraordinary speed, managed to gain positively on the sloop. Afterwards, by suddenly darting down the eastern passage between the two last islands of the group, Peyrol actually got out of sight of the chasing ship, being hidden by the Ile du Levant for a time. The Amelia having to tack twice in order to follow, lost ground once more. Emerging into the open sea, she had to tack again, and then the position became that of a stern chase, which proverbially is known as a long chase. Peyrol's skilful seamanship had twice extracted from Captain Vincent a low murmur accompanied by a significant compression of lips. At one time the Amelia had been near enough the tartane to send a shot ahead of her. That one was followed by another which whizzed extraordinarily close to the mastheads, but then Captain Vincent ordered the gun to be secured again. He said to his first lieutenant, who, his speaking trumpet in hand, kept at his elbow: "We must not sink that craft on any account. If we could get only an hour's calm, we would carry her with the boats."

The lieutenant remarked that there was no hope of a calm for the next twenty-four hours at least.

"No," said Captain Vincent, "and in about an hour it will be dark, and then he may very well give us the slip. The coast is not very far off and there are batteries on both sides of Frjus, under any of which he will be as safe from capture as though he were hove up on the beach. And look," he exclaimed after a moment's pause, "this is what the fellow means to do."

"Yes, sir," said the lieutenant, keeping his eyes on the white speck ahead, dancing lightly on the short Mediterranean waves, "he is keeping off the wind."

“We will have him in less than an hour,” said Captain Vincent, and made as if he meant to rub his hands, but suddenly leaned his elbow on the rail. “After all,” he went on, “properly speaking, it is a race between the Amelia and the night.”

“And it will be dark early to-day,” said the first lieutenant, swinging the speaking trumpet by its lanyard. “Shall we take the yards off the back-stays, sir?”

“No,” said Captain Vincent. “There is a clever seaman aboard that tartane. He is running off now, but at any time he may haul up again. We must not follow him too closely, or we shall lose the advantage which we have now. That man is determined on making his escape.”

If those words by some miracle could have been carried to the ears of Peyrol, they would have brought to his lips a smile of malicious and triumphant exultation. Ever since he had laid his hand on the tiller of the tartane every faculty of his resourcefulness and seamanship had been bent on deceiving the English captain, that enemy whom he had never seen, the man whose mind he had constructed for himself from the evolutions of his ship. Leaning against the heavy tiller he addressed Michel, breaking the silence of the strenuous afternoon.

“This is the moment,” his deep voice uttered quietly. “Ease off the mainsheet, Michel. A little now, only.”

When Michel returned to the place where he had been sitting to windward, the rover noticed his eyes fixed on his face wonderingly. Some vague thoughts had been forming themselves slowly, incompletely, in Michel’s brain. Peyrol met the utter innocence of the unspoken inquiry with a smile that, beginning sardonically on his manly and sensitive mouth, ended in something resembling tenderness.

“That’s so, camarade,” he said with particular stress and intonation, as if those words contained a full and sufficient answer. Most unexpectedly Michel’s round and generally staring eyes blinked as if dazzled. He too produced from somewhere in the depths of his being a queer, misty smile from which Peyrol averted his gaze.

“Where is the citizen?” he asked, bearing hard against the tiller and staring straight ahead. “He isn’t gone overboard, is he? I don’t seem to have seen him since we rounded the land near Porquerolles Castle.”

Michel, after craning his head forward to look over the edge of the deck, announced that Scevola was sitting on the keelson.

“Go forward,” said Peyrol, “and ease off the fore-sheet now a little. This tartane has wings,” he added to himself.

Alone on the after-deck Peyrol turned his head to look at the Amelia. That ship, in consequence of holding her wind, was now crossing obliquely the wake of the tartane. At the same time she had diminished the distance. Nevertheless, Peyrol considered that had he really meant to escape, his chances were as eight to ten — -practically an assured success. For a long time he had been contemplating the lofty pyramid of canvas towering against the fading red belt on the sky, when a lamentable groan made him look round. It was Scevola. The citizen had adopted the mode of progression on all fours, and while Peyrol looked at him he rolled to leeward, saving himself rather

cleverly from going overboard, and holding on desperately to a cleat, shouted in a hollow voice, pointing with the other hand as if he had made a tremendous discovery: "La terre! La terre!"

"Certainly," said Peyrol, steering with extreme nicety. "What of that?"

"I don't want to be drowned!" cried the citizen in his new hollow voice. Peyrol reflected a bit before he spoke in a serious tone:

"If you stay where you are, I assure you that you will . . ." he glanced rapidly over his shoulder at the Amelia. . . "not die by drowning." He jerked his head sideways. "I know that man's mind."

"What man? Whose mind?" yelled Scevola with intense eagerness and bewilderment. "We are only three on board."

But Peyrol's mind was contemplating maliciously the figure of a man with long teeth, in a wig and with large buckles to his shoes. Such was his ideal conception of what the captain of the Amelia ought to look like. That officer, whose naturally good-humoured face wore then a look of severe resolution, had beckoned his first lieutenant to his side again.

"We are gaining," he said quietly. "I intend to close with him to windward. We won't risk any of his tricks. It is very difficult to outmanuvre a Frenchman, as you know. Send a few armed marines on the forecastle-head. I am afraid the only way to get hold of this tartane is to disable the men on board of her. I wish to goodness I could think of some other. When we close with her, let the marines fire a well-aimed volley. You must get some marines to stand by aft as well. I hope we may shoot away his halliards; once his sails are down on his deck he is ours for the trouble of putting a boat over the side."

For more than half an hour Captain Vincent stood silent, elbow on rail, keeping his eye on the tartane, while on board the latter Peyrol steered silent and watchful but intensely conscious of the enemy ship holding on in her relentless pursuit. The narrow red band was dying out of the sky. The French coast, black against the fading light, merged into the shadows gathering in the eastern board. Citizen Scevola, somewhat soothed by the assurance that he would not die by drowning, had elected to remain quiet where he had fallen, not daring to trust himself to move on the lively deck. Michel, squatting to windward, gazed intently at Peyrol in expectation of some order at any minute. But Peyrol uttered no word and made no sign. From time to time a burst of foam flew over the tartane, or a splash of water would come aboard with a scurrying noise.

It was not till the corvette had got within a long gunshot from the tartane that Peyrol opened his mouth.

"No!" he burst out, loud in the wind, as if giving vent to long anxious thinking, "No! I could not have left you behind with not even a dog for company. Devil take me if I don't think you would not have thanked me for it either. What do you say to that, Michel?"

A half-puzzled smile dwelt persistently on the guileless countenance of the ex-fisherman. He stated what he had always thought in respect of Peyrol's every remark: "I think you are right, *matre*."

"Listen then, Michel. That ship will be alongside of us in less than half an hour. As she comes up they will open on us with musketry."

"They will open on us . . ." repeated Michel, looking quite interested. "But how do you know they will do that, *matre*?"

"Because her captain has got to obey what is in my mind," said Peyrol, in a tone of positive and solemn conviction. "He will do it as sure as if I were at his ear telling him what to do. He will do it because he is a first-rate seaman, but I, Michel, I am just a little bit cleverer than he." He glanced over his shoulder at the *Amelia* rushing after the *tartane* with swelling sails, and raised his voice suddenly. "He will do it because no more than half a mile ahead of us is the spot where Peyrol will die!"

Michel did not start. He only shut his eyes for a time, and the rover continued in a lower tone:

"I may be shot through the heart at once," he said: "and in that case you have my permission to let go the halliards if you are alive yourself. But if I live I mean to put the helm down. When I do that you will let go the foresheet to help the *tartane* to fly into the wind's eye. This is my last order to you. Now go forward and fear nothing. Adieu." Michel obeyed without a word.

Half a dozen of the *Amelia*'s marines stood ranged on the fore-castle-head ready with their muskets. Captain Vincent walked into the lee waist to watch his chase. When he thought that the jibboom of the *Amelia* had drawn level with the stern of the *tartane* he waved his hat and the marines discharged their muskets. Apparently no gear was cut. Captain Vincent observed the white-headed man, who was steering, clap his hand to his left side, while he hove the tiller to leeward and brought the *tartane* sharply into the wind. The marines on the poop fired in their turn, all the reports merging into one. Voices were heard on the decks crying that they "had hit the white-haired chap." Captain Vincent shouted to the master:

"Get the ship round on the other tack."

The elderly seaman who was the master of the *Amelia* took a critical look before he gave the necessary orders; and the *Amelia* closed on her chase with her decks resounding to the piping of boatswain's mates and the hoarse shout: "Hands shorten sail. About ship."

Peyrol, lying on his back under the swinging tiller, heard the calls shrilling and dying away; he heard the ominous rush of *Amelia*'s bow wave as the sloop foamed within ten yards of the *tartane*'s stern; he even saw her upper yards coming down, and then everything vanished out of the clouded sky. There was nothing in his ears but the sound of the wind, the wash of the waves buffeting the little craft left without guidance, and the continuous thrashing of its foresail the sheet of which Michel had let go according to orders. The *tartane* began to roll heavily, but Peyrol's right arm was sound and he managed to put it round a bollard to prevent himself from being

flung about. A feeling of peace sank into him, not unmingled with pride. Everything he had planned had come to pass. He had meant to play that man a trick, and now the trick had been played. Played by him better than by any other old man on whom age had stolen, unnoticed, till the veil of peace was torn down by the touch of a sentiment unexpected like an intruder and cruel like an enemy.

Peyrol rolled his head to the left. All he could see were the legs of Citizen Scevola sliding nervelessly to and fro to the rolling of the vessel as if his body had been jammed somewhere. Dead, or only scared to death? And Michel? Was he dead or dying, that man without friends whom his pity had refused to leave behind marooned on the earth without even a dog for company? As to that, Peyrol felt no compunction; but he thought he would have liked to see Michel once more. He tried to utter his name, but his throat refused him even a whisper. He felt himself removed far away from that world of human sounds, in which Arlette had screamed at him: "Peyrol, don't you dare!" He would never hear anybody's voice again! Under that grey sky there was nothing for him but the swish of breaking seas and the ceaseless furious beating of the tartane's foresail. His play-thing was knocking about terribly under him, with her tiller flying madly to and fro just clear of his head, and solid lumps of water coming on board over his prostrate body. Suddenly, in a desperate lurch which brought the whole Mediterranean with a ferocious snarl level with the slope of the little deck, Peyrol saw the Amelia bearing right down upon the tartane. The fear, not of death but of failure, gripped his slowing-down heart. Was this blind Englishman going to run him down and sink the dispatches together with the craft? With a mighty effort of his ebbing strength Peyrol sat up and flung his arm round the shroud of the mainmast.

The Ameleia, whose way had carried her past the tartane for a quarter of a mile, before sail could be shortened and her yards swung on the other tack, was coming back to take possession of her chase. In the deepening dusk and amongst the foaming seas it was a matter of difficulty to make out the little craft. At the very moment when the master of the man-of-war, looking out anxiously from the fore-castle-head, thought that she might perhaps have filled and gone down, he caught sight of her rolling in the trough of the sea, and so close that she seemed to be at the end of the Amelia's jibboom. His heart flew in his mouth. "Hard a starboard!" he yelled, his order being passed along the decks.

Peyrol, sinking back on the deck in another heavy lurch of his craft, saw for an instant the whole of the English corvette swing up into the clouds as if she meant to fling herself upon his very breast. A blown seatop flicked his face noisily, followed by a smooth interval, a silence of the waters. He beheld in a flash the days of his manhood, of strength and adventure. Suddenly an enormous voice like the roar of an angry sea-lion seemed to fill the whole of the empty sky in a mighty and commanding shout: "Steady!" ". . . And with the sound of that familiar English word ringing in his ears Peyrol smiled to his visions and died.

The Amelia, stripped down to her topsails and hove to, rose and fell easily while on her quarter about a cable's length away Peyrol's tartane tumbled like a lifeless corpse

amongst the seas. Captain Vincent, in his favourite attitude of leaning over the rail, kept his eyes fastened on his prize. Mr. Bolt, who had been sent for, waited patiently till his commander turned round.

“Oh, here you are, Mr. Bolt. I have sent for you to go and take possession. You speak French, and there may still be somebody alive in her. If so, of course you will send him on board at once. I am sure there can be nobody unwounded there. It will anyhow be too dark to see much, but just have a good look round and secure everything in the way of papers you can lay your hands on. Haul aft the foresheet and sail her up to receive a tow line. I intend to take her along and ransack her thoroughly in the morning; tear down the cuddy linings and so on, should you not find at once what I expect. . . .” Captain Vincent, his white teeth gleaming in the dusk, gave some further orders in a lower tone, and Mr. Bolt departed in a hurry. Half an hour afterwards he was back on board, and the *Amelia*, with the tartane in tow, made sail to the eastward in search of the blockading fleet.

Mr. Bolt, introduced into a cabin strongly lighted by a swinging lamp, tendered to his captain across the table a sail-cloth package corded and scaled, and a piece of paper folded in four, which, he explained, seemed to be a certificate of registry, strangely enough mentioning no name. Captain Vincent seized the grey canvas package eagerly.

“This looks like the very thing, Bolt,” he said, turning it over in his hands. “What else did you find on board?”

Bolt said that he had found three dead men, two on the after-deck and one lying at the bottom of the open hold with the bare end of the foresheet in his hand — “shot down, I suppose, just as he had let it go,” he commented. He described the appearance of the bodies and reported that he had disposed of them according to orders. In the tartane’s cabin there was half a demijohn of wine and a loaf of bread in a locker; also, on the floor, a leather valise containing an officer’s uniform coat and a change of clothing. He had lighted the lamp and saw that the linen was marked “E. Ral.” An officer’s sword on a broad shoulder-belt was also lying on the floor. These things could not have belonged to the old chap with the white hair, who was a big man. “Looks as if somebody had tumbled overboard,” commented Bolt. Two of the bodies looked nondescript, but there was no doubt about that fine old fellow being a seaman.

“By Heavens!” said Captain Vincent, “he was that! Do you know, Bolt, that he nearly managed to escape us? Another twenty minutes would have done it. How many wounds had he?”

“Three I think, sir. I did not look closely,” said Bolt.

“I hated the necessity of shooting brave men like dogs,” said Captain Vincent. “Still, it was the only way; and there may be something here,” he went on, slapping the package with his open palm, “that will justify me in my own eyes. You may go now.”

Captain Vincent did not turn in but only lay down fully dressed on the couch till the officer of the watch, appearing at the door, told him that a ship of the fleet was in sight away to windward. Captain Vincent ordered the private night signal to be made. When he came on deck the towering shadow of a line-of-battle ship that seemed to

reach to the very clouds was well within hail and a voice bellowed from her through a speaking trumpet:

“What ship is that?”

“His Majesty’s sloop Amelia,” hailed back Captain Vincent. “What ship is that, pray?”

Instead of the usual answer there was a short pause and another voice spoke boisterously through the trumpet:

“Is that you, Vincent? Don’t you know the Superb when you see her?”

“Not in the dark, Keats. How are you? I am in a hurry to speak the Admiral.”

“The fleet is lying by,” came the voice now with painstaking distinctness across the murmurs, whispers and splashes of the black lane of water dividing the two ships. “The Admiral bears S.S.E. If you stretch on till daylight as you are, you will fetch him on the other tack in time for breakfast on board the Victory. Is anything up?”

At every slight roll the sails of the Amelia, becalmed by the bulk of the seventy-four, flapped gently against the masts.

“Not much,” hailed Captain Vincent. “I made a prize.”

“Have you been in action?” came the swift inquiry.

“No, no. Piece of luck.”

“Where’s your prize?” roared the speaking trumpet with interest.

“In my desk,” roared Captain Vincent in reply. . . . “Enemy dispatches. . . . I say, Keats, fill on your ship. Fill on her, I say, or you will be falling on board of me.” He stamped his foot impatiently. “Clap some hands at once on the tow-line and run that tartane close under our stern,” he called to the officer of the watch, “or else the old Superb will walk over her without ever knowing anything about it.”

When Captain Vincent presented himself on board the Victory it was too late for him to be invited to share the Admiral’s breakfast. He was told that Lord Nelson had not been seen on deck yet, that morning; and presently word came that he wished to see Captain Vincent at once in his cabin. Being introduced, the captain of the Amelia, in undress uniform, with a sword by his side and his hat under his arm, was received kindly, made his bow and with a few words of explanation laid the packet on the big round table at which sat a silent secretary in black clothes, who had been obviously writing a letter from his lordship’s dictation. The Admiral had been walking up and down, and after he had greeted Captain Vincent he resumed his pacing of a nervous man. His empty sleeve had not yet been pinned on his breast and swung slightly every time he turned in his walk. His thin locks fell lank against the pale cheeks, and the whole face in repose had an expression of suffering with which the fire of his one eye presented a startling contrast. He stopped short and exclaimed while Captain Vincent towered over him in a respectful attitude:

“A tartane! Captured on board a tartane! How on earth did you pitch upon that one out of the hundreds you must see every month?”

“I must confess that I got hold accidentally of some curious information,” said Captain Vincent. “It was all a piece of luck.”

While the secretary was ripping open with a pen-knife the cover of the dispatches Lord Nelson took Captain Vincent out into the stern gallery. The quiet and sunshiny morning had the added charm of a cool, light breeze; and the Victory, under her three topsails and lower staysails, was moving slowly to the southward in the midst of the scattered fleet carrying for the most part the same sail as the Admiral. Only far away two or three ships could be seen covered with canvas trying to close with the flag. Captain Vincent noted with satisfaction that the first lieutenant of the Amelia had been obliged to brace by his afteryards in order not to overrun the Admiral's quarter.

"Why!" exclaimed Lord Nelson suddenly, after looking at the sloop for a moment, "you have that tartane in tow!"

"I thought that your lordship would perhaps like to see a 40-ton lateen craft which has led such a chase to, I daresay, the fastest sloop in his Majesty's service."

"How did it all begin?" asked the Admiral, continuing to look at the Amelia.

"As I have already hinted to your lordship, certain information came in my way," began Captain Vincent, who did not think it necessary to enlarge upon that part of the story. "This tartane, which is not very different to look at from the other tartanes along the coast between Cette and Genoa, had started from a cove on the Giens Peninsula. An old man with a white head of hair was entrusted with the service and really they could have found nobody better. He came round Cape Esterel intending to pass through the Hyres roadstead. Apparently he did not expect to find the Amelia in his way. And it was there that he made his only mistake. If he had kept on his course I would probably have taken no more notice of him than of two other craft that were in sight then. But he acted suspiciously by hauling up for the battery on Porquerolles. This manuvre in connection with the information of which I spoke decided me to overhaul him and see what he had on board." Captain Vincent then related concisely the episodes of the chase. "I assure your lordship that I never gave an order with greater reluctance than to open musketry fire on that craft; but the old man had given such proofs of his seamanship and determination that there was nothing else for it. Why! at the very moment he had the Amelia alongside of him he still made a most clever attempt to prolong the chase. There were only a few minutes of daylight left, and in the darkness we might very well have lost him. Considering that they all could have saved their lives simply by striking their sails on deck, I can not refuse them my admiration and especially to the white-haired man."

The Admiral, who had been all the time looking absently at the Amelia keeping her station with the tartane in tow, said:

"You have a very smart little ship, Vincent. Very fit for the work I have given you to do. French built, isn't she?"

"Yes, my lord. They are great shipbuilders."

"You don't seem to hate the French, Vincent," said the Admiral, smiling faintly.

"Not that kind, my lord," said Captain Vincent with a bow. "I detest their political principles and the characters of their public men, but your lordship will admit that for

courage and determination we could not have found worthier adversaries anywhere on this globe.”

“I never said that they were to be despised,” said Lord Nelson. “Resource, courage, yes. . . . If that Toulon fleet gives me the slip, all our squadrons from Gibraltar to Brest will be in jeopardy. Why don’t they come out and be done with it? Don’t I keep far enough out of their way?” he cried.

Vincent remarked the nervous agitation of the frail figure with a concern augmented by a fit of coughing which came on the Admiral. He was quite alarmed by its violence. He watched the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean choking and gasping so helplessly that he felt compelled to turn his eyes away from the painful spectacle; but he noticed also how quickly Lord Nelson recovered from the subsequent exhaustion.

“This is anxious work, Vincent,” he said. “It is killing me. I aspire to repose somewhere in the country, in the midst of fields, out of reach of the sea and the Admiralty and dispatches and orders, and responsibility too. I have been just finishing a letter to tell them at home I have hardly enough breath in my body to carry me on from day to day. . . . But I am like that white-headed man you admire so much, Vincent,” he pursued, with a weary smile, “I will stick to my task till perhaps some shot from the enemy puts an end to everything. . . . Let us see what there may be in those papers you have brought on board.”

The secretary in the cabin had arranged them in separate piles.

“What is it all about?” asked the Admiral, beginning again to pace restlessly up and down the cabin.

“At the first glance the most important, my lord, are the orders for marine authorities in Corsica and Naples to make certain dispositions in view of an expedition to Egypt.”

“I always thought so,” said the Admiral, his eye gleaming at the attentive countenance of Captain Vincent. “This is a smart piece of work on your part, Vincent. I can do no better than send you back to your station. Yes . . . Egypt . . . the Easts. . . . Everything points that way,” he soliloquized under Vincent’s eyes while the secretary, picking up the papers with care, rose quietly and went out to have them translated and to make an abstract for the Admiral.

“And, yet who knows!” exclaimed Lord Nelson, standing still for a moment. “But the blame or the glory must be mine alone. I will seek counsel from no man.” Captain Vincent felt himself forgotten, invisible, less than a shadow in the presence of a nature capable of such vehement feelings. “How long can he last?” he asked himself with sincere concern.

The Admiral, however, soon remembered his presence, and at the end of another ten minutes Captain Vincent left the Victory, feeling, like all officers who approached Lord Nelson, that he had been speaking with a personal friend; and with a renewed devotion for the great sea-officer’s soul dwelling in the frail body of the Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty’s ships in the Mediterranean. While he was being pulled back to his ship a general signal went up in the Victory for the fleet to form line, as convenient,

ahead and astern of the Admiral; followed by another to the Amelia to part company. Vincent accordingly gave his orders to make sail, and, directing the master to shape a course for Cape Cici, went down into his cabin. He had been up nearly the whole of the last three nights and he wanted to get a little sleep. His slumbers, however, were short and disturbed. Early in the afternoon he found himself broad awake and reviewing in his mind the events of the day before. The order to shoot three brave men in cold blood, terribly distasteful at the time, was lying heavily on him. Perhaps he had been impressed by Peyrol's white head, his obstinacy to escape him, the determination shown to the very last minute, by something in the whole episode that suggested a more than common devotion to duty and a spirit of daring defiance. With his robust health, simple good nature, and sanguine temperament touched with a little irony, Captain Vincent was a man of generous feelings and of easily moved sympathies.

"Yet," he reflected, "they have been asking for it. There could be only one end to that affair. But the fact remains that they were defenceless and unarmed and particularly harmless-looking, and at the same time as brave as any. That old chap now. . . ." He wondered how much of exact truth there was in Symons' tale of adventure. He concluded that the facts must have been true but that Symons' interpretation of them made it extraordinarily difficult to discover what really there was under all that. That craft certainly was fit for blockade running. Lord Nelson had been pleased. Captain Vincent went on deck with the kindest feelings towards all men, alive and dead.

The afternoon had turned out very fine. The British Fleet was just out of sight with the exception of one or two stragglers, under a press of canvas. A light breeze in which only the Amelia could travel at five knots, hardly ruffled the profundity of the blue waters basking in the warm tenderness of the cloudless sky. To south and west the horizon was empty except for two specks very far apart, of which one shone white like a bit of silver and the other appeared black like a drop of ink. Captain Vincent, with his purpose firm in his mind, felt at peace with himself. As he was easily accessible to his officers his first lieutenant ventured a question to which Captain Vincent replied:

"He looks very thin and worn out, but I don't think he is as ill as he thinks he is. I am sure you all would like to know that his lordship is pleased with our yesterday's work — -those papers were of some importance you know — -and generally with the Amelia. It was a queer chase, wasn't it?" he went on. "That tartane was clearly and unmistakably running away from us. But she never had a chance against the Amelia."

During the latter part of that speech the first lieutenant glanced astern as if asking himself how long Captain Vincent proposed to drag that tartane behind the Amelia. The two keepers in her wondered also as to when they would be permitted to get back on board their ship. Symons, who was one of them, declared that he was sick and tired of steering the blamed thing. Moreover, the company on board made him uncomfortable; for Symons was aware that in pursuance of Captain Vincent's orders, Mr. Bolt had had the three dead Frenchmen carried into the cuddy which he afterwards secured with an enormous padlock that, apparently, belonged to it, and had taken the key on board the Amelia. As to one of them, Symons' unforgiving verdict was that it

would have served him right to be thrown ashore for crows to peck his eyes out. And anyhow, he could not understand why he should have been turned into the coxswain of a floating hearse, and be damned to it. . . . He grumbled interminably.

Just about sunset, which is the time of burials at sea, the *Amelia* was hove to and, the rope being manned, the tartane was brought alongside and her two keepers ordered on board their ship. Captain Vincent, leaning over with his elbows on the rail, seemed lost in thought. At last the first lieutenant spoke.

“What are we going to do with that tartane, sir? Our men are on board.”

“We are going to sink her by gunfire,” declared Captain Vincent suddenly. “His ship makes a very good coffin for a seaman, and those men deserve better than to be thrown overboard to roll on the waves. Let them rest quietly at the bottom of the sea in the craft to which they had stuck so well.”

The lieutenant, making no reply, waited for some more positive order. Every eye on the ship was turned on the captain. But Captain Vincent said nothing and seemed unable or unwilling to give it yet. He was feeling vaguely, that in all his good intentions there was something wanting.

“Ah! Mr. Bolt,” he said, catching sight of the master’s-mate in the waist. “Did they have a flag on board that craft?”

“I think she had a tiny bit of ensign when the chase began, sir, but it must have blown away. It is not at the end of her mainyard now.” He looked over the side. “The halliards are rove, though,” he added.

“We must have a French ensign somewhere on board,” said Captain Vincent.

“Certainly, sir,” struck in the master, who was listening.

“Well, Mr. Bolt,” said Captain Vincent, “you have had most to do with all this. Take a few men with you, bend the French ensign on the halliards and sway his mainyard to the masthead.” He smiled at all the faces turned towards him. “After all they never surrendered and, by heavens, gentlemen, we will let them go down with their colours flying.”

A profound but not disapproving silence reigned over the decks of the ship while Mr. Bolt with three or four hands was busy executing the order. Then suddenly above the topgallant rail of the *Amelia* appeared the upper curve of a lateen yard with the tricolour drooping from the point. A subdued murmur from all hands greeted this apparition. At the same time Captain Vincent ordered the line holding the tartane alongside to be cast off and the mainyard of the *Amelia* to be swung round. The sloop shooting ahead of her prize left her stationary on the sea, then putting the helm up, ran back abreast of her on the other side. The port bow-gun was ordered to fire a round, aiming well forward. That shot, however, went just over, taking the foremast out of the tartane. The next was more successful, striking the little hull between wind and water, and going out well under water on the other side. A third was fired, as the men said, just for luck, and that too took effect, a splintered hole appearing at the bow. After that the guns were secured and the *Amelia*, with no brace being touched, was brought to her course towards Cape Cici. All hands on board of her with their backs

to the sunset sky, clear like a pale topaz above the hard blue gem of the sea, watched the tartane give a sudden dip, followed by a slow, unchecked dive. At last the tricolour flag alone remained visible for a tense and interminable moment, pathetic and lonely, in the centre of a brimful horizon. All at once it vanished, like a flame blown upon, bringing to the beholders the sense of having been left face to face with an immense, suddenly created solitude. On the decks of the *Amelia* a low murmur died out.

* *

When Lieutenant Ral sailed away with the Toulon fleet on the great strategical cruise which was to end in the battle of Trafalgar, Madame Ral returned with her aunt to her hereditary house at Escampobar. She had only spent a few weeks in town where she was not much seen in public. The lieutenant and his wife lived in a little house near the western gate, and the lieutenant's official position, though he was employed on the staff to the last, was not sufficiently prominent to make her absence from official ceremonies at all remarkable. But this marriage was an object of mild interest in naval circles. Those — -mostly men — -who had seen Madame Ral at home, told stories of her dazzling complexion, of her magnificent black eyes, of her personal and attractive strangeness, and of the Arlesian costume she insisted on wearing, even after her marriage to an officer of the navy, being herself sprung from farmer stock. It was also said that her father and mother had fallen victims in the massacres of Toulon after the evacuation of the town; but all those stories varied in detail and were on the whole very vague. Whenever she went abroad Madame Ral was attended by her aunt who aroused almost as much curiosity as herself: a magnificent old woman with upright carriage and an austere, brown, wrinkled face showing signs of past beauty. Catherine was also seen alone in the streets where, as a matter of fact, people turned round to look after the thin and dignified figure, remarkable amongst the passers-by, whom she, herself, did not seem to see. About her escape from the massacres most wonderful tales were told, and she acquired the reputation of a heroine. Arlette's aunt was known to frequent the churches, which were all open to the faithful now, carrying even into the house of God her sibylline aspect of a prophetess and her austere manner. It was not at the services that she was seen most. People would see her oftener in an empty nave, standing slim and as straight as an arrow in the shade of a mighty pillar as if making a call on the Creator of all things with whom she had made her peace generously, and now would petition only for pardon and reconciliation with her niece Arlette. For Catherine for a long time remained uncertain of the future. She did not get rid of her involuntary awe of her niece as a selected object of God's wrath, until towards the end of her life. There was also another soul for which she was concerned. The pursuit of the tartane by the *Amelia* had been observed from various points of the islands that close the roadstead of Hyres, and the English ship had been seen from the Fort de la Vigie opening fire on her chase. The result, though the two vessels soon ran out of sight, could not be a matter of doubt. There was also the story told by a coaster that got into Frjus, of a tartane being fired on by a square-rigged man-of-war; but that apparently was the next day. All these rumours pointed one way and were the foundation of the

report made by Lieutenant Ral to the Toulon Admiralty. That Peyrol went out to sea in his tartane and was never seen again, was of course an incontrovertible fact.

The day before the two women were to go back to Escampobar, Catherine approached a priest in the church of Ste Marie Majeure, a little unshaven fat man with a watery eye, in order to arrange for some masses to be said for the dead.

“But for whose soul are we to pray?” mumbled the priest in a wheezy low tone.

“Pray for the soul of Jean,” said Catherine. “Yes, Jean. There is no other name.”

Lieutenant Ral, wounded at Trafalgar, but escaping capture, retired with the rank of Capitaine de Fregate and vanished from the eyes of the naval world in Toulon and indeed from the world altogether. Whatever sign brought him back to Escampobar on that momentous night, was not meant to call him to his death but to a quiet and retired life, obscure in a sense but not devoid of dignity. In the course of years he became the Mayor of the Commune in that very same little village which had looked on Escampobar as the abode of iniquity, the sojourn of blood-drinkers and of wicked women.

One of the earliest excitements breaking the monotony of the Escampobar life was the discovery at the bottom of the well, one dry year when the water got very low, of some considerable obstruction. After a lot of trouble in getting it up, this obstruction turned out to be a garment made of sail-cloth, which had armholes and three horn buttons in front, and looked like a waistcoat; but it was lined, positively quilted, with a surprising quantity of gold pieces of various ages, coinages and nationalities. Nobody but Peyrol could have put it there. Catherine was able to give the exact date; because she remembered seeing him doing something at the well on the very morning before he went out to sea with Michel, carrying off Scevola. Captain Ral could guess easily the origin of that treasure, and he decided with his wife’s approval to give it up to the Government as the hoard of a man who had died intestate with no discoverable relations, and whose very name had been a matter of uncertainty, even to himself. After that event the uncertain name of Peyrol found itself oftener and oftener on Monsieur and Madame Ral’s lips, on which before it was but seldom heard; though the recollection of his white-headed, quiet, irresistible personality haunted every corner of the Escampobar fields. From that time they talked of him openly, as though he had come back to live again amongst them.

Many years afterwards, one fine evening, Monsieur and Madame Ral sitting on the bench outside the salle (the house had not been altered at all outside except that it was now kept whitewashed), began to talk of that episode and of the man who, coming from the seas, had crossed their lives to disappear at sea again.

“How did he get all that lot of gold?” wondered Madame Ral innocently. “He could not possibly want it; and, Eugne, why should he have put it down there?”

“That, ma chre amie,” said Ral, “is not an easy question to answer. Men and women are not so simple as they seem. Even you, fermire (he used to give his wife that name jocularly, sometimes), are not so simple as some people would take you to be. I think that if Peyrol were here he could not perhaps answer your question himself.”

And they went on, reminding each other in short phrases separated by long silences, of his peculiarities of person and behaviour, when above the slope leading down to Madrague, there appeared first, the pointed ears, and then the whole body of a very diminutive donkey of a light grey colour with dark points. Two pieces of wood, strangely shaped, projected on each side of his body as far as his head, like very long shafts of a cart. But the donkey dragged no cart after him. He was carrying on his back on a small pack saddle the torso of a man who did not seem to have any legs. The little animal, beautifully groomed and with an intelligent and even impudent physiognomy, stopped in front of Monsieur and Madame Ral. The man, balancing himself cleverly on the pack saddle with his withered legs crossed in front of him, slipped off, disengaged his crutches from each side of the donkey smartly, propped himself on them, and with his open palm gave the animal a resounding thwack which sent it trotting into the yard. The cripple of the Madrague in his quality of Peyrol's friend (for the rover had often talked of him both to the women and to Lieutenant Ral with great appreciation — "C'est un homme, a") had become a member of the Escampobar community. His employment was to run about the country on errands, most unfit, one would think, for a man without legs. But the donkey did all the walking while the cripple supplied the sharp wits and an unfailing memory. The poor fellow, snatching off his hat and holding it with one hand alongside his right crutch, approached to render his account of the day in the simple words: "Everything has been done as you ordered, madame"; then lingered, a privileged servant, familiar but respectful, attractive with his soft eyes, long face, and his pained smile.

"We were just talking of Peyrol," remarked Captain Ral.

"Ah, one could talk a long time of him," said the cripple. "He told me once that if I had been complete — -with legs like everybody else, I suppose he meant — - I would have made a good comrade away there in the distant seas. He had a great heart."

"Yes," murmured Madame Ral thoughtfully. Then turning to her husband, she asked: "What sort of man was he really, Eugne?" Captain Ral remained silent. "Did you ever ask yourself that question?" she insisted.

"Yes," said Ral. "But the only certain thing we can say of him is that he was not a bad Frenchman."

"Everything's in that," murmured the cripple, with fervent conviction in the silence that fell upon Ral's words and Arlette's faint sigh of memory.

The blue level of the Mediterranean, the charmer and the deceiver of audacious men, kept the secret of its fascination — -hugged to its calm breast the victims of all the wars, calamities and tempests of its history, under the marvellous purity of the sunset sky. A few rosy clouds floated high up over the Esterel range. The breath of the evening breeze came to cool the heated rocks of Escampobar; and the mulberry tree, the only big tree on the head of the peninsula, standing like a sentinel at the gate of the yard, sighed faintly in a shudder of all its leaves, as if regretting the Brother of the Coast, the man of dark deeds, but of large heart, who often at noonday would lie down to sleep under its shade.

Suspense

A NAPOLEONIC NOVEL
Conrad's unfinished novel

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Part 1

Chapter 1

A deep red glow flushed the fronts of marble palaces piled up on the slope of an arid mountain whose barren ridge traced high on the darkening sky a ghostly and glimmering outline. The winter sun was setting over the Gulf of Genoa. Behind the massive shore the sky to the east was like darkening glass. The open water too had a glassy look with a purple sheen in which the evening light lingered as if clinging to the water. The sails of a few becalmed feluccas looked rosy and cheerful, motionless in the gathering gloom. Their heads were all pointing towards the superb city. Within the long jetty with the squat round tower at the end, the water of the harbour had turned black. A bigger vessel with square sails, issuing from it and arrested by the sudden descent of the calm, faced the red disc of the sun. Her ensign hung down and its colours were not to be made out; but a lank man in a shabby sailor's jacket and wearing a strange cap with a tassel, who lounged with both his arms thrown over the black breech of an enormous piece of ordnance that with three of its monstrous fellows squatted on the platform of the tower, seemed to have no doubt of her nationality; for to the question of a young civilian in a long coat and Hessian boots and with an ingenuous young countenance above the folds of a white neckcloth he answered curtly, taking a short pipe out of his mouth but not turning his head.

"She's Elban."

He replaced his pipe and preserved an unsociable air. The elegant young man with the pleasant countenance, (who was Cosmo, the son of Sir Charles Latham of Latham Hall, Yorkshire), repeated under his breath, "Elban," and remained wrapped up in still contemplation of the becalmed ship with her undistinguishable flag.

It was not till the sun had sunk beneath the waters of the Mediterranean and the undistinguishable flag had been hauled down on board the motionless ship that he stirred and turned his eyes towards the harbour. The nearest prominent object in it was the imposing shape of an English line-of-battle ship moored on the west side not far from the quay. Her tall spars overtopped the roofs of the houses and the English ensign at her flagstaff had been just hauled down and replaced by a lantern that looked strange in the clear twilight. The forms of shipping crowded towards the head of the harbour were merging into one another. Cosmo let his eyes wander over the circular platform of the tower. The man leaning over the gun went on smoking with indifference.

"Are you the guardian of this tower?" asked the young man.

The other gave him a sidelong glance and made answer without changing his attitude and more as if speaking to himself:

“This is now an unguarded spot. The wars are over.”

“Do they close the door at the bottom of this tower at night?” enquired Cosmo.

“That is a matter worth consideration especially for those like you, for instance, who have a soft bed to go to for the night.”

The young man put his head on one side and looked at his interlocutor with a faint smile.

“You don’t seem to care,” he said. “So I conclude I need not. As long as you are content to stay here I am safe enough. I followed you up the stairs, you know.”

The man with the pipe stood up abruptly. “You followed me here? Why did you do that, in the name of all the saints?”

The young man laughed as if at a good joke. “Because you were walking in front of me. There was nobody else in view near the Mole. Suddenly you disappeared. Then I saw that the door at the bottom of the tower was open and I walked up the stairs on to this platform. And I would have been very surprised if I hadn’t found you here.”

The man in the strange cap ornamented with a tassel had taken his pipe out of his mouth to listen. “That was all?”

“Yes, that was all.”

“Nobody but an Englishman would behave like that,” commented the other to himself, a slight appearance of apprehension passing over his features. “You are an eccentric people.”

“I don’t see anything eccentric in what I’ve done. I simply wanted to walk out of the town. The Mole was as good as any other part. It is very pleasant here.”

A slight breeze touched the two men’s faces, while they stood silent, looking at each other. “I am but an idle traveller,” said Cosmo easily. “I arrived this morning by land. I am glad I had the idea to come out here to behold your town glowing in the sunset and to get a sight of a vessel belonging to Elba. There can’t be very many of them. But you, my friend . . . “

“I have as much right to idle away my time here as any English traveller,” interrupted the man hastily.

“It is very pleasant here,” repeated the young traveller, staring into the dusk which had invaded the platform of the tower.

“Pleasant?” repeated the other. “Yes, perhaps. The last time I was on this platform I was only ten years old. A solid round shot was spinning and rattling all over the stone floor. It made a wondrous disturbance and seemed a living thing full of fury.”

“A solid shot!” exclaimed Cosmo, looking all over the smooth flagstones as if expecting to see the traces of that visitation. “Where did it come from?”

“It came from an English brig belonging to Milord Keith’s Squadron. She stood in quite close and opened fire on us. . . . Heaven only knows why. The audacity of your people! A single shot from one of those big fellows,” he continued, slapping the

enormous bulging breech of the gun by his side, “would have been enough to sink her like a stone.”

“I can well believe it. But the fearlessness of our seamen has ceased to astonish the world long ago,” murmured the young traveller.

“There are plenty of fearless people in the world, but luck is even better than courage. The brig sailed away unscathed. Yes, luck is even better than courage. Surer than wisdom and stronger than justice. Luck is a great thing. It is the only thing worth having on one’s side. And you people have always had it. Yes, signore, you belong to a lucky nation or else you would not be standing here on this platform looking across the water in the direction of that crumb of land that is the last refuge of your greatest enemy.”

Cosmo leaned over the stone parapet near the embrasure of the gun on the other side of which the man with the short pipe in his hand made a vaguely emphatic gesture: “I wonder what thoughts pass through your head,” he went on in a quiet detached tone. “Or perhaps you are too young yet to have many thoughts in your head. Excuse my liberty, but I have always heard that one may be frank in speech with an Englishman; and by your speech there can be no doubt of you being of that nation.”

“I can assure you I have no thoughts of hatred. . . . Look, the Elban ship is getting farther away. Or is it only the darkness that makes her seem so?”

“The night air is heavy. There is more wind on the water than up here, where we stand; but I don’t think she has moved away. You are interested in that Elban ship, signore.”

“There is a fascination now about everything connected with that island,” confessed the ingenuous traveller. “You have just said that I was too young to think. You don’t seem so very much older than myself. I wonder what thoughts you may have.”

“The thoughts of a common man, thoughts that could be of no interest to an English milord,” answered the other, in a grimly deprecatory tone.

“Do you think that all Englishmen are lords?” asked Cosmo, with a laugh.

“I didn’t think. I went by your appearance. I remember hearing an old man once say that you were a lordly nation.”

“Really!” exclaimed the young man and laughed again in a low, pleasant note. “I remember hearing of an old man who called us a nation of traders.”

“Nazione di mercante,” repeated the man slowly. “Well, that may be true too. Different men, different wisdoms.”

“This didn’t occur to me,” said Cosmo, seating himself with a little spring on the stone parapet of the tower. He rested one foot on the massive gun-carriage and fixed his clear eyes on the dark red streak on the western sky left by the retreating sun like a long gash inflicted on the suffering body of the universe. . . . “Different men, different wisdoms,” he repeated, musingly. “I suppose it must be. People’s lives are so very different. . . . And of what kind was the wisdom of your old man?”

“The wisdom of a great plain as level almost as the sea,” said the other gravely. “His voice was as unexpected when I heard it as your own, signore. The eve-ainshadows

had closed about me just after I had seen to the west, on the edge of the world as it were, a lion miss his spring on a bounding deer. They went away right into the glow and vanished. It was as though I had dreamed. When I turned round there was the old man behind me no farther away than half the width of this platform. He only smiled at my startled looks. His long silver locks stirred in the breeze. He had been watching me, it seems, from folds of ground and from amongst reed beds for nearly half a day, wondering what I might be at. I had come ashore to wander on the plain. I like to be alone sometimes. My ship was anchored in a bight of this deserted coast a good many miles away, too many to walk back in the dark for a stranger like me. So I spent the night in that old man's ranch, a hut of grass and reeds, near a little piece of water peopled by a multitude of birds. He treated me as if I had been his son. We talked till dawn and when the sun rose I did not go back to my ship. What I had on board of my own was not of much value, and there was certainly no one there to address me as "My son" in that particular tone — you know what I mean, signore."

"I don't know — but I think I can guess," was the answer whose light-hearted yet earnest frankness was particularly boyish and provoked a smile on the part of the older man. In repose his face was grave. His English interlocutor went on after a pause. "You deserted from your ship to join a hermit in a wilderness simply because the tone of his voice appealed to your heart. Is that your meaning?"

"You have guessed it, signorino. Perhaps there was more in it than that. There is no doubt about it that I did desert from my ship."

"And where was that?"

"On the coast of South America," answered the man from the other side of the big gun, with sudden curtness. "And now it is time for us to part."

But neither of them stirred and for some time they remained silent, growing shadowy to each other on the massive tower, which itself, in the advancing night, was but a gray shadow above the dark and motionless sea.

"How long did you stay with that hermit in the desert?" asked Cosmo. "And how did you leave him?"

"Signore, it was he who left me. After I had buried his body I had nothing more to do there. I had learned much during that year."

"What is it you learned, my friend? I should like to know."

"Signore, his wisdom was not like that of other men and it would be too long to explain to you here on this tower and at this late hour of the day. I learned many things. How to be patient, for instance. . . . Don't you think, signore, that your friends or the servants at the inn may become uneasy at your long absence?"

"I tell you I haven't been much more than two hours in this town and I have spoken to nobody in it till I came upon you, except of course to the people at the inn."

"They may start looking for you."

"Why should they trouble their heads? It isn't late yet. Why should they notice my absence?"

“Why? . . . Simply because your supper may be ready by this time,” retorted the man impatiently.

“It may be, but I am not hungry yet,” said the young man casually. “Let them search for me all over the town if they like.” Then in a tone of interest, “Do you think they would think of looking for me here?” he asked.

“No. This is the last spot anybody would think of,” muttered the other as if to himself. He raised his voice markedly, “We must part indeed. Good-night, signore.”

“Good-night.”

The man in the seaman’s jacket stared for a moment, then with a brusque movement cocked his cap with the strange tassel more on the side of his head. “I am not going away from this spot,” he said.

“I thought you were. Why did you wish me goodnight then?”

“Because we must part.”

“I suppose we must some time or other,” agreed Cosmo in a friendly voice. “I should like to meet you again.”

“We must part at once, this moment, on this tower.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to be left alone,” answered the other after the slightest of pauses.

“Oh, come! Why on earth do you want to be left alone? What is it you could do here?” protested the other with great good humour. Then as if struck by an amusing notion, “Unless indeed you want to practise incantations,” he continued lightly, “and perhaps call the Evil One to your side.” He paused. “There are people, you know, that think it can be done,” he added in a mocking tone.

“They are not far wrong,” was the other’s ominous reply. “Each man has a devil not very far from his elbow. Don’t argue, signore, don’t call him up in me! You had better say no more and go in peace from here.”

The young traveller did not change his careless attitude. The man in the cap heard him say quietly, almost in a tone of self-communion:

“I prefer to stay in peace here.”

It was indeed a wonderful peace. The sound of their quiet voices did not seem to affect it in the least. It had an enormous and overpowering amplitude which seemed rather to the man in the cap to take the part of the Englishman’s calm obstinacy against his growing anger. He couldn’t repress an impulsively threatening movement in the direction of his inconvenient companion but it died out in perplexity. He pushed his cap still more on one side and simply scratched his head.

“You are one of those people that are accustomed to have their own way. Well, you can’t have your way this time. I have asked you quietly to leave me alone on this tower. I asked you as man to man. But if you won’t listen to reason I . . . “

Cosmo, putting the palms of his hands against the edge of the parapet, sprang lightly nearly to the middle of the platform and landed without a stagger. His voice was perfectly even.

“Reason is my only guide,” he declared. “But your request looks like mere caprice. For what can you possibly have to do here? The sea birds are gone to sleep and I have as much right to the air up here as you. Therefore ...”

A thought seemed to strike him. “Surely this can’t be your trysting place,” he commented in a changed tone through which pierced a certain sympathy.

A short scornful laugh from the other checked him and he muttered to himself soberly, “No. Altogether unfit . . . amongst those grim old guns.” He raised his voice. “All I can do is to give you all the room.” He backed away from the centre of the platform and perched himself this time on the massive breech of a sixty-pounder. “Go on with your incantations,” he said then to the tall and dim figure whose immobility appeared helpless for a moment. It broke the short period of silence, saying deliberately:

“I suppose you are aware that at any time since we have begun to talk together it was open to me to fling myself upon you unawares as you sat on the parapet and knock you over to the bottom of this tower?” He waited a moment, then in a deeper tone, “Will you deny it?” he said.

“No, I won’t deny it,” was the careless answer. “I hadn’t thought to be on my guard. But I can swim.”

“Don’t you know there is a border of big blocks of stone there? It would have been a terrible death. . . . And now, will the signore do what I ask him and return to his inn which is a much safer place than this platform?”

“Safety is not a great inducement; and I don’t believe for a moment you ever thought of attacking me in a treacherous manner.”

“Well,” the tall shadowy figure crowned by the shape of the strange cap admitted reluctantly. “Well, since you put it in those words, signore, I did not.”

“You see! I believe you are a fine fellow. But as it is I am under no sort of obligation to listen to you.”

“You are crafty,” burst out the other violently.

“It’s in the blood. How is one to deal with people like you?”

“You could try to drive me off,” suggested the other.

There was no answer for a time, then the tall figure muttered reflectively to itself.

“After all — he’s an Englishman.”

“I don’t think myself invincible on that account,” observed Cosmo calmly.

“I know. I have fought against English soldiers in Buenos Ayres. I was only thinking that, to give the devil his due, men of your nation don’t consort with spies or love tyranny either. . . . Tell me, is it true that you have only been two hours in this town?”

“Perfectly true.”

“And yet all the tyrants of the world are your allies,” the shadowy man pursued his train of thought half aloud.

The no less shadowy traveller remarked quietly into the gathering night:

“You don’t know who my friends are.”

"I don't, but I think you are not likely to go with a tale to the Austrian spies or consort with the Piedmont-ese sbirri. As to the priests who are poking their noses everywhere, I . . . "

"I don't know a single soul in Italy," interrupted the other.

"But you will soon. People like you make acquaintances everywhere. But it's idle talk with strangers that I fear. Can I trust you as an Englishman not to talk of what you may see?"

"You may. I can't imagine what unlawful thing you are about to commit here. I am dying from curiosity. Can it be that you are really some sort of sorcerer? Go on! Trace your magic circle if that is your business, and call up the spirits of the dead."

A low grunt was the only answer to this speech uttered in a tone between jest and earnest. Cosmo watched from the breach of his gun with intense interest the movements of the man who objected so strongly to his presence but who now seemed to pay no attention to him at all. They were not the movements of a magician in so far that they certainly had nothing to do with the tracing of circles. The figure had stepped over to the seaward face of the tower and seemed to be pulling endless things out of the breast pocket of his jacket. The young Englishman got down from the breach of the gun, without ceasing to peer in a fascinated way, and moved closer step by step till he threw himself back with an exclamation of astonishment. "By heavens! The fellow is going to fish." . . . Cosmo remained mute with surprise for a good many seconds and then burst out loudly:

"Is this what you displayed all this secrecy for? This is the worst hoax I ever ..."

"Come nearer, signore, but take care not to tangle all my twine with your feet. . . . Do you see this box?"

The heads of the two men had come together confidentially and the young traveller made out a cylindrical object which was in fact a round tin box. His companion thrust it into his hand with the request, "Hold it for me a moment, signore," and then Cosmo had the opportunity to ascertain that the lid of it was hermetically sealed. The man in the strange cap dived into the pocket of his breeches for flint and steel. The Englishman beheld with surprise his lately inimical companion squeeze himself between the massive tube of the piece of ordnance and the wall of stone and wriggle outwards into the depth of the thick embrasure till nothing of him remained visible but his black stockings and the soles of his heavy shoes. After a time his voice came deadened along the thickness of the wall:

"Will you hand me the box now, signore?" Cosmo, enlisted in these mysterious proceedings, the nature of which was becoming clear enough to him, obeyed at once, and approaching the embrasure thrust the box in at the full length of his arm till it came in contact with the ready hand of the man who was lying flat on his stomach with his head projecting beyond the wall of the tower. His groping hand found and snatched away the box. The twine was attached to the box and at once its length laid on the platform began to run out till the very end disappeared. Then the man lying prone within the thickness of the gun embrasure lay still as death and the young

traveller strained his ears in the absolute silence to catch the slightest sound at the foot of the tower. But all he could hear was the faint sound of some distant clock striking somewhere in the town. He waited a little longer, then in the cautious tone of a willing accomplice murmured within the opening:

“Got a bite yet?” The answer came hardly audible: “No. But this is the very hour.” Cosmo felt his interest growing. And yet the facts in themselves were not very exciting, but all this had the complexion and the charm of an unexpected adventure, heightened by its mystery, playing itself out before that old town towering like a carved hill decorated with lights that began to appear quickly on the sombre and colossal mass of that lofty shore. The last gleam had died out in the west. The harbour was dark except for the lantern at the stern of the British ship of the line. The man in the embrasure made a slight movement. Cosmo became more alert but apparently nothing happened. There was no murmur of voices, splash of water, or sign of the slightest stir all round the tower. Suddenly the man in the embrasure began to wriggle back on to the platform and in a very few minutes stood up to his full height facing the unexpected helper.

“She has come and gone,” he said. “Did you hear anything, signore?”

“Not a sound. She might have been the ghost of a boat — for you are alluding to a boat, are you not?”

“Si. And I hope that if any eye on shore had made her out it had taken her for only a ghost. Of course that English vessel of war rows guard at night. But it isn’t to look out for ghosts.”

“I should think not. Ghosts are of no account. Could there be anything more futile than the ghost of a boat?”

“You are one of the strong-minded, signore. Ghosts are the concern of the ignorant — yet who knows? But it does sound funny to talk of the ghost of a boat, a thing of brute matter. For wouldn’t a ghost be a thing of spirit, a man’s soul itself made restless by grief or love, or remorse or anger? Such are the stories that one hears. But the old hermit of the plain, of whom I spoke, assured me that the dead are too glad to be done with life to make trouble on earth.”

“You and your hermit!” exclaimed Cosmo in a boyish and marvelling tone. “I suppose it is no use me asking you what I have been just helping you in.”

“A, little smuggling operation, signore. Surely, signore, England has custom houses and therefore must have smugglers too.”

“One has heard of them of course. But I wouldn’t mind a bet that there is not one of them that resembles you. Neither do I believe that they deal with packages as small as the one you lowered into that ghostly boat. You saw her of course. There was a boat.”

“There was somebody to cut the string, as you see, signore. Look, here is all that twine, all of it but a little piece. It may have been a man swimming in the dark water. A man with a soul, fit to make a ghost of . . . let us call him a ghost, signore.”

“Oh yes, let us,” the other said lightly. “I am sure that when I wake up to-morrow all this will seem to me a dream. Even now I feel inclined to pinch myself.”

“What’s that for, in Heaven’s name?”

“It’s a saying we have in our country. Yes, you, your hermit, our talk, and this very tower, all this will be like a dream.”

“I would say ‘nothing better’ if it was not that most people are only too ready to talk about their dreams. No, signore, let all this be to you of less consequence than if it were a tale of ghosts, of mere ghosts in which you do not believe. You forced yourself on me as if you were the lord of this place, but I feel friendly enough to you.”

“I didn’t ask for your friendship,” retorted the young traveller in a clear voice so void of all offence that the other man accepted it for a mere statement of a fact.

“Certainly not. I spoke of my own feelings, and though I am, you may say, a new-comer and a stranger in my own native city, I assure you it is better to have me for a friend than for an enemy. And the best thing of all would be to forget all about me. It would be also the kindest thing you could do.”

“Really?” said Cosmo in a tone of sympathy. “How can you expect me to forget the most extraordinary thing that ever happened to me in all my life?”

“In all your life! H’m! You have a long life before you yet, signorino.”

“Oh, but this is an adventure.”

“That’s what I mean. You have so many marvellous adventures before you, signorino, that this one is sure to be forgotten very soon. Then why not at once?”

“No, my friend, you don’t seem somehow a person one could easily forget.”

“I-God forbid. . . . Good-night, signore.”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the man in the cap bounded across the platform, dived into the black square opening on its landward side, and ran down the steps so lightly that not a sound reached the ears of the other. Cosmo went down the winding stair, but cautiously in the profound darkness. The door at the bottom stood open and he stepped out on to the deserted jetty. He could see on it nothing in the shape of a fleeting shadow.

On the very edge of the shore a low little building with three arcades sent a dim gleam of light through its open door. It seemed to be a sort of guardroom, for there was a sentry, an Austrian soldier apparently, in a white coat. His duty, however, seemed to be concerned with the landing-steps in front of the guardhouse, and he let the young traveller pass on as though he had not seen him at all. Dark night had settled upon the long quay. Here and there a dim street lamp threw a feeble light on the uneven stones which the feet of the young traveller with his springy walk seemed hardly to touch. The pleasurable sensation of something extraordinary having happened to him accelerated his movements. He was also feeling very hungry and he was making haste towards his inn to dine first and then to think his adventure over, for there was a strong conviction within him that he certainly had had an adventure of a nature at the same time stimulating and obscure.

Chapter 2

Cosmo Latham had an inborn faculty of orientation in strange surroundings, most invaluable in a cavalry officer, but of which he had never made much use, not even during the few months when he served as a cornet of horse in the Duke of Wellington's army in the last year of the peninsular campaign. There had been but few occasions to make use of it for a freshly joined subaltern. It stood him in good stead that night, however, while making his way to his inn in a town in which he was a complete stranger, for it allowed him, with but little concern for the direction he took, to think of his home which he loved for itself, every stone and every tree of it — and of the two people he left there, whom he loved too, each in a different way: his father, Sir Charles, and his sister Henrietta.

Latham Hall, a large straggling building showing traces of many styles, flanked by a romantic park and commanding a vast view of the Yorkshire hills, had been the hereditary home of Lathams from the times before the Great Rebellion. That it escaped confiscation then might have been the effect of the worldly prudence of the Latham of the time. He probably took good care not to shock persons of position and influence. That, however, was not the characteristic of the later Lathams down to Sir Charles, Cosmo's father.

Sir Charles's unconventional individuality had never been understood by his country neighbours. Born endowed with a good intellect, a lively imagination, and a capacity for social intercourse, it had been his fate, owing to the idiosyncrasies of his own father, to spend his early youth in the depths of Yorkshire in surroundings not at all congenial to his tastes. Later he served for a time in the Guards; but he very soon left the army to make an extended tour in France and Italy. In those last days before the Revolution le chevalier Latham obtained a great social recognition in Paris and Versailles amongst the very best people, not so much by his brilliance as by the depth of his character and the largeness of his ideas. But suddenly he tore himself away from his friendships and successes and proceeded to Italy. There, amongst the members of the English colony in Florence, he met the two Aston girls and, for some reason or other, became a great favourite with their widowed mother. But at the end of some months he suddenly made up his mind to return home. During a long, sleepless night, which he spent pacing up and down in the agony of an internal struggle with himself in the magnificent rooms of his lodgings in Florence, he concluded that he would go home by sea. It was the easiest way of avoiding coming near Paris. He had heard not long before that the best friends he had made in the brilliant society he had frequented in France, the Marquis and the Marquise d'Armand, had a daughter born to them. At Leghorn on the very eve of embarking he had another struggle with himself — but he went by sea. By the time when, after a long sea passage, he put his foot on native soil he had renounced the idea of hurrying on north to shut himself up in his country home. He lingered in London, disdainful and idle, and began reluctantly to fall into the ways of a man about town, when a friend returning from Italy brought him news that Miss Aston was going to

marry a Tuscan nobleman of mature years, and, as a piece of queer Florentine gossip, that if the younger sister, Miss Molly

Aston, had refused two suitors in quick succession it was because she regarded herself in some way as being engaged to him, Charles Latham.

Whether stung by his conscience or urged by indignation Sir Charles started impulsively for Italy, travelling across the south of France. It was a long road. At first he had been amazed, confounded, and angry; but before he came to the end of his journey he had time to reflect upon what might have easily become an absurd and odious situation. He said to himself that a lot of bother of one sort and another would be saved by his marrying Molly Aston. He did so, to the applause of all right-minded people, and at the end of two years spent abroad came home with his wife to shut himself up in his ancestral hall commanding the view of a wide and romantic landscape, which he thought one of the finest in the world.

Molly Aston had been beautiful enough in her time to inspire several vagrant poets and at least one Italian sculptor; but as Cosmo grew older he began to understand that his mother had been a nonentity in the family life. The greatest piece of self-assertion on her part was his name. She had insisted on calling him Cosmo because the Astons counted, far back in the past, an ancestress of Florentine origin, supposed to have been a connection of the Medici family. Cosmo was fair, and the name was all about him that he had received from his mother. Henrietta was a type of dark beauty. Lady Latham died when both her children were still young. In her life she adorned Latham Hall in the same way as a statue might have adorned it. Her household power was limited to the ordering of the dinner. With habits of meticulous order and a marvellously commonplace mind she had a temperament which, if she had not fallen violently in love at the age of eighteen with the same man whom she married, would have made her fond of society, of amusement, and perhaps even of dissipation. But her only amusement and dissipation consisted of writing long letters to innumerable relations and friends all over the world, of whom after her marriage she saw but very little. She never complained. Her hidden fear of all initiative and the secret ardour of her temperament found their fulfilment in an absolute submission to Sir Charles's will. She would never have dreamed of asking for horses for a visit in the neighbourhood, but when her husband remarked, "I think it would be advisable for you, my lady, to call at such and such a house," her face would light up, she would answer with alacrity, "Certainly, Sir Charles," and go off to array herself magnificently indeed (perhaps because of that drop of Medici blood), but also with great taste.

As the years went on Sir Charles aged more than he ought to have done, and even began to grow a little stout, but no one could fail to see that he had been a very handsome man in his time and that his wife's early infatuation for him was justified in a way. In politics he was a partisan of Mr. Pitt rather than a downright Tory. He loved his country, believed in its greatness, in its superior virtue, in its irresistible power. Nothing could shake his fidelity to national prejudices of every sort. He had no great liking for grandees and mere aristocrats, despised the fashionable world, and would

have nothing whatever to do with any kind of "upstart." Without being gentle he was naturally kind and hospitable. His native generosity was so well known that no one was surprised when he offered the shelter of his Yorkshire house to a family of French refugees, the Marquis and the Marquise d'Armand and their little daughter Adèle. They had arrived in

England in a state of almost complete destitution but with two servants who had shared the dangers and the miseries of their flight from the excesses of the Revolution.

The presence of all these people at Latham Hall which, considered at first as a temporary arrangement, was to last for some years, did not affect in the least Lady Latham's beautifully dressed, idle equanimity. Had not the D'Armands been Sir Charles's intimate friends years ago, in France? But she had no curiosity. She was vaguely impressed by the fact that the Marquise was a god-daughter of the Queen of Naples. For the rest it was only so many people more in the servants' hall, at the dinner table, and in the drawing room where the evenings were spent.

High up on one of the walls a lamp with a shaded reflector concentrated its light on the yellow satin coat on the half-length portrait of a rubicund Latham in a white coachman's livery, which but for the manly and sensitive mouth might have been the portrait of his own coachman. Apart from that spot of beautiful colour the vast room with its windows giving on a terrace (from which Sir Charles was in the habit of viewing sunsets) remained dim with an effect of immensity in which the occupants, and even Sir Charles himself, acquired the appearance of unsubstantial shadows uttering words that had to travel across long, almost unlighted distances.

On one side of the mantelpiece of Italian marbles (a late addition designed by Sir Charles himself) Lady Latham's profuse jewellery sparkled about her splendid and restful person posed placidly on a sofa. Opposite her, the Marquise would be lying down on a deep couch with one of Lady Latham's shawls spread over her feet. The D'Armands in their flight from the Terror had saved very little besides their lives, and the Marquise d'Armand's life had by this time become a very precarious possession.

Sir Charles was perhaps more acutely aware of this than the Marquis her husband. Sir Charles remembered her gentle in her changing moods of gaiety and thought, charming, active, fascinating, and certainly the most intelligent as she was the most beautiful of the women of the French court. Her voice reaching him clear but feeble across the drawing room had a pathetic appeal; and the tone of his answers was tinged with the memory of a great sentiment and with the deference due to great misfortunes. From time to time Lady Latham would make a remark in a matter-of-fact tone which would provoke something resembling curtness in Sir Charles's elaborately polite reply, and the thought that that woman would have made the very Lord's Prayer sound prosaic. And then in the long pauses they would pursue their own thoughts as perplexed and full of unrest as the world of seas and continents that began at the edge of the long terrace graced by gorgeous sunsets; the wide world filled with the strife of ideas and the struggle of nations in perhaps the most troubled time of its history.

From the depths of the Italian chimney-piece the firelight of blazing English logs would fall on Adele d'Armand sitting quietly on a low stool near her mother's couch. Her fair hair, white complexion, and dark blue eyes contrasted strongly with the deeper colour scheme of Henrietta Latham, whose locks were rich chestnut brown and whose eyes had a dark lustre full of intelligence rather than sentiment. Now and then the French child would turn her head to look at Sir Charles, for whom in her silent existence she had developed a filial affection.

In those days Adele d'Armand did not see much of her own father. Most of the time the Marquis was away. Each of his frequent absences was an act of devotion to his exiled Princes, who appreciated it no doubt but found devotion only natural in a man of that family. The evidence of their regard for the Marquis took the shape mainly of distant and dangerous missions to the courts of north Germany, and northern Italy. In the general disruption of the old order those missions were all futile, because no one ever stopped an avalanche by means of plots and negotiations. But in the Marquis the perfect comprehension of that profound truth was mingled with the sort of enthusiasm that fabricates the very hopes on which it feeds. He would receive his instructions for those desperate journeys with extreme gravity and depart on them without delay, after a flying visit to the Hall to embrace his ailing wife and his silent child and hold a grave conference with his stately English friend from whom he never concealed a single one of his thoughts or his hopes. And Sir Charles approved of them both; because the thoughts were sober and absolutely free from absurd illusions common to all exiles, thus appealing to Sir Charles's reason and also to his secret disdain of all great aristocracies — and the second, being based on the Marquis's conviction of England's unbroken might and consistency, seemed to Sir Charles the most natural thing in the world.

They paced a damp laurel-bordered walk together for an hour or so: Sir Charles lame and stately like a disabled child of Jupiter himself, the Marquis restraining his stride and stooping with a furrowed brow to talk in measured, level tones. The wisdom of Sir Charles expressed itself in curt sentences in which scorn for men's haphazard activities and shortsighted views was combined with a calm belief in the future.

After the peace of Amiens the Comte d'Artois, the representative of the exiled dynasty in England, having expressed the desire to have the Marquis always by his side, the Marquis and Adele left Latham Hall for the poverty and the makeshifts of the life of well-nigh penniless exiles in London. It was as great a proof of devotion to his royal cause as any that could be given. They settled down in a grimy house of yellow brick in four rooms up a very narrow and steep staircase. For attendants they had a dark mulatto maid, brought as a child from the West Indies before the Revolution by an aunt of the Marquise, and a man of rather nondescript nationality called Bernard, who had been at one time a hanger-on in the country house of the D'Armands, but following the family in its flight and its wanderings before they had found refuge in England, had displayed unexpected talents as a general factotum. Life at Latham Hall had bored him exceedingly. The sense of complete security was almost

too much for his patience. The regularity of the hours and the certitude of abundant meals depressed his spirits at times. The change to London revived him greatly, for there he had something to do and found daily occasion to display his varied gifts. He went marketing in the early morning, dusted the room he called the salon, cooked the meals, inspired and made happy by the large white smile of Miss Aglae, the Negress, with whom he was very much in love. At twelve o'clock, after tidying himself a bit, he would go in on the tips of his heavy square shoes and carry the Marquise from her room to the sofa in the salon with elaborate sureness and infinite respect, while Aglae followed with pillow, shawl, and smelling bottle, wearing a forced air of gravity. Bernard was acutely aware of her presence and would be certain — the Marquise once settled on her sofa — to get a flash of a white grin all to himself. Later Mile. Ad&le, white and fair, would go out visiting, followed by Aglae as closely as night follows day; and Bernard would watch them down the depths of the staircase in the hope of catching a sight of a quickly upturned dark brown face with fine rolling eyes. This would leave him happy for the rest of the afternoon. In the evening his function was to announce visitors who had toiled up the stairs: some of the first names in France that had come trudging on foot through the mud or dust of the squalid streets to fill the dimly lighted room which was the salon of the Marquise d'Arm and. For those duties Bernard would put on a pair of white stockings, which Miss Aglae washed for him every second day, and encase his wide shoulders in a very tight green shabby jacket with large metal buttons. Miss Aglae always found a minute or two to give him a hasty inspection and a brush-down. Those were delightful instants. Holding his breath and in a state of rigid beatitude he turned about as ordered in gay whispers by his exotic lady-love. Later he would sit on a stool outside the closed door listening to the well-bred soft uproar of conversation; and when the guests began to depart he lighted them downstairs, holding a tallow dip in a small candlestick over the banister of the landing. When his duties for the day were over he made up for himself a bed on the floor of a narrow passage which separated the living rooms from a sort of large cupboard in which Miss Aglae reposed from her daily labours. Bernard, lying under a pair of thin blankets and with the tallow candle burning on the floor, kept slumber off till Miss Aglae stuck out her head tied up in an old red foulard — nothing but her head through the crack of the door — in order to have a little whispered conversation. That was the time when the servants exchanged their views and communicated to each other their ideas and observations. The black maid's were shrewder than the white factotum's. Being a personal attendant of the two ladies she had occasion to see and hear more than her admirer. They commented on the evident decline of the Marquise's health, not dolefully but simply as a significant fact of the situation; on the Marquis's manner of daily life which had become domestic and almost sedentary. He went out every day but now he never went away for weeks and months as he used to before. Those sudden and mysterious missions for which a misanthropic Yorkshire baronet had paid out of his own pocket had come to an end. A Marquis d'Armand could not be sent out as a common spy and there was now no court in Christendom that would dare to receive an

emissary, secret or open, of the royal exiles. Bernard, who could read, explained these things shortly to Miss Aglae. All great folk were terrified at that Bonaparte. He made all the generals tremble. On those facts Miss Aglae would have it that he must be a sorcerer. Bernard had another view of Napoleonic greatness. It was nothing but the power of lies. And on one occasion after a slight hesitation he burst out: "Shall I tell you the truth about him, Miss Aglae?" The tied-up black head protruding through the crack of the door nodded assent many times in the dim light of the tallow dip. "Well then," continued Bernard with another desperate effort, "he is of no account."

Miss Aglae repressed with difficulty the loud burst of laughter which was the usual expression of her unsophisticated emotions. She had heard ladies and gentlemen in the salon express a very similar opinion of Bonaparte, but she thought suddenly of Miss Adele and emitted a sigh.

"He seems to get his paw on the whole world, anyhow. What sort of a fellow is he, Bernard? You have seen him."

Bernard had seen the fellow. He assured Miss Aglae that he was a miserable shrimp of a man in big boots and with lank hair hanging down his yellow cheeks. "I could break him in two like a straw if I could only get him into my hands."

Believing it implicitly, the black maid suggested that Bernard should go and do it.

"I would go at once," said the faithful follower. "But if I went I would never see you again. He has always a hundred thousand men around him."

At this Miss Aglae, who had begun to smile, ended with a sigh of such a deeply sorrowful nature that Bernard assured her that the time would come, yes, some day the time would come when everybody would get back his own. Aglae was ready to believe this prophecy. But meantime there was Miss Adele. That sweet child was now ready to get married, but everybody was so very poor. Bernard put on a sentimental expression in the dim light of the tallow dip, the flame of which swayed by the side of his straw mattress and made the shadow of his head, protected by a nightcap, dance too, high up the wall of the drafty passage. Timidly he muttered of love. That would get over all the difficulties.

"You very stupid man, Mr. Bernard. Love! What sort of trash you talk? Love don't buy fish for dinner." Then with sudden anxiety she inquired: "Have you got money for marketing to-morrow?" Bernard had the money. Not much, but he had the money. "Then you go out early and buy fish for dinner. This Madame la Marquise orders. Easier than killing an emperor," she continued sarcastically. "And take care fat woman in Billingsgate don't cheat you too much." she added with dignity before drawing her head in and shutting the door of her dark cupboard.

A month later, sitting upon his straw bed and with his eyes fixed on the door of Miss Aglae's cupboard, Bernard had just begun to think that he had done something to offend, and that he would be deprived of his whispered midnight chat, when the door opened, the head of the girl appeared in its usual position. It drooped. Its white eyeballs glistened full of tears. It said nothing for a long time. Bernard was extremely alarmed. He wanted to know in an anxious whisper what was wrong. The maid let him

cudgel his brains for a whole minute before she made the statement that oh! she did not like the looks of a certain gentleman visitor in a “too-much-laced coat.”

Bernard, relieved but uncomprehending, snatched the candlestick off the floor and raised it to the protruded head of the maid.

“What is there to cry about?” he asked. The tears glistening on the dusky cheek astonished him beyond measure; and as an African face lends itself to the expression of sorrow more than any other type of human countenance, he was profoundly moved, and without knowing the cause, by mere sympathy felt ready to cry himself.

“You don’t see! You don’t understand anything, Bernard. You stand there at the door like a stick. What is the use of you I can’t tell.”

Bernard would have felt the injustice to be unbearable if he had not had a strong sense of his own merits. Moreover, it was obvious that Aglae was thoroughly upset. As to the man in the too-much-laced coat, Bernard remembered that he was dressed very splendidly indeed. He had called first in company of a very fine English gentleman, a friend of the family, and he had repeated the call always with that same friend. It was a fact he had never called by himself yet. The family had dined with him only the day before, as Bernard knew very well because he had had to call the hackney coach and had given the address, not to mention the confidential task of carrying the Marquise down the stairs and then up again on their return from that entertainment. There could be nothing wrong with a man with whom the family dined. And the Marquise herself too, she who, so to speak, never went out anywhere!

“What has he done?” he asked without marked excitement. “I have never seen you so distressed, Miss Aglae.”

“Me upset? I should think me upset. I fear him wants carry off Mile. Adele — poor child.”

This staggered the faithful Bernard. “I should like him to try,” he said pugnaciously. “I keep a cudgel there in this passage.” A scornful exclamation from the maid made him pause. “Oh!” he said in a changed tone, “carry her off for a wife? Well, what’s wrong in that?”

“Oh! you silly!” whimpered Aglae. “Can’t you see him twice, twice and a half, the age of Mile. Ad&le?”

Bernard remained silent a minute. “Fine-looking man,” he remarked at last. “Do you know anything else about him?”

“Him got plenty of money,” sobbed out Aglae.

“I suppose the parents will have something to say about that,” said Bernard, after a short meditation. “And if Mile. Adele herself ...”

But Aglae wailed under her breath, as it were. “It’s done, Bernard, it’s done!”

Bernard, fascinated, stared upwards at the maid. A mental reference to abundance of money for marketing flashed through his mind.

“I suppose Mile. Ad&le can love a man like that. Why not?”

“Him got very fine clothes certainly,” hissed Aglae furiously. Then she broke down and became full of desolation. “Oh, Bernard, them poor people, you should have seen

their faces this morning when I served the breakfast. I feel as if I must make a big howl while I give plate to M. le Marquis. I hardly dare to look at anybody.”

“And Mademoiselle?” asked Bernard in an anxious whisper.

“I don’t like to look at her either,” went on Aglae in a tone of anguish. “She got quite a flush on her face. She think it very great and fine, make everybody rich. I ready to die with sorrow, Bernard. She don’t know. She too young. Why don’t you cry with me? — you great stupid man.”

Chapter 3

The marriage, the prospect of which failed to commend itself to the coloured maid, took place in due course. The contract which expressed the business side of that alliance was graced by the signature of a Prince of the blood and by two other signatures of a most aristocratic complexion. The French colony in London refrained from audible comments. The gracious behaviour of H. R. H. the Due de Berry to the bridegroom killed all criticism in the very highest circles of the emigration. In less exalted circles there were slight shrugs and meaning glances, but very little else besides, except now and then a veiled sarcasm which could be ascribed to envy as much as to any other sentiment. Amongst the daughters of the emigration there must have been more than one who in her heart of hearts thought Adele d’Armand a very lucky girl. The splendour of the entertainments which were given to the London society by the newly wedded couple after their return from the honeymoon put it beyond all doubt that the man whom Aglae described as wearing a “too-much-laced coat” was very rich. It began also to be whispered that he was a man of fantastic humours and of eccentric whims of the sort that do not pass current in the best society; especially in the case of a man whose rank was dubious and whose wealth was but recently acquired. But the embittered and irreconcilable remnant of the exiled aristocracy gave but little of its sympathy to Adele d’Armand. She ought to have waited till the King was restored, and either married suitably — si or else entered a convent for ladies of rank. For these too would soon be restored.

The Marquis, before the engagement of his daughter had become public, had written to his friend Sir Charles of the impending marriage in carefully selected terms which demanded nothing but a few words of formal congratulation. Of his son-in-law he mentioned little more than the name. It was, he said, that of a long-impooverished Piedmontese family with good French connections formed in the days before it had fallen into comparative obscurity but, the Marquis insisted, fully recognized by the parties concerned. It was the family De Monteverso. The world had heard nothing of it for more than a century, the Marquis admitted parenthetically. His daughter’s intended husband’s name was Helion — Count Helion de Monteverso. The title had been given to him by the King of Sardinia just before that unfortunate monarch was driven out of his dominions by the armies of republican France. It was the reward of

services rendered at a critical time and none the less meritorious because, the Marquis admitted, they were of a financial nature. Count Helion, who went away very young from his native country and wandered in many lands, had amassed a large personal fortune, the Marquis went on to say, which luckily was invested in a manner that made it safe from political revolutions and social disasters overwhelming both France and Italy. That fortune, as a matter of fact, had not been made in Europe, but somewhere beyond the seas. The Marquis's letter reached Latham Hall in the evening of an autumn day.

The very young Miss Latham, seated before an embroidery frame, watched across the drawing room her father reading the letter under the glare of the reflector lamp and at the feet, as it were, of the Latham in the yellow satin coat. Sir Charles raised his eyebrows, which with passing years had become bushy and spoiled a little the expression of his handsome face. Miss Latham was made very anxious by his play of physiognomy. She had already been told after the first rustle of unfolded paper that her big friend Adele d'Armand (Miss Latham was four years younger) was going to be married, and had become suddenly, but inwardly, excited. Every moment she expected her father to tell her something more. She was dying from impatience; but there was nothing further except the rustle of paper — and now this movement of the eyebrows. Then Sir Charles lowered his hands slowly. She could contain herself no longer.

“Who is it, Papa?” she asked with animation.

Henrietta Latham was fifteen then. Her dark eyes had remained as large as ever. The purity of her complexion, which was not of the milk-white kind, was admirable and the rich shade of the brown curls clustering on each side of her faintly glowing cheeks made a rich and harmonious combination. Sir Charles gazed at his daughter's loveliness with an air of shocked abstraction. But he too could not contain himself. He departed from his stateliness so far as to growl out scathingly:

“An upstart of some kind.”

Miss Latham was, for all her lively manner, not given to outward manifestations of emotions. This intelligence was too shocking for a gasp or an exclamation. She only flushed slowly to the roots of her pretty hair. An upstart simply meant to her everything that was bad in the way of a human being, but the scathing tone of Sir Charles's outburst also augmented her profound emotion, for it seemed to extend to Adele d'Armand herself. It shocked her tender loyalty towards the French girl, which had not been diminished by a separation of more than three years. She said quietly:

“Adele . . . Impossible!”

The flush ebbed out of her healthy cheeks and left them pale, with the eyes darker than Sir Charles had ever seen them before. Those evidences of his daughter's emotion recalled Sir Charles to himself. After looking at his daughter fixedly for a moment he murmured the word “impossible” without any particular accent and again raised the letter to his eyes.

He did not find it in anything to modify his first impression of the man whom Adele d'Armand was about to marry. Once more in his vaguely explanatory message the

Marquis alluded to the wealth of his prospective son-in-law. It gave him a standing in the best society which his personal merits could not perhaps have secured for him so completely. Then the Marquis talked about his wife's health. The Marquise required many comforts, constant care, and cheerful surroundings. He had been enabled to leave the disagreeable lodgings in a squalid street for a little house in Chiswick very near London. He complained to his old friend that the uncompromising royalists reproached him bitterly for having signed a three-years' lease. It seemed to them an abominable apostasy from the faith in a triumphal return of the old order of things in a month or two. "I have caused quite a scandal by acting in this sensible manner," he wrote. "I am very much abused, but I have no doubt that even those who judge me most severely will be glad enough to come to Adele's wedding."

Then, as if unable to resist the need to open his heart, he began the next line with the words:

I need not tell you that all this is my daughter's own doing. The demand for her hand was made to us regularly through

Lord G , who is a good friend of mine, though he belongs to the faction of Mr. Fox in which the Count of Monteverso numbers most of his English friends. But directly we had imparted the proposal to Addle she took a step you may think incredible, and which from a certain point of view might even be called undutiful, if such a word could ever be applied to the sweet and devoted child our Adele has always been to us. At her personal request, made without consulting either her mother or myself, Lord G. had the weakness to arrange a meeting between her and the Count at his own house. What those two could have said to each other I really cannot imagine. When we heard of it, the matter was so far settled that there was nothing left for us but to accept the inevitable . . .

Again Sir Charles let his big white aristocratic hands descend on his knees. His daughter's dark head drooped over the frame, and he had a vision of another head, very different and very fair, by its side. It had been a part of his retired life and had had a large share of his affection. How large it was he discovered only now, at this moment, when he felt that it was in a sense lost to him for ever. "Inevitable," he muttered to himself with a half-scornful, half-pained intonation. Sir Charles could understand the sufferings, the difficulties, the humiliations of poverty. But the Marquis might have known that, far or near, he could have counted on the assistance of his friend. For some years past he had never hesitated to dip into his purse. But that was for those mysterious journeys and those secret and important missions his Princes had never hesitated to entrust him with without ever troubling their heads about the means. Such was the nature of Princes, Sir Charles reflected with complete bitterness. And now came this ... A whole young life thrown away perhaps, in its innocence, in its ignorance. . . .

How old could Adele be now? Eighteen or nineteen. Not so very much younger than her mother was when he used to see so much of her in Paris and Versailles, when she had managed to put such an impress on his heart that later he did not care whom he

married or where he lived. . . . Inevitable! ... Sir Charles could not be angry with the Marquise, now a mere languid shadow of that invincible charm that his heart had not been able to resist. She and her husband must have given up all their hopes, all their loyal royalist hopes before they could bow like this to the Inevitable. It had not been difficult for him to learn to love that fascinating French child as though she had been another daughter of his own. For a moment he experienced an anguish so acute that it made him move slightly in his chair. Half aloud he muttered the thought that came into his mind:

“Austerlitz has done it.”

Miss Latham raised her lustrous dark eyes with an enquiring expression and murmured, “Papa?”

Sir Charles got up and seized his stick. “Nothing, my dear, nothing.” He wanted to be alone. But on going out of the room he stopped by the embroidery frame and, bending down, kissed the forehead of his daughter — his English daughter. No issue of a great battle could affect her future. As to the other girl, she was lost to him and it couldn’t be helped. A battle had destroyed the fairness of her life. This was the disadvantage of having been born French or indeed belonging to any other nation of the continent. There were forces there that pushed people to rash or unseemly actions; actions that seemed dictated by despair and therefore wore an immoral aspect. Sir Charles understood Adele d’Armand even better than he understood his own daughter, or at least he understood her with greater sympathy. She had a generous nature. She was too young, too inexperienced to know what she was doing when she took in hand the disposal of her own person in favour of that apparently Piedmontese upstart with his obscure name and his mysteriously acquired fortune. “I only hope the fortune is there,” thought Sir Charles with grim scepticism. But as to that there could be no doubt, judging from the further letters he received from his old friend. After a short but brilliant period of London life the upstart had carried Adele off to France. He had bought an estate in Piedmont, which was his native country, and another with a splendid house, near Paris. Sir Charles was not surprised to hear a little later that the Marquise and the Marquis had also returned to France. The time of persecution was over; most of the great royalist families were returning, unreconciled in sentiment if wavering in their purposes. That his old friend should ever be dazzled by imperial grandeurs Sir Charles could not believe. Though he had abandoned his daughter to an upstart, he was too good a royalist to abandon his principles, for which certainly he would have died if that had been of any use. But he had returned to France. Most of his exiled friends had returned too, and Sir Charles understood very well that the Marquis and his wife wanted to be somewhere near their daughter. This departure closed a long chapter in his life, and afterwards Sir Charles hardly ever mentioned his French friends. The only positive thing which Henrietta knew was that Adele d’Armand had married an upstart and had returned to France. She had communicated that knowledge to her brother, who had stared with evident surprise but had made no comment. Living away from home at school and afterwards in Cambridge, his father’s French friends had

remained for him as shadowy figures on the shifting background of a very poignant, very real, and intense drama of contemporary history, dominated by one enormously vital and in its greatness immensely mysterious individuality — the only man of his time.

Cosmo Latham at the threshold of life had adopted neither of the contrasted views of Napoleon Emperor entertained by his contemporaries. For him as for his father before him, the world offered a scene of conflicting emotions in which facts appraised by reason preserved a mysterious complexity and a dual character. One evening during an artless discussion with young men of his own age, it had occurred to him to say that Bonaparte seemed to be the only man amongst a lot of old scarecrows. “Look how he knocks them over,” he had explained. A moment of silence followed. Then a voice objected:

“Then perhaps he is not so great as some of you try to make him out.”

“I didn’t mean that exactly,” said Cosmo in a sobered tone. “Nobody can admire that man more than I do. Perhaps the world may be none the worse for a scarecrow here and there left on the borders of what is right or just. I only wished to express my sense of the moving force in his genius.”

“What does he stand for?” asked the same voice.

Cosmo shook his head. “Many things, and some of them too obvious to mention. But I can’t help thinking that there are some which we cannot see yet.”

“And some of them that are dead already,” retorted his interlocutor. “They died in his very hands. But there is one thing for which he stands and that will never die. You seem to have forgotten it. It is the spirit of hostility to this nation; to what we in this room, with our different views and opinions, stand for in the last instance.”

“Oh, that!” said Cosmo confidently. “What we stand for isn’t an old scarecrow. Great as he is he will never knock that over. His arm is not long enough, however far his thoughts may go. He has got to work with common men.”

“I don’t know what you mean. What else are we? I believe you admire him.”

“I do,” confessed Cosmo sturdily.

This did not prevent him from joining the army in Spain before the year was out, and that without asking for Sir Charles’s approval. Sir Charles condemned severely the policy of using the forces of the Crown in the Peninsula. He did not like the ministry of the day, and he had a strong prejudice against all the Wellesleys to whose aggrandizement this whole policy seemed effected. But when at the end of a year and a half, after the final victory of Toulouse, his son appeared in Yorkshire, the two made up for the past coolness by shaking hands warmly for nearly a whole minute. Cosmo really had done very little campaigning and soon declared to his father the wish to leave the army. There would be no more fighting for years and years, he argued, and though he did not dislike fighting in a good cause, he had no taste for mere soldiering. He wanted to see something of the world which had been closed to us for so long. Sir Charles, ageing and dignified, leaned on his stick on the long terrace.

“All the world was never closed to us,” he said.

"I wasn't thinking of the East, sir," explained Cosmo. "I heard some people talk about its mystery, but I think Europe is mysterious enough just now, and even more interesting."

Sir Charles nodded his bare gray head in the chill evening breeze.

"France, Germany," he murmured.

Cosmo thought that he would prefer to see something of Italy first. He would go north afterwards.

"Through Vienna, I suppose," suggested Sir Charles with an impassive face.

"I don't think so, sir," said Cosmo frankly. "I don't care much for the work which is going on there and perhaps still less for the men who are putting their hands to it."

This time Sir Charles's slow nod expressed complete agreement. He too had no liking for the work that was about to begin there. But no objection could be raised against Italy. He had known Italy well thirty or more years ago, but it must have been changed out of his knowledge. He remained silent, gazing at the wide landscape of blue wooded rises and dark hollows under the gorgeous colours of the sunset. They began to die out.

"You may travel far before you see anything like this," he observed to his son. "And don't be in a hurry to leave us. You have only just come home. Remember I am well over sixty."

Cosmo was quite ready to surrender himself to the peace of his Yorkshire home, so different from the strenuous atmosphere of the last campaign in the South of France. Autumn was well advanced before he fixed the day for his departure. On his last day at home Sir Charles addressed him with perfect calmness.

"When you pass into Italy you must not fail to see my old friend the Marquis d'Armand. The French King has appointed him as ambassador in Turin. It's a sign of high favour, I believe. He will be either in Turin or Genoa. . . ." Sir Charles paused, then after a perfectly audible sigh added with an effort: "The Marquise is dead. I knew her in her youth. She was a marvellous woman. . . ." Sir Charles checked himself, and then with another effort, "But the daughter of my old friend is I believe with her father now, a married daughter, the Countess of Montevesso."

"You mean little Adele, sir," said Cosmo, with interest, but on Sir Charles's face there passed a distinct shade of distress.

"Oh, you remember the child," he said, and his tone was tender but it changed to contempt as he went on. "I don't know whether the fellow, I mean the man she married, is staying with them or whether they are living with him, or whether ... I know nothing!"

The word "upstart," heard many years ago from his sister Henrietta, crossed Cosmo's mind. He thought to himself, "There is something wrong there," and to his father he said, "I will be able to tell you all about it."

"I don't want to know," Sir Charles replied with a surprising solemnity of tone and manner which hid some deeper feeling. "But give the Marquis my love and tell him

that when he gets tired of all his grandeurs he may remember that there is a large place for him in this house as long as I live.”

Late that evening Cosmo, saying good-bye to his sister, took her in his arms, kissed her forehead, and holding her out at arm’s length said:

“You have grown into a charming girl, Henrietta.”

“I am glad you think so,” she said. “Alas, I am too dark. I can never be as charming as Adele must have been at my age. You seem to have forgotten her.”

“Oh no,” protested Cosmo carelessly. “A marvel of fairness, wasn’t she? I remember you telling me years ago that she married an upstart.”

“That was Father’s expression. You know what that means, Cosmo.”

“I do know what it means, exactly,” he said, laughing. “But from what Father said this afternoon it seems as if he were a rather nasty upstart. What made Adele do it?”

“I am awed,” confessed Henrietta. “I don’t know what made her do it. I was never told. Father never talked much about the D’Armands afterwards. I was with him in the yellow drawing room the evening he got the letter from the Marquis. After he read it he said something very extraordinary. You know it’s full nine years ago and I was yet a child, yet I could not have dreamed it. I heard it distinctly. He dropped his hands and said, ‘Austerlitz has done it/ What could he have meant?’”

“It would be hard to guess the connection,” said Cosmo, smiling at his sister’s puzzled face. “Father must have been thinking of something else.”

“Father was thinking of nothing else for days,” affirmed Henrietta positively.

“You must have been a very observant child,” remarked her brother. “But I believe you were always a clever girl, Henrietta. Well, I am going to see Adele.”

“Oh yes, you start in the morning to travel ever so far and for ever so long,” said Miss Latham enviously. “Oh Cosmo, you are going to write to me — lots?”

He looked at her appreciatively and gave her another brotherly hug.

“Certainly I will write, whole reams,” he said.

Chapter 4

On his way from the harbour to the upper part of the town where his inn was situated Cosmo Latham met very few people. He had to pass through a sort of covered way; its arch yawned in front of him very black with only a feeble glimmer of a light in its depths. It did not occur to him that it was a place where one could very well be knocked on the head by evil-intentioned men if there were any prowling about in that early part of the evening, for it was early yet, though the last gleams of sunset had gone out completely off the earth and out of the sky. On issuing from the dark passage a maze of narrow streets presented itself to his choice, but he knew that as long as he kept walking uphill he could not fail to reach the middle of the town. Projecting at long intervals from the continuous mass of thick walls, wrought-iron arms held lanterns containing dim gleams of light. The enormous doors of the lofty gateways he

passed were closed, and the only sound he could hear was that of his own deliberate footsteps. At a wider spot where several of those lanes met he stopped, and looking about him asked himself whether all those enormous and palatial houses were empty, or whether it was the thickness of walls that killed all the signs of life within; for as to the population being already asleep he could not believe it for a moment. All at once he caught sight of a muffled feminine form. In the heavy shadow she seemed to emerge out of one wall and gliding on seemed to disappear into another. It was undoubtedly a woman. Cosmo was startled by this noiseless apparition and had a momentary feeling of being lost in an enchanted city. Presently the enchanted silence was broken by the increasing sound of an iron-shod stick tapping the flagstones, till there walked out of one of the dark and tortuous lanes a man who by his rolling gait, general outline, and the characteristic shape of the hat, Cosmo could not doubt, was a seaman belonging to the English man-of-war in the harbour. The tapping of his stick ceased suddenly and Cosmo hailed him in English, asking for the way.

The sturdy figure in the tarpaulin hat put its cudgel under its arm and answered him in a deep pleasant voice. Yes, he knew the inn. He was just coming from there. If His Honour followed the street before him he would come to a large open space and His Honour's inn would be across the square. In the deep shadows Cosmo could make out of the seaman's face nothing but the bushy whiskers and the gleam of the eyes. He was pleased at meeting the very day he had reached the Mediterranean shore (he had come down to Genoa from Turin) such a fine specimen of a man-of-war's man. He thanked him for the direction and the sailor, touching his hat, went off at his slightly rolling gait. Cosmo observed that he took a turning very near the spot where the muffled woman had a moment before vanished from his sight. It was a very dark and a very narrow passage between two towering buildings. Cosmo, continuing on his way, arrived at a broad thoroughfare badly lighted but full of people. He knew where he was then. In a very few moments he found himself at the door of his inn in a great square which in comparison with the rest of the town might have been said to blaze with lights.

Under an iron lantern swung above a flight of three broad steps, Cosmo recognized his servant gazing into the square with a worried expression which changed at once into one of relief on perceiving his master. He touched his cap and followed Cosmo into a large hall with several doors opening into it and furnished with many wooden chairs and tables. At one of them bearing four candlesticks several British naval officers sat talking and laughing in subdued tones. A compactly built clean-shaven person with slightly sunken cheeks, wearing black breeches and a maroon waistcoat with sleeves, but displaying a very elaborate frill to his white shirt, stood in the middle of the floor, glancing about with vigilance, and bowed hurriedly to his latest client. Cosmo returned the greeting of Signor Cantelucci, who, snatching up the nearest candlestick, began to ascend a broad stone staircase with an air of performing a solemn duty. Cosmo followed him, and Cosmo's servant followed his master. They went up and up. At every flight broad archways gave a view of dark perspective in which nothing but a few drops

of dim fire were forlornly visible. At last Signor Cantelucci threw open a door on a landing and bowing again:

“See, milord! There is a fire. I know the customs and habits of the English.”

Cosmo stepped into a large and lofty room where in the play of bright flames under a heavy and tall mantelpiece the shadows seemed very much disturbed by his entrance. Cosmo approached the blaze with satisfaction.

“I had enough trouble to get them to light it,” remarked the valet in a resentful tone. “If it hadn’t been for a jack-tar with big whiskers I found down in the hall it wouldn’t be done yet. He came up from the ship with one of these sea officers downstairs. He drove the fellows with the wood in fine style up here for me. He knows the people here. He cursed them each separately by their Christian names, and then had a glass of wine in the kitchen with me.”

Meantime Signor Cantelucci, wearing the aspect of a deaf man, had lighted, on two separate tables, two clusters of candles which drove the restless gloom of the large apartment half way up to the ceiling, and retired with noiseless footsteps. He stopped in the doorway to cast a keen glance at the master and the man standing by the fire. Those two turned their heads only at the sound of the closing door.

“I couldn’t think what became of you, sir. I was getting quite worried about you. You disappeared without saying anything to me.”

“I went for a walk down to the sea,” said Cosmo while the man moved off to where several cowhide trunks were ranged against the wall. “I like to take a look round on arriving at a new place.”

“Yes, sir; but when it got dark I wondered.”

“I tarried on a tower to watch the sunset,” murmured Cosmo.

“I have been doing some unpacking,” said the servant, “but not knowing how long you mean to stay »

“It may be a long stay.”

“Then I will go on, sir; that is if you are going to keep this room.”

“Yes. The room will do, Spire. It’s big enough.”

Spire took up one of the two candelabras and retired into the neighbourhood of a sort of state bed heavily draped at the other end of the room. There, throwing open the trunks and the doors of closets, he busied himself systematically, without noise, till he heard the quiet voice of his young master.

“Spire.”

“Yes, sir,” he answered, standing still with a pile of shirts on his arm.

“Is this inn very full?”

“Yes, very,” said Spire. “The whole town is full of travellers and people from the country. A lot of our nobility and gentry are passing this way.”

He deposited the shirts on a shelf in the depths of the wall and turned round again.

“Have you heard any names, Spire?”

Spire stooped over a trunk and lifted up from it carefully a lot of white neckcloths folded neatly one within the other.

“I haven’t had much time yet, sir. I heard a few.”

He laid down the neckcloths by the side of the shirts while Cosmo, with his elbow on the mantelpiece, asked down the whole length of the room:

“Anybody I know?”

“Not in this place, sir. There is generally a party of officers from the man-of-war staying here. They come and go. I have seen some Italian gentlemen in square-cut coats and powdered hair. Very old-fashioned, sir. There are some Austrians too, I think; but I haven’t seen any ladies. ... I am afraid, sir, this isn’t the right sort of inn. There is another about a hundred yards from here on the other side of the square.”

“I don’t want to meet anybody I know,” said Cosmo Latham in a low voice.

Spire thought that this would make his stay in Genoa very dull. At the same time he was convinced that his young master would alter his mind before very long and change to that other inn patronized by travellers of fashion. For himself he was not averse from a little quiet time. Spire was no longer young. Thirty years ago, before the War and before the Revolution, he had travelled with Sir Charles in France and Italy. He was then only eighteen, but being a steady and trustworthy lad was taken abroad to look after the horses. Sir Charles kept four horses in Florence, and Spire had often ridden on Tuscan roads behind Sir Charles and the two Misses Aston, of whom one later became Lady Latham. After the family settled in Yorkshire he passed from the stables to the house, acquired a confidential position, and whenever Lady Latham took a journey he sat in the rumble with a pair of double-barrelled pistols in the pockets of his greatcoat and ordered all things on the road. Later he became intermediary between Sir Charles and the stables, the gardens, and in all out-of-door things about the house. He attended Lady Latham on her very last drive, all the details for that lady’s funeral having been left to his management. He was also a very good valet. He had been called one evening into the library where Sir Charles, very gouty that day, leaning with one hand on a thick stick and with the other on the edge of a table, had said to him: “I am lending you to Mr. Cosmo for his travels in France and Italy. You will know your way about. And mind you draw the charges of the pistols in the carriage every morning and load them afresh.”

Spire was then requested to help Sir Charles up the stairs and had a few more words said to him when Sir Charles stopped at the door of his bedroom.

“Mr. Cosmo has plenty of sense. You are not to make yourself a nuisance to him.”

“No, Sir Charles,” said the imperturbable Spire. “I will know how to look after Mr. Cosmo.”

And if he had been asked, Spire would have been able to say that during the stay in Paris and all through France and Switzerland on the way to Genoa Mr. Cosmo had given him no trouble at all.

Spire, still busy unpacking, glanced at his young master. He certainly looked very quiet now, leaning on his elbow with the firelight playing from below on his young thoughtful face with its smooth and pale complexion. “Very good-looking indeed,” thought Spire.-In that thoughtful mood he recalled very much the Sir Charles of thirty

or thirty-five years ago. Would he too find his wife abroad? There had been women enough in Paris of every kind and degree, English and French and all sorts. But it was a fact that Mr. Cosmo sought most of his company amongst men, of whom also there had been no lack and of every degree. In that, too, the young man resembled very much his father. Men's company. But were he to get caught he would get caught properly; at any rate for a time, reflected Spire, remembering Sir Charles Latham's rush back to Italy, the inwardness of which had been no more revealed to him than to the rest of the world.

Spire, approaching the candelabra, unfolded partly a very fine coat, then refolded it before putting it away on a convenient shelf. He had a moment of regret for his own young days. He had never married, not because there had been any lack of women to set their caps at him, but from a sort of half-conscious prudence. Moreover, he had a notion somehow or other that Sir Charles would not have liked it. Perhaps it was just as well. Now he was carefree, attending on Mr. Cosmo without troubling his head about who had remained at home.

Spire, arranging the contents of a dressing case on the table, cast another sidelong look at the figure by the fire. Very handsome. Something like Sir Charles and yet not like. There was a touch of something unusual, perhaps foreign, and yet no one with a pair of eyes in his head could mistake Mr. Cosmo for anything but an English gentleman.

Spire's memories of his tour with Sir Charles had been growing dim. But he remembered enough of the old-time atmosphere to have become aware of a feeling of tension, of a suggestion of restlessness which certainly was new to him.

The silence had lasted very long. Cosmo before the fire had not moved. Spire ventured on a remark.

"I notice people are excited about one thing and another hereabouts, sir."

"Excited. I don't wonder at it. In what way?"

"Sort of discontented, sir. They don't like the Austrians, sir. You may have noticed as we came along ..."

"Did they like us when we held the town?"

"I can hardly say that, sir. I have been sitting for an hour or more in the couriers' room, with all sorts of people coming in and out, and heard very wild sort of talk."

"What can you know about its wildness?"

"To look at their faces was enough. It's a funny place, that room downstairs," went on Spire, rubbing with a piece of silk a travelling looking-glass mounted cunningly in a silver case which when opened made a stand for it. He placed it exactly in the middle of a little table and turned round to look at his master. Seeing that Cosmo seemed disposed to listen he continued : "It is vaulted like a cellar and has a little door giving into a side street. People come in and out as they like. All sorts of low people, sir, facchini and carters and boatmen and suchlike. There was an old fellow came in, a gray-headed man, a cobbler, I suppose, as he brought a bagful of mended shoes for the servants of the house. He emptied the lot on the stone floor, sir, and instead of trying

to collect his money from the people that were scrambling for them he made them a speech. He spouted, sir, without drawing a breath. The courier-valet of an English doctor staying here, a Swiss I think he is, says to me in his broken English: 'He would cut every Austrian throat in this town.' We were having a glass of wine together and I asked him, 'And what do you think of that?' And he says to me, after thinking a bit, 'I agree with him. . . / Very dreadful, sir,' concluded Spire with a perfectly unmoved face.

Cosmo looked at him in silence for a time. "It was very bold talk if that is what the man really said," he remarked. "Especially as the place is so public as you say it is."

"Absolutely open to the street, sir; and that same Swiss fellow had told me just before that the town was full of spies and what they call sbirri that came from Turin with the King. The King is staying at the Palace, sir. They are expecting the Queen of Sardinia to arrive any day. You didn't know, sir? They say she will come in an English man-of-war. That old cobbler was very abusive about the King of Piedmont too. Surely talk like that can't be safe anywhere."

Spire paused suddenly and Cosmo Latham turned his back to the fire.

"Well, and what happened?" he asked with a smile.

"You could have heard a pin drop," said Spire in equable tones, "till that Signor Cantelucci — that's the padrone of this inn, sir ... "

"The man who lighted me up?" said Cosmo.

"Yes, sir. ... I didn't know he was in the room till suddenly he spoke behind my back telling one of the scullions that was there to give the man a glass of wine. And what the old fellow must do but raise it above his head and shout a toast to the Destructor of the Austrians before he tossed it down his throat. I was quite astonished, but Signor Cantelucci never turned a hair. He offered his snuffbox to that doctor's courier and myself and shrugged his shoulders. 'It was only Pietro,' he said, 'a little mad' — he tapped his forehead, you know, sir. The doctor's courier sat there grinning. I got suddenly uneasy about you, sir, and went out to the front door to see whether you were coming. It's very different from what it was thirty years ago. There was no talk in Italy of cutting foreigners' throats when Sir Charles and I were here. It was quite a startling experience."

Cosmo nodded. "You seem impressed, Spire. Well, I too had an experience, just as the sun was setting."

"I am sorry to hear that, sir."

"What do you mean? Why should you be sorry?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I thought it was something unpleasant."

Cosmo had a little laugh. "Unpleasant? No! Not exactly, though I think it was more dangerous than yours, but if there was any madness connected with it, it had a very visible method. It was not all talk either. Yes, Spire, it was exciting."

"I don't know what's come to them all. Everybody seems excited. There was not excitement in Italy thirty years ago when I was with Sir Charles and took four horses with only one helper from this very town to Florence, sir."

Cosmo with fixed eyes did not seem to hear Spire's complaining remark. He exclaimed: "Really it was very extraordinary," so suddenly that Spire gave a perceptible start. He pulled himself together and asked in a purely business tone:

"Are you going to dine in your room, sir? Time is getting on."

Cosmo's mood too seemed to have changed completely.

"I don't know. I am not hungry. I want you to move one of those screens here near the fire and place a table and chair there. I will do some correspondence to-night. Yes, I will have my dinner here, I think."

"I will go down and order it, sir," said Spire. "The cook here is a Frenchman who married a native and..."

"Who on earth is swearing like this outside?" exclaimed Cosmo, while Spire's face also expressed astonishment at the loud burst of voices coming along the corridor, one angry, the other argumentative, in a crescendo of scolding and expostulation which, passing the door at its highest, died away into a confused murmur in the distance of the long corridor.

"That was an English voice," said Cosmo. "I mean the angry one."

"I should think it's that English doctor from Tuscany that has been three or four days here already. He has been put on this floor."

"From what I have been able to catch," said Cosmo, "he seems very angry at having a neighbour on it. That must be me. Have you heard his name?"

"It's Marvel or some such name. He seems to be known here; he orders people about as if he were at home. The other was Cantelucci, sir."

"Very likely. Look here, Spire. I will dine in the public room downstairs. I want to see that angry gentleman. Did you see him, Spire?"

"Only his back, sir. Very broad, sir. Tall man. In boots and a riding coat. Are you going down now, sir? The dinner must be on already."

"Yes," said Cosmo, preparing to go out. "And by the by, Spire, if you ever see in the street or in that room downstairs, where everyone comes in and out as you say, a long fellow wearing a peculiar cap with a tassel, just try to find out something about him; or at any rate let me know when you have seen him. . . . You could perhaps follow him for a bit and try to see where he goes."

After saying those words Cosmo left the room before Spire could make any answer. Spire's astonishment expressed itself by a low exclamation, "Well, I never!"

Part 2

Chapter 1

Cosmo descended into a hall now empty and with most of its lights extinguished. A loud murmur of voices guided him to the door of the dining room. He discovered it to be a long apartment with flat pilasters dividing its whitewashed walls, and resembling somewhat a convent's refectory. The resemblance was accentuated by the two narrow tables occupying its middle. One of them had been appropriated by the British naval officers, had lights on it, and bristled with the necks of wine bottles along its whole length. The talk round it was confused and noisy. The other, shorter, table accommodated two rows of people in sombre garments who at first glance struck Cosmo as natives of the town and belonging to a lower station in life. They had less lights, less wine, and almost no animation. Several smaller tables were ranged against the walls at equal intervals, and Cosmo's eye was caught by one of them because of the candles in the sconce on the wall above it having been lighted. Its cloth was dazzlingly white, and Signor Cantelucci with a napkin in his hand stood respectfully at the elbow of its sole occupant, who was seated with his back to the door.

Cosmo was under the impression that his entrance had been unobserved. But before he had walked half the length of the room Signor Cantelucci, whose eyes had never ceased darting here and there while his body preserved its deferential attitude at the elbow of the exclusive client, advanced to meet him with his serious and attentive air. He bowed. Perhaps the signore would not mind sharing the table of his illustrious countryman.

"Yes, if my countryman doesn't object," assented Cosmo readily. He was absolutely certain that this must be the doctor of whom Spire had spoken.

Cantelucci had no doubt that His Excellency's company would be most welcome to his illustrious countryman. Then stepping aside, he added under his breath: "He is a person of great distinction. A most valued patron of mine. . . ." The person thus commended, turning his head ensconced in the high collar of his coat, disclosed to Cosmo a round face with a shaved chin, strongly marked eyebrows, round eyes, and thin lips compressed into a slightly peevish droop which, however, was at once corrected by an attempt at a faint smile. Cosmo, too, produced a faint smile. For an appreciable moment they looked at each other without saying a word while Cantelucci, silent too, executed a profound bow.

“Sit down, sir, sit down,” said the elder man (Cosmo judged him to be well over forty), raising his voice above the uproar made by the occupants of the naval table and waving his hand at the empty chair facing his own. It had a high carved back showing some traces of gilding, and the silk which covered it was worn to rags. Cosmo sat down while Cantelucci disappeared and the man across the table positively shouted, “I am glad,” and immediately followed that declaration by an energetic “Oh damn!” He bent over the table: “One can’t hear oneself speak with that noisy lot. All heroes, no doubt, but not a single gentleman.”

He leaned back and waited till the outburst of noisy mirth had died out at the officers’ table. The corners of his mouth drooped again and Cosmo came to the conclusion that that face in repose was decidedly peevish.

“I don’t know what they have got to be so merry about,” the other began, with a slight glance at the naval table and leaning forward again towards Cosmo. “Their occupation is gone. Heroes are a thoughtless lot. Yet just look at that elderly lieutenant at the head of the table. Shabby coat. Old epaulette. He doesn’t laugh. He will die a lieutenant — on half pay. That’s how heroic people end when the heroic times are over.”

“I am glad,” said Cosmo steadily, “that you recognize at least their heroism.”

The other opened his mouth for some time before he laughed, and that gave his face an expression of somewhat hard jollity. But the laugh when it came was by no means loud and had a sort of ingratiating softness.

“No, no. Don’t think I am disparaging our sea service. I had the privilege to know the greatest hero of them all. Yes, I had two talks with Lord Nelson. Well, he was certainly not ...”

He interrupted himself and raising his eyes saw the perfectly still gaze of Cosmo fastened on his face. Then peevishly:

“What I meant to say was that he at least was indubitably a hero. I remember that I was very careful about what I said to him. I had to be mighty careful then about what I said to anybody. Someone might have put it into his head to hang me at some yard-arm or other.”

“I envy you your experience all the same,” said Cosmo amiably. “I suppose your conscience was clear?”

“I have always been most careful not to give my conscience any license to trouble me,” retorted the other with a certain curtness of tone which was not offensive;

“and I have lived now for some considerable time. I am really much older than I look,” he concluded, giving Cosmo such a keen glance that the young man could not help a smile.

The other went on looking at him steadily for a while, then let his eyes wander to a door in a distant part of the long room as if impatient for the coming of the dinner. Then giving it up:

“A man who has lived actively, actively I say, the last twenty years may well feel as old as Methuselah. Lord Nelson was but a circumstance in my life. I wonder, had he lived, how he would have taken all this.”

A slight movement of his hand seemed to carry this allusion outside the confines of the vaulted noisy room, to indicate all the out-of-doors of the world. Cosmo remarked that the hand was muscular, shapely, and extremely well cared for.

“I think there can be no doubt about the nature of his feelings if he were living.” Cosmo’s voice was exactly non-committal. His interlocutor grunted slightly.

“H’m. He would have done nothing but groan and complain about anything and everything. No, he wouldn’t have taken it laughing. Very poor physique. Very. Frightful hypochondriac. ... I am a doctor, you know.”

Cantelucci was going to attend himself on his two guests. He presented to the doctor a smoking soup tureen enveloped in a napkin. The doctor assumed at once a business-like air, and at his invitation Cosmo held out his plate. The doctor helped him carefully.

“Don’t forget the wine, my wine, Anzelmo,” he said to Cantelucci, who answered by a profound bow. “I saved his life once,” he continued after the innkeeper had gone away.

The tone was particularly significant. Cosmo, partly repelled and partly amused by the man, enquired whether the worthy host had been very ill. The doctor swallowed the last spoonful of soup.

“Ill,” he said. “He had a gash that long in his side and a set of forty-pound fetters in his legs. I cured both complaints. Not without some risk to myself, as you may imagine. There was an epidemic of hanging and shooting in the South of Italy then.”

He noticed Cosmo’s steady stare and raised the corners of his mouth with an effect of geniality on his broad rosy face.

“In ‘99, you know. I wonder I didn’t die of it too. I was considerably younger then and my humane instincts, early enthusiasms, and so on had led me into pretty bad company. However, I had also pretty good friends. What with one thing and another I am pretty well known all over Italy. My name is Martel — Doctor Martel. You probably may have heard. . . .”

He threw a searching glance at Cosmo, who bowed non-committally, and went on without a pause: “I am the man who brought vaccine to Italy, first. Cantelucci was trying to tell me your name but really I couldn’t make it out.”

“Latham is my name,” said Cosmo, “and I only set foot in Italy for the first time in my life two days ago.”

The doctor jerked his head sideways.

“Latham, eh? Yorkshire?”

“Yes,” said Cosmo, smiling.

“To be sure. Sir Charles ...”

“That’s my father.”

“Yes, yes. Served in the Guards. I used to know the doctor of his regiment. Married in Italy. I don’t remember the lady’s name. Oh, those are old times. Might have been a hundred years ago.”

“You mean that so much history has been made since.”

“Yes, no end of history,” assented the doctor, but checked himself. “And yet, tell me, what does it all amount to?”

Cosmo made no answer. Cantelucci having brought the wine while they talked, the doctor filled two glasses, waited a moment as if to hear Cosmo speak, but as the young man remained silent he said:

“Well, let us drink then to Peace.”

He tossed the wine down his throat while Cosmo drank his much more leisurely. As they set down their empty glasses they were startled by a roar of a tremendous voice filling the vaulted room from end to end in order to “let Their Honours know that the boat was at the steps.” The doctor made a faint grimace.

“Do you hear the voice of the British lion, Mr. Latham?” he asked peevishly. “Ah, well, we will have some little peace now here.”

Those officers at the naval table who had to go on board rose in a body and left the room hastily. Three or four who had a longer leave drew close together and began to talk low with their heads in a bunch. Cosmo glancing down the room seemed to recognize at the door the form of the seaman whom he had met earlier in the evening. He followed the officers out. The other diners, the sombre ones, and a good many of them with powdered heads, were also leaving the room. Cantelucci put another dish on the table, stepped back a pace with a bow, and stood still. A moment of profound silence succeeded the noise.

“First rate,” said Doctor Martel to Cosmo, after tasting the dish, and then gave a nod to Cantelucci, who made another bow and retreated backwards, always with a solemn expression on his face.

“Italian cooking, of course, but then I am an old Italian myself. Not that I love them, but I have acquired many of their tastes. Before we have done dining you will have tasted the perfection of their cookery, north and south, but I assure you you are sharing my dinner. You don’t suppose that the dishes that come to this table are the same the common customers get.”

Cosmo made a slight bow. “I am very sensible of the privilege,” he said.

“The honour and the pleasure are mine, I assure you,” the doctor said in a half-careless tone and looking with distaste towards the small knot of officers with a twenty-four hours’ leave who had finished their confabulation and had risen in a body like men who had agreed on some pleasant course of action. Only the elderly lieutenant lagging a little behind cast a glance at his two countrymen at the little table and followed his comrades with less eager movements.

“A quarter of a tough bullock or half a roast sheep are more in their way, and Cantelucci knows it. As to that company that was sitting at the other table, well, I daresay you can tell yourself what they were, small officials or tradesmen of some

sort. I should think that emptying all their pockets — and they were how many, say twenty — you couldn't collect the value of one English pound at any given time. And Cantelucci knows that too. Well, of course. Still he does well here, but it's a poor place. I wonder, Mr. Latham, what are you doing here?"

"Well," said Cosmo with a good-humoured smile, "I am just staying here. Just as you yourself are staying here."

"Ah, but you never saved Cantelucci's life, whereas I did and that's the reason why I am staying here: out of mere kindness and to give him an opportunity to show his gratitude. . . . Let me fill your glass. Not bad, this wine."

"Excellent. What is it?"

"God knows. Let us call it Cantelucci's gratitude. Generous stuff, this, to wash down those dishes with. Gluttony is an odious vice, but an ambition to dine well is about the only one which can be indulged at no cost to one's fellow men."

"It didn't strike me," murmured Cosmo absently, for he was just then asking himself why he didn't like this pleasant companion, and had just come to the conclusion that it was because of his indecisive expression wavering between peevishness and jocularity with something else in addition, as it were, in the background of his handsome, neat, and comfortable person. Something that was not aggressive nor yet exactly impudent. He wondered at his mistrust of the personality which certainly was very communicative but apparently not inquisitive. At that moment he heard himself addressed with a direct inquiry.

"You passed, of course, through Paris?"

"Yes, and Switzerzland."

"Oh, Paris. I wonder what it looks like now. Full of English people, of course. Let's see, how many years is it since I was last there? Ha, lots of heads rolled off very noble shoulders since. Well, I am trying to make my way there. Curious times. I have found some letters here. Duke of Wellington very much disliked, what? His nod is insupportable, eh?"

"I have just had a sight of the Duke two or three times," said Cosmo. "I can assure you that everybody is treating him with the greatest respect."

"Of course, of course. All the same I bet that all these foreigners are chuckling to themselves at having finished the job without him."

"They needn't be so pleased with themselves," said Cosmo scornfully. "The mere weight of their numbers ..."

"Yes. It was more like a migration of armed tribes than an army. They will boast of their success all the same. There is no saying what the Duke himself thinks. ... I wonder if he could have beaten the other in a fair fight. Well, that will never be known now."

Cosmo had a sudden sense of an epical tale with a doubtful conclusion. He made no answer. Cantelucci had come and gone solemnly, self-contained, with the usual two ceremonial bows. As he retreated he put out all the candles on the central table and became lost to view. From the illuminated spot at which he sat, Cosmo's eyes met only

the shadows of the long refectory-like room with its lofty windows closely shuttered so that they looked like a row of niches for statues. Yet the murmur of the piazza full of people stole faintly into his ear. Cosmo had the recollection of the vast expanse of flagstones enclosed by the shadowy and palatial masses gleaming with lights here and there under the night sky thick with stars and perfectly cloudless.

“This is a very quiet inn,” he observed.

“It has that advantage certainly. The walls are fairly thick, as you can see. It’s an unfinished palace, I mean as to its internal decorations, which were going to be very splendid and even more costly than splendid. The owner of it, I mean the man who had it built, died of hunger in that hall out there.”

“Died of hunger?” repeated Cosmo.

“No doubt about it. It was during the siege of Genoa. You know the siege, surely?” Cosmo recollected himself. “I was quite a child at the time,” he said.

The venerated client of Cantelucci cracked a walnut and then looked at Cosmo’s face.

“I should think you weren’t seven years old at the time,” he said in a judicial tone. “When I first came into Italy with the vaccine, you know, Sir Charles’s marriage was still being talked about in Florence. I remember it perfectly though it seems as if it had all happened in another world. Yes, indubitably he died of hunger like ten thousand other Genoese. He couldn’t go out to hunt for garbage with the populace or crawl out at night trying to gather nettles in the ditches outside the forts, and nobody would have known that he was dead for a month if one of the bombs out of a bomb-vessel with Admiral Keith’s blockading squadron hadn’t burst the door in. They found him at the foot of the stairs, and, they say, with a lot of gold pieces in his pockets. But nobody cared much for that. If it had been a lot of half-gnawed bones there would have been blood spilt, no doubt. For all I know there were or may be even now secret places full of gold in the thickness of these walls. However, the body was thrown into a corpse-cart and the authorities boarded the doorway. It remained boarded for years because the heirs didn’t care to have anything to do with that shell of a palace. I fancy that the last of them died in the snows of Russia. Cantelucci came along, and owing to a friendship with some sort of scribe in the Municipality he got permission to use the place for his hostel. He told me that he found several half ducats in the corners of the hall when he took possession. I suppose they paid for the whitewash, for I can’t believe that Cantelucci had much money in his pockets.”

“Perhaps he found one of those secret hiding-places of which you spoke,” suggested Cosmo.

“What? Cantelucci? He never looked for any gold. He is too much in the clouds; but he has made us dine well in the palace of the starved man, hasn’t he? Sixteen years ago in Naples he was a Jacobin and a friend of the French, a rebel, a traitor to his king if you like — but he has a good memory, there is no denying that.”

“Is he a Neapolitan, then?” asked Cosmo. “I imagined they were of a different type.”

“God only knows. He was there and I didn’t ask him. He was a prisoner of the royalists, of the reactionaries. I was much younger then and perhaps more humane. Flesh and blood couldn’t stand in the sight of the way in which they were being treated, men of position, of attainments, of intelligence. The Neapolitan Jacobins were no populace. They were men of character and ideas, the pick of all classes. They were properly liberals. Still they were called Jacobins and you may be surprised that I, a professional man and an Englishman ...”

Cosmo, looking up at the sudden pause, saw the doctor sitting with the dull eyes and the expression of a man suddenly dissatisfied with himself. Cosmo hastened to say that he himself was no friend of reactionaries and in any case not conceited enough to judge the conduct of men older than himself. Without a sign that he had heard a word of that speech the doctor had a faint and peevish smile. He never moved at all till, after a longish interval, Cosmo spoke again.

“Were you expecting somebody that would want to see you this evening?” he asked. The doctor started.

“See me? No. Why do you ask?”

“Because within the last five minutes somebody has put his head twice through the door; and as I don’t expect either a visitor or a messenger, I thought he was looking for you. I don’t know a single soul here.”

The doctor remained perfectly unmoved. Cosmo, who was looking towards the distant door, saw the head again and this time shouted at it an inquiry. Thereupon the owner of the head entered and had not advanced half the length of the room before Cosmo recognized in him the portly figure of Spire. To his great surprise, however, Spire instead of coming up to the table made a vague gesture and stopped short.

This was strange conduct. The doctor sat completely unconscious, and Cosmo took the course of excusing himself and following Spire, who, directly he had seen his master rise, had retreated rapidly to the door. The doctor did not rouse himself to answer, and Cosmo left him leaning on his elbow in a thoughtful attitude. In the badly lighted hall he found Spire waiting for him between the foot of the stairs and the door which Cosmo presumed was leading to the offices of the hotel. Again Spire made a vague gesture which seemed to convey a warning, and approached his master on tiptoe.

“Well, what is it? What do you mean by flourishing your arm at me like this?” asked Cosmo sharply, and Spire ventured on a warning “Ssh!”

“Why, there is nobody here,” said Cosmo, lowering his voice nevertheless.

“I wanted to tell you, sir, I have seen that fellow.”

“What fellow? Oh yes. The fellow with the cap. Where did you see him?”

“He is here,” said Spire, pointing to the closed door.

“Here? What could a man like that want here? Did you speak to him?”

“No, sir, he has just come in and for all I know he may be already gone away — though I don’t think so.”

“Oh, you don’t think so. Do you know what he has come for?”

Spire made no answer to the question, but after a short silence: "I will go and see, and if you stand where you are, sir, you will be able to look right into the room. He may not be the man."

Without waiting for an answer he moved towards the closed door and threw it wide open. The room, very much like the dining room but smaller, was lighted gloomily by two smoky oil lamps hanging from the ceiling, over a trestle table having a wooden bench on each side. Bad as the light was Cosmo made out at once the peculiar cap. The wearer, sitting on one of the benches, was leaning with both elbows across the table towards the fair head of a girl half-hidden by a lace scarf. They were engaged in earnest conversation so that they never turned their heads at Spire's entrance. Cosmo had just time to discern the fine line of the girl's shoulders, which were half-turned from him when Spire shut the door.

Chapter 2

Returning to his bedroom, Cosmo found the fire of logs still playing fitfully upon the drawn curtains, upon the dim shape of the canopied bed of state, and perceived that Spire as directed had prepared the writing table and had placed a screen round the inviting-looking armchair.

He did not sit down to write. He felt more than ever that in a moment of amused expansion he had made a rash promise to his sister. The difficulty in keeping it had confronted him for the first time in Paris. Henrietta would have liked to hear of people he met, of the great world indulging in the new-found freedom of travel, the English, the French, the Poles, the Germans. Certainly he had seen quite a lot of people; but the problem was as to what could be said about them to a young girl, ignorant of the world, brought up in the country, and having really no notion of what mankind was like. He admitted to himself with introspective sincerity that even he did not exactly know what mankind was really like. He was too much of a novice, and she, obviously, was too innocent to be told of his suspicions and of what it was like. Even to describe the world outwardly was not an easy task — to Henrietta. The world was certainly amusing. Oh yes, it was amusing; but even as he thought that, he felt within him a certain distaste. Just before he had left Paris he had been at a rout given by a great lady. There was a fellow there who somehow became suspected of picking pockets. He was extremely ugly and therefore attracted notice. The great lady, asked if she had invited him, denied ever having seen him before, but he assured her that he had spoken to her already that evening. Her Ladyship then declared that if he was really the man he gave himself out to be, she was not aware that he was in Paris. She imagined him to be in Ireland. Altogether a peculiar story. Cosmo never knew how it had ended because his friend Hollis led him away to introduce him to Mrs. R., who was most affable and entertained him with a complete inventory of her daughter's accomplishments, the daughter herself being then in the room, obviously quite lovely and clever, but

certainly a little odd; for a little later, on his being introduced, she had discoursed to him for half an hour on things of the heart, charmingly, but in a perfectly cool and detached manner. There was also Lady Jane, very much in evidence, very much run after, with a voice of engaging sweetness, but very free, not to say licentious, in her talk. How could he confide his impressions of her to Henrietta? As a matter of fact his head had been rather full of Lady Jane for some time. She had, so to speak, attended him all the way from Paris up to the morning of his arrival at Cante-lucci's inn. But she had now deserted him. Or was it his mind that had dropped her out of a haunting actuality into that region where the jumble of one's experiences is allowed to rest? But was it possible that a shabby fellow in tight breeches and bad boots, with a peculiarly shaped cap on his head, could have got between him and Lady Jane about the time of sunset?

Cosmo thought suddenly that one's personal life was a very bizarre thing. He could write to his sister that before he had been three hours in Genoa he had been involved in passing secret correspondence from Italy to the Island of Elba. Henrietta had solemnly charged him to write everything he could find out, hear, or even guess about Napoleon. He had heard certainly a lot of most extraordinary stories; and if he had not made any guesses he had been associating with persons who actually had been doing nothing else; frightened persons, exulting people, cast-down people, frivolous people, people with airs of mystery or with airs of contempt. But by Jove, now he had been in personal touch and had actually helped a man of the people who was mysteriously corresponding with Elba. He could write something about that but, after all, was it worth while? Finally he concluded he wouldn't write home at all that evening; pushed the table away, and throwing himself into the armchair extended his legs towards the fire. A moody expression settled on his face. His immobility resembled open-eyed sleep with the red spark of the fire in his unwinking eyes, and a perfect insensibility to outward impressions. But he heard distinctly Spire knocking discreetly at the door. Cosmo's first impulse was to shout that he wasn't wanted, but he changed his mind. "Come in."

Spire shut the door carefully, and crossing the room at once put a log on the fire. Then he said:

"Can't get any hot water this evening, sir. Very sorry, sir. I will see that it won't happen again."

At the same time he thought, "Served him right for picking out such an inn to stay at." Cosmo, still silent, stared at the fire, and when he roused himself at last he perceived Spire in the act of putting down in front of his chair a pair of slippers of shiny leather and red heels.

"Take your boots off, sir?" suggested Spire under his breath.

Cosmo let him do it. "Going to bed now, sir?" asked Spire in the same subdued tone.

"No, but you needn't wait. I won't need you any more to-night."

"Thank you, sir." Spire lingered, boots in hand. "The two small pistols are on the bedside table, sir. I have looked to the primings. This town is full of rabble from all parts just now, so I hear. The lock of your door is fairly poor. I shall be sleeping just outside in the corridor, sir. They are going to put me a pallet there."

"You will be very cold," protested Cosmo.

"It will be all right, sir. I have got the fur rug out of the carriage. I had everything taken out of the carriage. The yard isn't safe, sir. Nothing is properly safe in this house, so far as I can see."

Cosmo nodded absent-mindedly. "Oh, wait a moment, Spire. That man, that fellow in the cap, is he still downstairs?"

Spire thought rapidly that he wouldn't be a party to bringing any of those ragamuffins up to the bedroom. "Gone a long time ago, sir," he said stolidly.

Cosmo had a vivid recollection of the man's pose of being settled for an earnest and absorbing conversation to last half the night.

"He doesn't belong to this house?" he asked.

"No, sir, he only came to talk to a young woman. I left him taking leave of her to come up to you, sir. I suppose he was the man you meant, sir."

"Yes," said Cosmo, "I have no doubt about it. He will probably turn up again."

Spire admitted reluctantly that it was likely. He had been telling a long tale to that young woman. "She is very good-looking, sir."

"Is she a servant here?"

"Ob no, sir. She came in with that old cut-throat cobbler. They seem to be friendly. I don't like the looks of the people in this house."

"I wonder," said Cosmo, "whether you could manage to obtain for me a quiet talk with that man on the next occasion he comes here."

Spire received this overture in profound silence.

"Do you think you could?" insisted Cosmo.

A dispassionate raising of the eyebrows preceded the apparently irrelevant remark. "The worst of this house, sir, is that it seems open to all sorts of rabble."

"I see. Well, try to think of some way, Spire. You may go now."

Spire, carrying the boots, walked as far as the door, where he turned for a moment. "The only way I can think of, sir," he said, "would be to make friends with that young woman." Before Cosmo could recover from the surprise at the positive statement Spire had gone out and had shut the door.

Cosmo slept heavily but fitfully, with moments of complete oblivion interrupted by sudden starts, when he would lie on his back with open eyes, wondering for a moment where he was, and then fall asleep again before he had time to make a movement. In the morning the first thing he did was to scribble a note to the Countess de Monteverso to ask her permission to call that very morning. While writing the address he smiled to himself at the idea that it was after all the little Adele whom he remembered but dimly, mostly as a fair head hovering near his father's armchair in the big drawing room, the windows of which opened on the western terrace. As a schoolboy during his holidays

he saw the two girls, Adele and his sister, mostly in the evening. He had his own out-of-door pursuits while those girls stayed upstairs with their governess. Remembering how he used to catch glimpses of them, the fair and the dark, walking in the Park, he felt a greater curiosity to see the Countess de Monteverso than if he had never seen her before. He found it impossible to represent her to himself grown up, married for years, the daughter of an ambassador.

When the family of D'Armand departed from Latham Hall, it was as if a picture had faded, a picture of faces, attitudes, and colours, leaving untouched the familiar background of his Yorkshire home, on to which he could never recall them distinctly. He would be meeting a complete stranger and he wondered whether that lady, who, young as she still was, had lived through tragic-times and had seen so many people, would remember him at all. Him personally. For as to his home he had no doubt she had not forgotten; neither the stones, nor the woods, nor the streams. And as to the people Cosmo had a distinct notion that she was more familiar with his father than he and Henrietta ever had been. His father was not a man whom anybody could forget. And that Countess de Monteverso, more difficult for him to imagine than a complete stranger, would remember his mother better than he could himself. She had seen so much more of her day after day for something like three years; whereas he was at home only at intervals and while there took Lady Latham for granted, a kind, serene presence, beautifully dressed.

He handed the note to Spire with orders to send it off by one of the ragged idlers about the hotel door. There would be an answer. Then, approaching the window, he perceived that he could not see very much out of it. It was too high above the piazza, which furthermore was masked by the jutting balconies. But the sky was blue with a peculiar deep brilliance and the sunlight slanted over the roofs of the houses on the other side of the piazza. When he opened the window the keen pure air roused his vitality. The faint murmur of voices from below reached him very much as it had reached him downstairs the night before through the closed shutters of the dining room, as if the population of the town had never gone to bed.

While Spire was serving his breakfast in his room he wondered what the Countess de Monteverso would look like. The same fair head but higher above the ground and with the hair no longer flowing over the shoulders, but done up no doubt most becomingly and perhaps turned darker with age. It would be the hair of the daughter of an ambassador, able to judge of men and affairs, a woman of position, a very fine lady. Perhaps just a fine lady; but the memory of the child came to him with renewed force, gracious, quiet, with something timid and yet friendly in all its gestures, with his father's hand smoothing the fair hair. . . . No. Not merely a fine lady.

Cosmo had no inborn aptitude for mere society life. Though not exactly shy, he lacked that assurance of manner which his good looks and his social status ought to have given him. He suspected there was too much mockery in the world, and the undoubted friendliness he had met with, especially from women, seemed to him always a little suspect, the effect not of his own merit, of which he had no idea, but of a

shallow, good-natured compassion. He imagined himself awkward in company. The very brilliance of the entertainments, of which he had seen already a good many, was apt to depress his spirits. Often during talk with some pretty woman he would feel that he was not meant for that sort of life, and then suddenly he would withdraw into his shell. In that way he had earned for himself the reputation of being a little strange. He was to a certain extent aware of it, but he was not aware that this very thing made him interesting.

A gust of diffidence came over him while he was trying to eat some breakfast. "I really don't want to see that Countess," he thought. Then remembering the intonation in his father's voice when talking of Adele, he wondered whether perchance he would find an uncommon personality. Cosmo had a profound belief in his father, though he was well aware that he had never understood him thoroughly. . . . But if she is a woman out of the common, he reflected further, then she can't possibly be interested in a rough schoolboy grown into a young man of no particular importance. No doubt she would be amiable enough. . . .

"Clear away all these things, Spire," he said, "and go downstairs to see if the messenger is back."

The messenger was not back yet; and assisted by Spire, Cosmo began to dress himself with extreme care. The tying of his neckcloth was an irritating affair, and so was Spire's perfectly wooden face while he was holding up the glass to him for that operation. Cosmo spoiled two neckcloths and became extremely dissatisfied with the cut and colour of various articles of attire which Spire presented to him one after another. The fashions for men were perfectly absurd. By an effort of mind Cosmo overcame this capricious discontent with familiar things and finished his dressing. Then he sent Spire once more downstairs to inquire if the messenger was back. Obediently, Spire disappeared, but once gone it did not seem as though he meant to return at all. There was no Spire. There was no bell-pull in the room either.

Cosmo stuck his head out through the door. Absolute silence reigned in the well of the stairs. A woman in black, on her knees beside a pail of water and scrubbing the floor of the corridor, looked up at him. Cosmo drew his head in. She was a pitiful hag. . . . He was sure of a gracious reception, of course. He was also sure of meeting a lot of people of all sorts. He wondered what sort of society she received. Everybody, no doubt; Austrians, Italians, French; all the triumphant reactionaries, all the depressed heads bobbing up again after the storm, venomous, revengeful, oppressive, odious. What the devil had become of Spire?

The long window right down to the floor had remained open. Suddenly the sound of a drum reached Cosmo's ears. Stepping out on a balcony, he saw a company of infantry in white coats marching across a distant corner of the piazza. Austrians! Yes, their time had come. A voice behind him said: "The messenger is back, sir." Cosmo stepped in and saw Spire empty-handed. "There's a verbal answer, sir."

"What is it? You haven't spoken with the messenger, have you?"

"I have seen him, sir, but I got the message through the innkeeper. He speaks a little English. The lady would be glad to see you as soon after the fourth hour as possible. They have their own way of reckoning time, but as far as I can understand it, sir, it means something between ten and eleven. At any rate, it's what Cantelucci says, and he can tell the time by an English watch all right."

I "Shut the window, Spire. I don't want to hear that drum. Yes, it would mean as soon after ten as possible, but why has the fellow been so long? Is it very far?"

"No, sir, I think it's quite close, really. He was so long because he has been trying to give your note to the lady herself and there was some difficulty about it. That innkeeper tells me that instead of handing it to the porter the fellow got in through the kitchen door and was dodging about a passage for some time."

Cosmo looked fixedly at Spire, whose face expressed no opinion whatever on those proceedings.

"Dodging in a passage," repeated Cosmo. "But did he see the lady herself?"

"Apparently not, sir. Cantelucci slanged him for being so long, but he said he thought he was acting for the best. He would have been there yet if a black woman hadn't come along and snatched the letter out of his hand. It was she too who brought down the message from the lady."

"Oh, yes," said Cosmo. "Don't you remember there was a black maid?"

"Yes, sir, I remember perfectly well, in the housekeeper's room. She learned to talk English very quickly, but she was a little spitfire."

"Was she?"

Spire busied himself in brushing Cosmo's hat while he remarked in an explanatory tone: "She could never understand a joke, sir."

He attended Cosmo into the hall, where Cantelucci with his usual intense gravity and a deep bow asked whether the signore would want a carriage. Cosmo, however, preferred walking; therefore the youth who had taken Cosmo's note was directed to guide the English milord to the Palazzo Brignoli. He had a tousled head of hair and wore a jacket that might have belonged at one time to a hussar's uniform, with all its trimmings and buttons cut off and a ragged hole in each elbow. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes rolled expressively, and his smile discovered a set of very sound teeth.

"Si, si, Palazzo Rosso," he said.

Cantelucci explained in his imperturbable and solemn manner that the populace gave that name to the Palace on account of the red granite of which it was built, and the thin-faced lad, bounding forward, preceded Cosmo across the piazza, looking over his shoulder from time to time. Cosmo's doubts and apprehensions disappeared before the inevitable charm and splendour of the town. At the corner of a narrow lane and a small open space with some trees growing in the centre of it the ragged guide stopped and, pointing at a dark and magnificent building, left him alone. Massive and sombre, ornate and heavy, with a dark aspect and enormous carvings, the Palace where little Adele was living had to Cosmo's eye the air of a sumptuous prison. The portal with its heavy iron-studded doors was reached by a flight of shallow steps, a segment of a

wide circle, guarded on each side by an enormous griffin seated, tensely alert with wing and claw, on a high and narrow pedestal. On ascending the steps Cosmo discovered that the heavy door was ajar, just enough to let him slip in; and, at once, from the gloom of the arched passage he saw the inner sunshine on the oleanders of the inner court, flagged with marble, from whence a broad staircase ascended to the colonnaded gallery of the first floor.

Cosmo had seen no porter or other living soul, and there was no sound of any sort, no appearance of movement anywhere. Even the leaves of the oleanders kept perfectly still. In the light of the morning a slanting shadow cut the western wall into two triangles, one dark, the other glowing as with a red fire; and Cosmo remained for a moment spellbound by a strong impression of empty grandeur, magnificence, and solitude.

A voice behind him, issuing from somewhere in the big gateway through which he had passed, cried: "Ascend, signore!" Cosmo began to mount the open staircase, embarrassed as though he had been watched by thousands of eyes. In the gallery he hesitated, for the several doors he could see remained closed, and the only sound that reached his ears was the gentle plashing of the fountain in the court below him.

Before he had made up his mind the door in front of him opened fairly wide, but he could not see the person till he had entered an anteroom with narrow red and gilt settees ranged along its white walls. The door shut behind him and, turning round, he confronted a dark, plump mulatto woman who was staring at him with an expression of intense admiration. She clapped her hands in ecstasy and, opening her mouth, exhibited her white teeth in a low cackling laugh.

"Bonjour, Aglae," said Cosmo readily.

The woman laughed again in sheer delight. "You remember my name, Mr. Cosmo! You quite frighten me, you grow so big. I remember you climb tree and throw nice ripe apple to the black girl. . . ." Her eyes gleamed and rolled absurdly.

Cosmo was so strangely touched by this extremely slight reminiscence of his tree-climbing boyhood, that when she added, "That was a good time," he was quite ready to agree, thereby provoking another burst of delightful laughter. But Aglae was controlling herself obviously. Her laughter was subdued. It had not the unbounded freedom of sound that used to reverberate exotically in the dark passages at the back of Latham Hall; though there, too, Aglae tried to subdue it in view of rebukes or sarcastic comments in the servants' hall. It stopped suddenly and Aglae in a tone of sober respect wanted to know how the Signior was. Cosmo said that his father was very well.

"He a very great gentleman," commented Aglae. "I always tremble when I see him. You very fine gentleman too, Mr. Cosmo."

She moved to one of the inner doors, but as Cosmo was following her she raised her hand to prevent him and opened the door only a little way, then came back and said in a lower tone, "It's to hear the bell better when it rings. . . . Will you wait a little bit here?" she asked anxiously.

"I will," said Cosmo, "but surely you don't want to tremble before me. What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all is the matter." Aglae tossed her head, tied up in a bandana handkerchief, with something of the spirit of the old days.

Cosmo was amused. "I no tremble before you," she continued. "I always like you very much. I am glad with all my heart to see you here."

All the time she turned her ear to the door she had left the least bit ajar. She had on a high-waisted white calico dress, white stockings, and Genoese slippers on her feet. Her dark brown hands moved uneasily.

"And how is Madame la Comtesse?" asked Cosmo.

"Miss Adele very well. Anyway she never says anything else. She very great lady now. All the town come here, but she wants to see you alone after all these years."

"It's very kind of her," said Cosmo. "I was wondering whether she remembered me at all."

Now the excitement of seeing him had worn off, he was surprised at the careworn expression of the mulatto's face. For a moment it seemed to him like a tragic mask, then came the flash of white teeth, strangely unlike a smile.

"She remember everything," said Aglae. "She . . . she . . . Mr. Cosmo, you no boy now. I tell you that Miss Adele had not a moment's peace since she drive away from your big home in the country one very cold day. I remember very well. little birds fall dead off the tree. I feel ready to fall dead myself."

"I was away at school," said Cosmo. He remembered that on his return the disappearance of those people had not produced a very strong impression on him. In fact, the only thing he had missed was, in the evening, the fair head of the stranger Adele near the dark head of his sister Henrietta. And the next evening he had not even missed that!

While these thoughts were passing through his head he waited, looking at Aglae with a faint smile of which he was not aware. The mulatto girl seemed to have concentrated all her faculties on listening for the sound of a bell. It came at last. Cosmo heard it, too, very distant, faint and prolonged. A handbell.

"Now," said Aglae under her breath, and Cosmo followed her through a suite of rooms, magnificent but under-furnished, with the full light excluded by half-closed jalousies. The vista was terminated by a white and gold door at which Aglae stopped and looked back at him over her shoulder with an air of curiosity, anxiety, or was it hesitation? But certainly without a smile. As to his own it had stiffened permanently on his lips. Before turning the handle of the door the mulatto listened for a moment. Then she threw it open, disclosing a room full of light indeed but which Cosmo could not see in its full extent because of a screen cutting off the view. His last thought as he crossed the threshold was, "It will be interesting," and then he heard the door shut behind him, leaving him as it were alone with the heavy screen of figured velvet and three windows through which sunshine poured in a way that almost blinded him after his long experience of half lights.

He walked clear of the screen, and he was surprised at the vast size of the room. Here and there were other screens and a quite unexpected quantity of elegant furniture amongst which he felt for a moment as if lost. All this shone and gleamed and glowed with colour in the freshness and brilliance of the sunny morning. "Why, there's nobody here," he thought with a mingled sense of disappointment and relief. To his left above a square of carpet that was like a flower-bed rose a white mantelpiece which in its proportion and sumptu-osity was like a low but much carved portal surmounted by an enormous sheet of glass reaching up to the cornice of the ceiling. He stepped on to the flowers, feeling now somewhat vexed, and only then perceived away at the other end of the room, in a corner beyond a fourth window, a lady seated at a writing table with her back to him. Barred by the gilt openwork of the chair-back he saw her dress, the only bit of blue in the room. There was some white lace about her shoulders, her fair head was bent, she was writing rapidly.

Whoever she was she seemed not to be aware of his presence. Cosmo did not know whether to wait in silence or say something, or merely warn her by a slight cough. What a stupid position, he thought. At that moment the lady put the pen down and rose from her chair brusquely, yet there was a perceptible moment before she turned round and advanced towards him. She was tall. But for the manner of his introduction, which could leave no room for doubt, the impression that this could not be the lady he had come to see would have been irresistible. As it was Cosmo felt apologetic, as though he had come to the wrong house. It occurred to him also that the lady had been from the very first aware of his presence. He was struck by the profundity of her eyes, which were fixed on him. The train of her blue robe followed on the floor. Her well-shaped head was a mass of short fair curls, and while she approached him Cosmo saw the colour leave her cheeks, the passing away of an unmistakable blush. She stopped and said in an even voice:

"Don't you recognize me?"

He recovered his power of speech but not exactly the command of his thoughts, which were overwhelmed by a variety of strong and fugitive impulses.

"I have never known you," he said with a tone of the profoundest conviction.

She smiled (Cosmo was perfectly sure that he had never seen that sort of smile or the promise even of anything so enchanting), and sank slowly on to a sofa whose brocaded silk, gray like pure ashes, and the carved frame painted with flowers and picked with gold, acquired an extraordinary value from the colour of her dress and the grace of her attitude. She pointed to an armchair, close by. Cosmo sat down. A very small table of ebony inlaid with silver stood between them, her hand rested on it; and Cosmo looked at it with appreciation, as if it had been an object of art, before he raised his eyes to the expectant face.

"Frankly," he said, "didn't you think that a complete stranger had been brought into the room?"

He said this very seriously, and she answered him in a light tone. "For a moment I was afraid to look round. I sat there with my back to you. It was absurd after having

been imprudent enough to let you come in the morning. You kept so still that you might have been already gone. I took fright, I jumped up, but I need not have hesitated. You are still the same boy.”

Cosmo paid very little attention to what she said. Without restraint and disguise, in open admiration he was observing her with all his might, saying to himself,

“Is it possible — this — Adele!” He recollected himself, however, sufficiently to murmur that men changed more slowly and perhaps less completely than women. The Countess de Montevezzo was not of that opinion, or, at any rate, not in this case.

“It isn’t that at all. I know because I used to look at you with that attention worthy of the heir of the Latham name, whereas you never honoured the French girl by anything more than a casual glance. Why should you have done more? You had the dogs, the horses, your first gun. I remember the gun. You showed it to both of us, to your sister and myself, while we were walking in the park. You shouted to us and came across the grass, brandishing your gun, while the governess — I don’t remember her name — screamed at you, *Oh mon dieu! N’apjtroachez pas!* You paid not the slightest attention to her. You had a flushed face. Of course her screaming frightened us at first, and just as we were preparing to get very interested in your gun you walked off with a look of contempt.”

“Did I behave so badly as that?” said Cosmo, feeling suddenly very much at ease with that lady with whom he had never even exchanged a formal greeting. She had grown more animated. As he was very fond of his sister he answered her numerous questions about Henrietta with interest and pleasure. From that subject the lady on the sofa, who may or may not have been Adele d’Armand at one time, went on putting a series of questions about the house and all the people in it in a manner that proved a precise and affectionate recollection of those days. The memory of the countryside seemed to have been cherished by her too, and Cosmo’s heart warmed to the subject. She remembered certain spots in the park and certain points of view in the neighbourhood as though she had left them but a year before. She seemed not to have forgotten a single servant in the house. She asked after Spire.

“I have got him with me,” said Cosmo. “Of course he has grown elderly.”

He almost forgot to whom he was speaking. Without associating her very distinctly with the child Adele, he was taking the Countess de Montevezzo for granted. He delighted in seeing her so quiet and so perfectly natural. The first effect of her appearance persisted, with only the added sense of the deep dark blue of her eyes, an impression of living profundity that made his thoughts about her pause. But he was unconsciously grateful to her for the fact that she had never given him a moment of that acute social awkwardness from which he used to suffer so much; though there could not be the slightest doubt that the little Adele (if there had ever been a little Adele) was now a very fine lady indeed. But she loved the old place and everything and everybody in it. Of that too there could be no doubt. The few references she made to his mother touched and surprised Cosmo. They seemed to imply some depth in her which he, the son, and Henrietta, the daughter, had failed to penetrate. In contrast with that, Cosmo

remarked that after the inquiry after Sir Charles's health, which was one of her first questions, his father was not mentioned again.

"Are you going to make a stay in Genoa?" she asked after a pause.

"A few days," said Cosmo, in an irresolute tone, because he did not know what answer was expected to this inquiry, the first which had nothing to do with Yorkshire. His interest in the rest of Italy was, he perceived, very small. But by the association of ideas he thought suddenly of the passing hours. He raised his eyes to a faintly engraved brass disc with black hands hung on the wall above one of the two doors at that end of the room which he was facing. The black hands pointed to eleven, but what prevented his eyes from returning at once to the delighted contemplation of the Countess de Montevesso was the fact that the door below the clock seemed to have moved slightly.

"I intend to see something of Italy," he said. "My time really is my own, I have nothing special to do. It seems to me that the principal object of my journey has been attained now. I don't think my father would be surprised to hear that I had turned back after leaving Genoa."

The Countess looking up at this, their eyes remained fastened together for a time and Cosmo thoughtt "What on earth am I saying?" He watched her lips move to form the words which quite frightened him.

"Did Sir Charles give you a message for me?"

He thought he had brought this on himself. It was & painful moment. It lasted long enough to give the Countess time to assume an expression of indifference, startling after the low tone of her question.

"No," said Cosmo truthfully. "I have only a message for your father." He waited a moment. "But I will tell you one of the last things Henrietta told me. She told me that when you were married my father could think of nothing for days but you."

He did not venture to look at her; then added impulsively, "My father loved you dearly. We children could see it very well, Ad-"

"Why don't you finish my name?" her seductive voice asked.

Cosmo coloured. "Well, you know, I never heard you really called by any other name. It came naturally since I suppose you must be — Adele."

Madame de Montevesso, who had been hanging on his lips, was surprised by Cosmo raising his eyes to stare intensely into the part of the room behind her back. Just as he was making his apology he had noticed the door under the clock swing open without any sound at all; and there entered quite noiselessly, too, and with something ambiguous in the very motion, a young girl (nothing could have been more unexpected) in a sort of dishabille of a white skirt and a long pink jacket of some very thin stuff which had a silky shimmer. She made a few steps and stopped. She was rather short, her hair was intensely black and drawn tightly away from her forehead. Cosmo felt sure (though he couldn't see) that it was done in one long plait at the back. Her face was a short oval, her chin blunt, her nose a little too big and her black eyes perfectly round. Cosmo had the time to notice all this because astonishment prevented him from looking away. The girl advanced slowly if with perfect assurance, and stared

unwinkingly at Cosmo, who in the extremity of his embarrassment got up from his chair. The young girl then stopped short and for a moment the three persons in the room preserved an absolute immobility. Then the Countess glanced over her shoulder leisurely and addressed Cosmo.

"This is Clelia, a niece of my husband." Cosmo made a deep bow to the possessor of the round black eyes. "I didn't know of her existence till about a fortnight ago," added Madame de Monteverso carelessly. The round-eyed girl still staring hard made a curtsy to Cosmo. "My husband," went on Adele, "has also two old aunts living here. I have never seen them. This house is very big."

Cosmo resumed his seat and there was a moment of silence. The girl sat down in the chair before the writing table sideways, folded her arms on its back, and rested her chin on her hands. Her round eyes examined Cosmo with a sort of animal frankness. He thought suddenly that it was time to bring his visit to an end. He would have risen at once but for the Countess de Monteverso beginning to speak to him, still in English. She seemed to have guessed what was passing through his mind.

"Don't go yet for a moment," she said, in a perfectly unconcerned voice, then paused. "We were talking about your father."

"As to him," said Cosmo, "I have nothing more to say. I have told you all the truth as far as I am certain of it."

She inclined her head slowly and in the same level voice:

"The Court is here and most of the foreign ambassadors. We are waiting here for the arrival of the Queen of Sardinia, who may or may not come within the next month or so. This is considered a good post of observation, but there is very little to observe just now from the diplomatic point of view. Most of us have exhausted almost all emotions. Life has grown suddenly very dull. We gossip a little about each other; we wait for the end of the Vienna Congress and discuss the latest rumour that floats about. Yes. The play is over, the stage seems empty. If I were you I would stay a little longer here."

"I certainly mean to stay here for some time," declared Cosmo with sudden resolution.

"That's right," she continued in the same indifferent tone. "But wait a few days before you write home. You have awakened old memories in me. Inconceivably distant," she went on in a voice more expressionless than ever, "and the dormant feelings of what seems quite another age."

Cosmo smiled at this. The girl with round eyes was keeping perfectly still with her watchful stare. Madame de Monteverso seemed to read Cosmo's thoughts.

"Yes," she insisted. "I feel very old and everything is very far. I am twenty-six and I have been married very nearly ten years now."

Cosmo, looking at her face, thought that those had been the most agitated ten years of European history. He said, "I have no doubt that Yorkshire must seem very far away to you."

"I suppose you write very often home?" she said.

Cosmo defended himself from being one of those people who write letters about their travels. He had no talent for that; and then what could one write to a young girl like Henrietta and to a man as austere as his father, who had so long retired from the world? Cosmo had found it very difficult. Of course he took care to let them know pretty often that he was safe and sound.

Adele could see this point of view. She seemed amused by the innocent difficulties of a young man having no one but a father and a sister to write to. She ascertained that he had no intimate friend left behind to whom he could confide his impressions. Cosmo said he had formed none of those intimacies that induce a man to share his innermost thoughts and feelings with somebody else.

"Probably your father was like that too," said Madame de Monteverso. "I fancy he must have been very difficult to please, and still more difficult to conquer."

"Oh, as to that," said Cosmo, "I can safely say I've never been conquered," and he laughed boyishly. He confessed further that he had the habit of thinking contradictorily about most things. "My father was never hl*e that," he concluded.

The gravity with which she listened to him now disconcerted him secretly. At last she nodded and opined that his difficulties had their source in the liveliness of his sympathies. He declared that he suffered most at times from the difficulty of making himself understood by men of his own age.

"And the women?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, the women!" he said, without the slightest levity. "One would not even try." He raised his eyes and, obeying a sudden impulse, added: "I think that perhaps you could understand me."

"That would be because I am so much older," she said. Cosmo discovered in her delicately modelled face, with all its grace and freshness of youth, an interrogative profundity of expression, the impress of the problems of life and the conflicts of the soul. The great light of day had treated her kindly. Bathed in the sunshine entering through the four windows, she appeared to him wonderful in the glow of her complexion, in the harmony of her form and the composed nobility of her attitude. He felt this wonderfulness of her whole person in some sort physically, and thought that he had looked at her too long. He glanced aside and met the dark girl's round unwinking stare of a cat ready to fly at one. She had not moved a hair's breadth, and Cosmo felt reluctant to take his eyes off her exactly as though she had been a fierce cat. He heard the voice of the Countess de Monteverso and had to turn to her.

"Well, wait a few days before you write home about . . . Genoa."

"I had a mind to begin a letter yesterday," he said.

"What? Already! Only a few hours after your arrival!"

"Yes. Henrietta is very anxious to hear everything relating to the Emperor Napoleon."

Madame de Monteverso was genuinely surprised. Her voice lost its equable charm while she asked what on earth could he have had to tell of Napoleon that he could not have written to her from Paris.

“Yes. He is in everybody’s thoughts and on everybody’s lips there,” he said. “Whenever three people come together he is the presence that is with them. But last night ...”

He was on the point of telling her of his adventure 011 the tower when she struck in:

“The Congress will put an end to all that presently.” It checked Cosmo’s expansiveness and he said instead: “It’s very possible. But last night on arriving here I experienced a curious sensation of his nearness. I went down in the evening to look at the Fort.”

“He isn’t certainly very far from here. And what are your feelings about him?”

“Oh,” he rejoined lightly, “as about everything else in the world — contradictory.”

Madame de Monteverso rose suddenly, saying: “I won’t ask you, then, as to your feelings about myself.” Cosmo stood up hastily. He was a little the taller of the two but their faces were nearly on a level. “I should like you to make up your mind about me before you take up your traveller’s pen,” continued Adele. “Come again this evening. There will be a few people here; and, as you have said, when a fe* people come together just now Napoleon is always with them, an unseen presence. But you will see my father Do you remember him at all?”

Cosmo assured her that he remembered the Marquis d’Armand perfectly. He was on the point of making hia parting bow when Madame de Monteverso, with the two words “d VAnglaise,” put out her hand. He took it and forgot himself in the unexpected sensation of this contact. He was in no haste to release it when to his extreme surprise, with a slight movement of her eyes towards the girl at the writing table, Madame de Monteverso said:

“Did you ever see anything like that?”

Cosmo was taken completely aback. He dropped her hand. He did not know what to say, and even if it was proper for him to smile. Madame de Monteverso continued in a voice betraying no sentiment of any kind: “I can never be sure of my privacy now. Do you understand that I am her aunt? She wanders all over this palazzo very much like a domestic animal, only more observant, and she is by no means an idiot. Luckily she knows no language but Italian.”

They had been moving slowly towards the other end of the room, but now Madame de Monteverso stopped and returned Cosmo’s parting bow with a slight inclination of her head. Before passing round the screen between him and the door Cosmo glanced back. The girl on the chair had not stirred.

He had half a hope that the mulatto maid would be waiting for him. But he saw no one. As he crossed the courtyard he might have thought himself leaving an uninhabited house. But the streets through which he made his way to his inn were thronged with people. The day was quite warm. Already on the edge of the pavements, here and there, there was a display of flowers for sale; and at every turn he saw more people who seemed carefree, and the women with their silken shoes and the lace scarves on their heads appeared to him quite charming. The plaza was a scene of constant movement. Here

and there a group stood still, conversing in low voices but with expressive gestures. As he approached his hotel he caught an evanescent sight of the man he had met on the tower. His cap was unmistakable. Cosmo mended his pace but the man had disappeared; and after looking in all directions Cosmo went up the steps of the inn. In his room he found Spire folding methodically some clothes.

"I saw that man/' said Cosmo, handing him his hat.

"Was he following you, sir?" asked Spire.

"No, I saw his back quite near this house."

"I shouldn't wonder if he were coming here," opined Spire.

"In any case I wouldn't have spoken to him in the piazza," said Cosmo.

"Much better not, sir," said the servant.

"After all," said Cosmo, "I don't know that I have anything to say to him."

From these words Spire concluded that his master had found something more interesting to occupy his mind. While he went on with his work he talked to Cosmo, who had thrown himself into an armchair, of some repairs needed to the carriage, and also informed him that the English doctor had left a message asking whether Mr. Latham would do him the honour to take his midday meal with him at the same table as last night. After a slight hesitation Cosmo assented, and Spire, saying that he would go and tell them downstairs, left the room.

In the solitude favourable to concentration of thought Cosmo discovered that he could not think connectedly, either of the fair curls of the Countess de Monteverso or of the vague story of her marriage. Strictly speaking he knew nothing of it; and this ignorance interfered with the process of consecutive thinking; but he formed some images and even came to the verge of that state which one sees visions. The obscurity of her past helped the freedom of his fancies. He had an intuitive conviction that he had seen her in the fullest brilliance of her beauty and of the charm of her mind. A woman like that was a great power, he reflected, and then it occurred to him that, marvellous as she was, she was not her own mistress.

Some church clock striking loudly the hour roused him up, but before he went downstairs he paced the floor to and fro several times. And when he forced himself out of that empty room it was with a profound disgust of all he was going to see and hear, a momentary repulsion towards the claims of the world, like a man tearing himself away from the side of a beloved mistress.

Chapter 3

Returning that evening to the Palazzo Brignoli, Cosmo found the lantern under the vaulted roof lighted. There was also a porter in gold-laced livery and a cocked hat who saluted him, and in the white anteroom with red benches along the walls two lackeys made ready to divesthim of his cloak. But a man in sombre garments detained Cosmo, saying that he was the ambassador's valet, and led him away along a very

badly lighted inner corridor. He explained that His Excellency the Ambassador wished to see Monsieur Latham for a few moments in private before Monsieur Latham joined the general company. The ambassador's cabinet into which he introduced Cosmo was lighted by a pair of candelabra. Cosmo was told that His Excellency was finishing dressing, and then the man disappeared. Cosmo noticed that there were several doors besides the one by which he had entered, which was the least conspicuous of them all, and in fact so inconspicuous, corresponding exactly to a painted panel, that it might have been called a secret door. Other doors were framed in costly woods, lining the considerable thicknesses of the walls. One of them opened without noise and Cosmo saw enter a man somewhat taller than he had expected to see, with a white head, in a coat with softly gleaming embroideries and a broad ribbon across his breast. He advanced, opening his arms wide, and Cosmo, who noticed that one of the hands was holding a snuffbox, submitted with good grace to the embrace of the Marquis d'Armand, whose lips touched his cheeks one after another and whose hands then rested at arm's length on his shoulder for a moment.

"Sit down, mon enfant," were the first words spoken, and Cosmo obeyed, facing the armchair into which the Marquis had dropped. A white meagre hand set in fine lace moved the candelabra on the table, and Cosmo good-humouredly submitted to being contemplated in silence. This man in a splendid coat, white-headed and with a broad ribbon across his breast, seemed to have no connection whatever with his father's guest, whom as a boy he remembered walking with Sir Charles amongst deep shrubberies or writing busily at one end of the long table in the library of Latham Hall, always with the slightly subdued mien of an exile and an air of being worried by the possession of unspeakable secrets which he preserved even when playing at backgammon with Sir Charles in the great drawing room. Cosmo, returning the gaze of the tired eyes, remarked that the ambassador looked old but not at all senile.

At last the Marquis declared that he could detect the lineaments of his old friend in the son's face, and in a voice that was low and kindly put a series of questions about Sir Charles, about London and his old friends there; questions which Cosmo, especially as to the latter, was not always able to answer fully.

"I forget! You are still so young," said the ambassador, recollecting himself. This young man sitting here before him with a friendly smile had his friends amongst his own contemporaries, shared the ideas and the views of his own generation which had grown up since the Revolution, to whom the Revolution was only a historical fact and whose enthusiasms had a strange complexion, for the undisciplined hopes of the young make them reckless in words and sometimes in actions. The Marquis's own generation had been different. It had had no inducement to be reckless. It had been born to a settled order of things. Certainly a few philosophers had been indulging for years in subversive sentimentalism, but the foundations of Europe seemed unshakable. He noticed Cosmo's expectant attitude and said:

"I wonder what my dear old friend is thinking of all this." ^

"It is not very easy to get at my father's thoughts," confessed Cosmo. "After all, you must know my father much better than I do, Monsieur le Marquis."

"In the austerity of his convictions your father was more like a republican of ancient times," said the Marquis seriously. "Does that surprise you, my young friend? ..." Cosmo shook his head slightly. . . . "Yet we always agreed very well. Your father understood every kind of fidelity. The world had never known him and it will never know him now. But I, who approached him closely, could have nothing but the greatest respect for his character and for his far-seeing wisdom."

"I am very glad to hear you say this," interjected Cosmo.

"He was a scornful man," said the Marquis, then paused and repeated once more: "Yes. Un grand dedaigieux. He was that. But one accepted it from him as one would not from another man, because one felt that it was not the result of mean grievances or disappointed hopes. Now the old order is coming back and, whatever my old friend may think of it, he had his share in that work."

Cosmo raised his head. "I had no idea," he murmured.

"Yes," said the Marquis. "Indirectly if you like. AH I could offer to my Princes was my life, my toil, the sacrifice of my deepest feelings as husband and father. I don't say this to boast. I could not have acted otherwise. But for my share of the work, risky, often desperate, and continuously hopeless as it seemed to be, I have to thank your father's help, mon jeune ami. It came out of that fortune which some day will be yours. The only thing in all the activities the penetrating mind of your father was not scornful of was my fidelity. He understood that it was above the intrigues, the lies, the selfish stupidities of that exiles' life which we all shared with our Princes. They will never know how much they owe to that English gentleman. When parting with my wife and child I was sustained by the thought that his friendship and care were extended over them and would not fail."

"I have heard nothing of all this," said Cosmo. "Of course I was not ignorant of the great friendship that united you to him. This is one of the things that the world does know about my father."

"Have you brought a letter for me?" asked the Marquis. "I haven't heard from him for a long time. After we returned to France, through the influence of my son-in-law, communications were very difficult. Ten years of war, my dear friend, ten years."

"Father very seldom takes a pen in hand now," said Cosmo, "but ..."

The Marquis interrupted him. "When you write home, my dear friend, tell him that I never gave way to promptings of mean ambition or an unworthy vanity. Tell him that I twice declined the Embassy of Madrid which was pressed on me, and that if I accepted the nomination as a Commissioner for settling the frontiers with the representatives of the Allied Powers it was at the cost of my deepest feelings and only to serve my vanquished country. My secret missions had made me known to many European statesmen. I knew I was liked. I thought I could do some good. The Russians, I must say, were quite charming, and you may tell your father that Sir Charles Stewart clothed his demands in the form of the most perfect politeness; but

all those transactions were based after all on the right of the strongest. I had black moments and I suffered as a Frenchman. I suffered ...”

The Marquis got up, walked away to the other end of the room, then coming back dropped into the armchair again. Cosmo was too startled by this display of feeling to rise. The ambassadorial figure in the laced coat exhaled a deep sigh. “Your father knows that, unlike so many of the other refugees, I have always remained a Frenchman. One would have paid any price almost to avoid this humiliation.”

Cosmo was gratified by the anxiety of a king’s friend to, as it were, justify himself before his father. He discovered that even this old royalist had been forced, if only for a moment, to regret the days of imperial victories. The Marquis tapped his snuffbox, took a pinch of snuff, and composed himself.

“Of course when this Turin mission was unexpectedly pressed on me I went to the King himself and explained that, having refused a much higher post, I could not think of accepting this one. But the King pointed out that this was an altogether different position. The King of Sardinia was his brother-in-law. There was nothing to say against such an argument. His Majesty was also good enough to say that he was anxious to grant me any favour I might ask. I didn’t want any favours but I had to think of something on the spur of the moment and I begged for a special right of entree on days on which there are no receptions. I couldn’t resist so much graciousness,” continued the Marquis. “I have managed to keep clear of prejudices that poison and endanger the hopes of this restoration, but I am a royalist, a man of my own time. Remember to tell your father all this, my dear young friend.”

“I shall not fail,” said Cosmo, wondering within himself at the power of such a strange argument, yet feeling a liking and respect for that old man torn between rejoicing and sorrow at the end of his troubled life.

“I should like him to know, too,” the Marquis said in his bland and friendly voice, “that M. de Talleyrand just before he left for Vienna held out to me the prospect of the London Embassy later. That, certainly, I would not refuse, if only to be nearer a man to whom my obligations are immense and only equalled by the affection I had borne towards him through all those unhappy years.”

“My father — ” began Cosmo — “I ought to have given you his message before — told me to give you his love and to tell you that when you are tired of your grandeurs there is always a large place for you in his house.”

Cosmo was surprised at the sudden movement of the Marquis, who leaned over the arm of his chair and put his hand over his eyes. For a time complete silence reigned in the room. Then Cosmo said:

“I think somebody is scratching at the door.”

The Marquis sat up and listened, then raising his voice: “You may come in.”

The man in black clothes, entering through the hidden door, stopped at some distance in a respectful attitude. The Marquis beckoned him to approach, and the man, bending to his ear, said in a low voice which was, however, audible to Cosmo: “He is here.” The Marquis answered in an undertone, “He came rather early. He must wait,”

at which the man murmured something which Cosmo couldn't hear. He became aware that the Marquis looked at him irresolutely before he said:

"My dear boy, you will have to make your entrance into my daughter's salon together with me. I thought of sending you back the way you came, but as a matter of fact the passage is blocked. . . . Bring him in and let him sit here after we are gone," he directed the man in black, and Cosmo only then recognized Bernard, the servant of proved fidelity in all the misfortunes of the D'Armand family. Bernard withdrew without responding in any way to Cosmo's smile of recognition. "In my position," continued the Marquis, "I have to make use of agents more or less shady. Those men often object to being seen. Their occupation is risky. There is a man of that sort waiting in the corridor."

Cosmo said he was at the Marquis's orders, but the ambassador remained in the armchair, tapping the lid of his snuffbox slightly.

"You saw my daughter this morning, I understand." Cosmo made an assenting bow. Madame de Monteverso had done him the honour to receive him in the morning.

"You speak French very well," said the Marquis. "I don't really know why the English are supposed to be bad linguists. We French are much worse. Did you two speak French together?"

"No," said Cosmo, "we spoke in English. It was Madame de Monteverso's own choice."

"She hasn't quite forgotten it, has she?"

"It struck me," said Cosmo, "that your daughter has forgotten neither the language nor the people, nor the sights of her early life. I was touched by the fidelity of her memory and the warmth of her feelings."

His own tone had warmth enough in it to make the Marquis look up at him. There was a short pause. "None of us are likely to forget those days of noble and infinite kindness. We were but vagrants on a hostile earth. My daughter could not have forgotten! As long as there is anybody of our name left ..."

The Marquis checked himself abruptly, but almost at once went on in a slightly changed tone: "But I am alone of my name now. I wish I had had a son so that gratitude could have been perpetuated from generation to generation and become a traditional thing between our two families. But this is not to be. Perhaps you didn't know I had a brother. He was much younger than myself and I loved him as though he had been my son. Directly I had placed my wife and child in safety, your father insisted on giving me the means to return to France secretly in order to try and save that young head. But all my attempts failed. It fell on the scaffold. He was one of the last victims of the sanguinary madness of that time. . . . But let us talk of something else. What are your plans, my young friend?"

Cosmo confessed that he had no plans. He intended to stay in Genoa for some time. Madame de Monteverso had been good enough to encourage him in that idea, and really there was such a feeling of leisure in the European atmosphere that he didn't see why he should make any plans. The world was enjoying its first breathing time. Cosmo corrected himself — well no, perhaps not exactly enjoying. To be strictly

truthful he had not noticed much feeling of joy. ... He hesitated a moment but the whole attitude of the Marquis was so benevolent and encouraging that he continued to take stock of his own sensations and continued in the same strain. There was activity, lots of activity, agitation perhaps, but no real joy. Or at any rate, no enjoyment. Not even now, after the foreign troops had withdrawn from France and all the sovereigns of the world had gone to Vienna.

The Marquis listened with profound attention. "Are those your impressions, mon cker enfant? Somehow they don't seem very favourable. But you English are very apt to judge us with severity. I hear very little of what is going on in France."

The train of his own thoughts had mastered Cosmo, who added, "What struck me most was the sense of security ... "he paused for an instant and the ambassador, bending forward in the chair with the air of a man attempting an experiment, insinuated gently: "Not such a bad thing, that sentiment."

In the ardour of his honesty Cosmo did not notice either the attitude or the tone, though he caught the sense of the words.

"Was it of the right kind," he went on, as if communing with himself, "or was it the absence of sound thought, and almost of all feeling? M. le Marquis, I am too young to judge, but one would have thought, listening to the talk one heard on all sides, that such a man as Bonaparte had never existed."

"You have been in the society of returned exiles," said the Marquis after a moment of meditation. "You must judge them charitably. A class that has been under the ban for years lives on its passions and on prejudices whose growth stifles not only its sagacity but its visions of the reality." He changed his tone. "Our present Minister of Foreign Affairs never communicates with me personally. The only personal letter I had from him in the last four months was on the subject of procuring some truffles that grow in this country for the King, and there were four pages of most minute directions as to where they were to be found and how they were to be packed and transmitted to Paris. As to my dispatches, I get merely formal acknowledgments. I really don't know what is going on except through travellers who naturally colour their information with their own desires. M. de Talleyrand writes me short notes now and then, but as he has been himself for months in Vienna he can't possibly know what is going on in France. His acute mind, his extraordinary talents are fit to cope with the international situation, but I suppose he too is uneasy. In fact, my dear young friend, as far as I can judge, uneasy suspense is the prevailing sentiment all round the basin of the Mediterranean. The fate of nations still hangs in the balance."

Cosmo waited a moment before he whispered, "And the fate of some individual souls perhaps."

The ambassador made no sound till after a whole minute had elapsed, and then it was only to say:

"I suppose that like many of your young and even old countrymen, you have formed a project of visiting Elba."

Cosmo at once adopted a conversational tone. "Half-formed at most," he said. "I was never one of those who like to visit prisons and gaze at their fellow beings in captivity. A strange taste indeed! I will own to you, M. le Marquis," he went on boyishly, "that the notion of captivity is very odious to me, for men, and for animals too. I would sooner look at a dead lion than a lion in a cage. Yet I remember a young French friend of mine telling me that we English were the most curious nation in the world. But as you said, everybody seems to be doing Elba. I suppose there are no difficulties."

"Not enough difficulties," said the ambassador blandly. "I mean for the good of all concerned."

"Ah," said Cosmo, and repeated thoughtfully, "All concerned! The other day in Paris I met Mr. Wycherley on his way home. He seemed to have had no difficulty at all, not even in Elba. We had quite a long-audience. Mr. Wycherley struck me as a man of blunt feelings. Apparently the Emperor — after all, the imperial title is not taken away from him yet—"

The Marquis lowered his head slowly. "No, not yet."

"Well, the Emperor said to him: 'You have come here to look at a wild beast,' and Mr. Wycherley, who doesn't seem to be at a loss for words, answered at once: 'I have come here to look at a great man.' What a crude answer! He is telling this story to everybody. He told me he is going to publish a pamphlet about his visit."

"Mr. Wycherley is a man of good company. His answer was polite. What would have been yours, my young friend?"

"I don't think I will ever be called to make any sort of answer to the great man," said Cosmo.

The Marquis got up with the words: "I think that on the whole you will be wise not to waste your time. I have here a letter from the French Consul in Leghorn quoting the latest report he had from Elba. It states that Bonaparte remains shut up for days together in his private apartments. The reason given is that he fears attempts on his life being made by emissaries sent from France and Italy. He is not visible. Another report states that lately he has expressed great uneasiness at the movements of the French and English frigates."

The Marquis laid a friendly hand on Cosmo's shoulder. "You cannot complain of me; I have given you the very latest intelligence. And now let us join whatever company my daughter is receiving. I think very few people." He crossed the room, followed by Cosmo, and Cosmo noticed a distinct lameness in his gait. At the moment of opening the door the Marquis d'Armand said:

"Your arm, *mon jeune ami*. I am suffering from rheumatism considerably this evening."

Cosmo hastened to offer his arm, and the Marquis with his hand on the door said:

"I can hardly walk. I hope I shall be able to go to the audience I have to-morrow with the King of Sardinia. He is an excellent man but all his ideas and feelings came to a standstill in '98. It makes all conversation with him extremely difficult even for me. His ministers are more reasonable, but that is only because they are afraid."

A low groan escaped the ambassador. He remained leaning with one hand on Cosmo's shoulder and with the other clinging to the door-handle.

"Afraid of the people?" asked Cosmo.

"The people are being corrupted by secret societies," the Marquis said in his bland tone. "All Italy is seething with conspiracies. What, however, they are most afraid of is the Man of Elba."

Cosmo for an instant wondered at those confidences, but a swift reflection that probably those things were known to everybody who was anybody in Europe made him think that this familiar talk was merely the effect of the Marquis's kindness to the son of his old friend. "I think I can proceed now," said the Marquis, pushing the door open. Cosmo recognized one of the rooms which he had passed in the morning. It was the only one of the suite which was fully lighted by a great central glass chandelier, but even in that only two rows of candles were lighted. It was a small reception. The rest of the suite presented but a dim perspective. A semi-circle of heavy armchairs was sparsely occupied by less than a dozen ladies. There was only one card table in use. All the faces were turned to the opening door, and Cosmo was struck by the expression of profound surprise on them all. In one or two it resembled thunderstruck imbecility. It didn't occur to him that the entrance of the French King's personal representative leaning on the shoulder of a completely unknown young man was enough to cause a sensation. A group of elderly personages, conversing in a remote part of the room, became silent. The Marquis gave a general greeting by an inclination of his head, and Cosmo felt himself impelled towards a console between two windows against which the Marquis leaned, whispering to him, "If I were to sit down it would be such an affair to get up." The Countess de Monteverso advanced quickly across the room. Cosmo noticed that her dress had a long train. She smiled at Cosmo and said to the Marquis anxiously:

"You are in pain, Papa?"

"A little. . . . Take him away, my dear, now. He was good enough to lend me his shoulder as far as this."

"Venez, M. Latham," said Adele, "I must introduce you at once to Lady William Bentick in order to check wild speculation about the appearance of a mysterious stranger. As it is, all the town will be full of rumours. People will be talking about you this very night."

Cosmo followed Adele across the room. She moved slowly and talked easily with a flattering air of intimacy. She even stopped for a moment under the great chandelier. "Lady William is talking now with Count Bubna," she explained to Cosmo, who took a rapid survey of a tall, stout man in an Austrian general's uniform, with his hair tied up in a queue, with black moustaches and something cynical though not ill-natured in his expression. That personage interrupted suddenly his conversation with a lady, no longer very young, who was dressed very simply, and made his way to the ambassador, giving in passing a faintly caustic smile and a keen glance to Cosmo.

“Let me introduce to you Mr. Cosmo Latham,” said Adele. “He is the son of my father’s very old friend. He and I haven’t met since we were children together in Yorkshire. He has just arrived here.”

Cosmo bowed, and in response to a slight gesture took a seat close to the lady, whose preoccupied air struck him with a sort of wonder. She seemed to have something on her mind. Cosmo could know nothing of the prevalent gossip that it was only the black eyes of Louise Durazzo that were detaining Lord William in Italy. He explained in answer to a careless inquiry as to the latest news from Paris that he had been travelling very leisurely and that he could not possibly have brought any fresh news. Lady William looked at him as if she had not seen him before.

“Oh, I am not very much interested in the news, except in so far that they may make a longer stay here unnecessary for us.”

“I suppose everybody wants to see the shape of the civilized world settled at last,” said Cosmo politely.

“All I want is to go home,” declared Lady William. She was no longer looking at him and had the appearance of a person not anxious to listen to anybody’s conversation. Cosmo glanced about the room. The card game had been resumed. The Austrian general was talking to the Marquis with Madame de Montevezzo standing close to them, while other persons kept at a respectful distance. Lady William seemed to be following her own thoughts with a sort of impassive abstraction. Cosmo felt himself at liberty to go on with his observations, and sweeping his glance round noticed, sitting half hidden by the back of the armchair Adele had vacated, the dark girl with round black eyes, whom he had seen that morning. To his extreme surprise she smiled at him and, not content with that, gave other plain signs of recognition. He thought he could do no less than get up and make her a bow. By the time he sat down again he became aware that he had attracted the notice of all the ladies seated before the fire. One of them put up her eyeglasses to look at him, two others started talking low together with side glances in his direction, and there was not one that did not look interested. This disturbed him much less than the fixed stare of the young creature, which became fastened on him unwinkingly. Even Lady William gave him a short look of curiosity.

“I understand that you have just arrived in Genoa.”

“Yes. Yesterday afternoon late. This is my first appearance.”

He meant that it was his first appearance in society and he continued:

“And I don’t know a single person in this room even by name. Of course I know that it is Count Bubna who is talking to the Marquis, but that is all.”

“Ah,” said Lady William with a particular intonation which made Cosmo wonder what he could have said to provoke scepticism. But Lady William was asking herself how it was that this young Englishman seemed to be familiar with the freakish girl who was an object of many surmises in Genoa, and whose company, it was understood, Count Helion of Montevezzo had imposed upon his wife. Meantime Cosmo, with the eyes of all the women concentrated upon him with complete frankness, began to feel uncomfortable. Lady William noticed it and out of pure kindness spoke to him again.

“If I understood rightly you have known Madame de Monteverso from childhood.”

“I can’t call myself really a childhood’s friend. I was so much away from home,” explained Cosmo. “But she lived for some years in my parents’ house and everybody loved her there; my mother, my father, my sister — and it seems to me, looking back now, that I too must have loved her at that time; though we very seldom exchanged more than a few words in the course of the day.”

He spoke with feeling and glanced in the direction of the group near the console where the head of Adele appeared radiant under the sparkling crystals of the lustre. Lady William, bending sideways a little, leaned her cheek against her hand in a listening attitude. Cosmo felt that he was expected to go on speaking, but it seemed to him that he had nothing more to say. He fell back upon a general remark.

“I think boys are very stupid creatures. However, I wasn’t so stupid as not to feel that Adele d’Armand was very intelligent and quite different from us all. Her very gentleness set her apart. Moreover, Henrietta and I were younger. To my sister and myself she seemed almost grown up. A couple of years makes a very great difference at that age. Soon after she went away we children heard that she was married. She seemed lost to us then. Presently she went back to France, and once there she was lost indeed. When one looked towards France in those days it seems to me there was nothing to be seen but Napoleon. And then her marriage, too. A Countess de Monteverso didn’t mean anything to us. I came here expecting to see a stranger.”

Cosmo checked himself. It was impossible to say whether Lady William had heard him, or even whether she had been listening at all, but she asked:

“You never met Count Helion?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea of the man. He is not in this room, is he? WThat is he like?”

Lady William looked amused for a moment at the artless curiosity of the Countess de Monteverso’s young friend; but it was in an indifferent tone that she said:

“Count Helion is a man of immense wealth which he amassed in India somewhere. He is much older than his wife. More than twice her age.” Cosmo showed his surprise, and Lady William continued smoothly: “Of course all the world knows that Adele has been a model wife.”

Cosmo noted the faintest possible shade of emphasis on those last words and thought to himself: “That means she is not happy and that the world knows it.” But, several men having approached the circle, the conversation became general. He vacated his seat by the side of Lady William and got introduced by Adele to several people, amongst whom was a delicate young woman splendidly dressed and of a slightly Jewish type who, though she was the wife of General Count Bubna, commander-in-chief of the Austrian troops and the representative of Austria at the Court of Turin, behaved with a strange timidity and appeared almost too shy to speak. A simple Madame Ferrati, or so at least Cosmo heard her name, a lady with white tousled hair, had an aggressive manner. Cosmo remarked in the course of the evening that she seemed rather to be persecuting Lady William, who, however, remained amiably abstracted and did not seem to mind

anything. The Marquis, getting away from the console, had seated himself near the little Madame Bubna. This, Cosmo thought, was an unavoidable sort of thing for him to do.

A young man with a grave manner and something malicious in his eye, apparently a First Secretary of the Embassy, informed Cosmo shortly after they had been made known to each other that "the wife of the general would not naturally be received in Vienna society," and that this was the secret of Bubna sticking to his Italian command so long, even now when really all the excitement was over. Of course he was very much in love with his wife. He used to give her balls twice a week at the expense of the Turin Municipality. Old Bubna understood the art of pillaging to perfection, but apart from that he was a parfait galant homme and an able soldier. Bonaparte had a very great liking for him. Bubna was the only friend Bonaparte had in this room. He meant sympathy as man for man. Years ago when Bubna was in Paris he got on very well with the Emperor. Bonaparte knew how to flatter a man. It was worth while to sit up half the night to hear Bubna talking about Bonaparte "I am posting you up like this," concluded the secretary, "because I see you are in the intimacy of the Marquis and of Madame de Montevezzo here."

He went away then to talk to somebody else, and presently Madame de Montevezzo, passing close to Cosmo, whispered to him, "Stay to the last," and went on without waiting for his answer. Cosmo amongst all the groups engaged in animated conversation felt rather lonely, totally estranged from the ideas those people were expressing to each other. He could not possibly be in sympathy with the fears and the hopes, strictly personal, and with the royalist-legitimist enthusiasms of these advocates of an order of things that had been buried for a quarter of a century and now was paraded like a rouged and powdered corpse putting on a swagger of life and revenge. Then he reflected that in this room, at any rate, it was probably nothing but scandalous gossip and trivial talk of futile intrigues. There was no need for him to be indignant. He was even amused at himself, and looking about him in a kindlier frame of mind he perceived that the person nearest to him was that strange girl with the round eyes. She had kept perfectly still on her uncomfortable stool like a captured savage. Her green flounced skirt was spread on each side of the seat. The bodice of her dress, which was black, was cut low, her bare arms were youthfully red and immature. Her hair was done up smoothly and pulled up from her forehead in the manner of the portraits of the 15th Century.

"Why do they dress her in this bizarre manner?" thought Cosmo. It couldn't be Adele's conception. Perhaps of the Count himself. Yet that didn't seem likely. Perhaps it was her own atrocious taste. But if so it ought to have been repressed. He reflected that there could be nothing improper in him talking to the niece of the house. He would try his conversational Italian. With the feeling of venturing on a doubtful experiment he approached her from the back, sat down at her elbow, and waited. She could not possibly remain unaware of him being there.

At last she turned her head for a point-blank stare, and once she had her eyes on him she never attempted to take them away. Cosmo uttered carefully a complimentary phrase about her dress, which was received in perfect silence. Her carmine lips remained as still as her round black eyes for quite a long time. Suddenly in a low tone, with an accent which surprised Cosmo but which he supposed to be Piedmontese, and with a sort of spiteful triumph, she said:

“I knew very well it would suit me. You think it does?”

Her whole personality had such an aggressive mien that Cosmo, startled and amused, hastened to say, “Undoubtedly,” lest she should fly at his eyes.

She showed him her teeth in a grin of savage complacency, and the subject seemed exhausted. Cosmo set himself the task to daunt her by a steady gaze. In less than two seconds he regretted his venture. He felt certain that she would not be the one to look away first. There was not the slightest doubt about that. In order to cover his retreat he let his eyes wander vaguely about the room, smiled agreeably, and said:

“Your uncle is not here. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing him this evening?”

“No,” she said. “You won’t see him this evening. But he knows you have been here this morning.”

This was, strictly speaking, news to Cosmo, but he said at once and with great indifference:

“Why shouldn’t he? Probably Madame de Monteverso has told him. I used to know your aunt when she was younger than you are, signorina.” “How do you know how old I am?” Cosmo asked himself if she would ever wink those black eyes of hers.

“I know that you are not a hundred years old.” This struck her as humorous, because there was a sound as of a faint giggle which, generally speaking, is a silly kind of sound but in her case had a disturbing quality. It was followed by the hoarse declaration:

“Aunt didn’t. I told Uncle. I looked a lot at you in the morning. Why didn’t you look at me? “

“I was afraid of being indiscreet,” said Cosmo readily, concealing his astonishment.

“What silliness,” she commented scornfully. “And this evening too! I was looking at you all the time and you did nothing but look at all those witches here, one after another.”

“I find all the ladies in the room perfectly charming,” said Cosmo.

“You lie. I suppose you do nothing else from morning till night.”

“I am sorry you have such a bad opinion of me, but it being what it is, hadn’t I better go away? “

“Directly I set eyes on you I knew you were one of that sort.”

“And did you impart your opinion of me to your uncle?” asked Cosmo. He could be no more offended with that girl than if she had been an unmannerly animal. Her peculiar stare remained unchanged but her general expression softened for a moment.

“No. But I took care to tell him that you were a very handsome gentleman. . . . You are a very handsome gentleman.”

What surprised Cosmo was not the downright statement but the thought that flashed through his mind that it was as dreadful as being told that one was good to eat. For a time he stared without any thought of unwinking competition. He was not amused. Distinctly not. He asked:

“Where were you born?”

“How can I tell? In the mountains, I suppose. Somewhere where you will never go. How can it possibly concern you?”

Cosmo offered his apology for his indiscretion, and she received it with a sort of uncomprehending scorn. She said after a pause: “None of those witches, young or old, ever speak to me. And even you didn’t want to speak to me. You only spoke to me . . . Oh, no! I know why you spoke to me.”

“Why did I speak to you?” asked Cosmo thought-fully. “Won’t you tell me?”

Upon the firm roundness of that high-coloured face came a subtle change which suggested something in the nature of cunning, and the rough, somewhat veiled voice came from between the red lips which had no more charm or life than the painted lips carved in a piece of wood.

“If I were to tell you you would be as wise as myself.”

“Where would be the harm of me being as wise as yourself?” said Cosmo, trying to be playful but somehow missing the tone of playfulness so completely that he was struck by his failure himself.

“If you were as wise as myself you would never come to this house again and I don’t want, you to stay away,” was the answer, delivered in a hostile tone.

Cosmo said, “You don’t! Well, at any rate it can’t be because of kindness, so I don’t thank you for it.” He said this with extreme amiability. Becoming aware that people were beginning to leave, he observed, out of the corner of his eye, that nobody went away without glancing in their direction. Then the departure of Lady William caused a general stir and gave Cosmo the occasion to get up and move away. Lady William gave him a gracious nod, and the Marquis, coming up to him, introduced him at the last moment to General Count Bubna just as that distinguished person was making ready to take his wife away. Everybody was standing up and for the first time Cosmo felt himself completely unobserved. Obeying a discreet sign of the Countess de Monteverso, he moved unaffectedly in the direction of a closed door, the white and gold door he remembered well from his morning visit. When he had got near to it and within reach of the handle he turned about. He had the view of the guests’ backs as they moved slowly out. Ad&le looked over her shoulder for a moment with an affirmative nod. He understood it, hesitated no longer, opened the door, and slipped through without, so far as he could judge, being seen by anybody.

It was as he had thought. He found himself in Madame de Monteverso’s boudoir in which he had been received that morning.

Chapter 4

He shut the door behind him gently and remained between it and the screen. He had expected to be followed at once by Adele. What could be detaining her? But he remembered the remarkable proportions of that suite of reception rooms. He had seen some apartments in Paris, but nothing quite so long as that. The old Marquis would no doubt conduct the little Madame Bubna to the very door of the anteroom. The ambassador of The Most Christian King owed that attention to the representative of His Apostolic Majesty and Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian troops. This was the exact form which his thought took. The Christian King, the Apostolic Majesty — all those submerged heads were bobbing up out of the subsiding flood.

He pictured them to himself in their mental simplicity and with their grand air; the Marquis magnificent and ageing, and the dutiful daughter by his side with her radiant head and her divine form. It was impossible to believe that these two had also been submerged at one time.

All those people were mere playthings, reflected Cosmo without a pang. But who or what was playing with them? he thought further, boldly, and remained for a moment as if amused by the marvellousness of it, in the manner of people watching the changes on the stage. But what could have become of them?

She might next moment be opening the door. Could she have made him stay behind because she wanted to talk with him alone? Why, yes, obviously. Cosmo did not ask himself what she wanted to talk to him about. It was no wonder that he felt, it was a subtle emotion resembling impatience for the arrival of a promised felicity of an indefinite kind. All this was by no means poignant. It was merely delightfully disturbing.

“I shall have a tête-a-tête; that’s clear,” he thought, as he advanced into the room. The air all around him was delightfully warm. Whatever she would have to say would be wonderful because of her voice. He would look her in the face. She did not intimidate him and it was impossible to have too much of that. After all, he thought, immensely amused, it was only Adele, Ad —

His mental monologue was cut short by the shock of perceiving, seated on the painted sofa, a man who was looking at him in perfect silence and immobility. The fact was that Count Helion, having come into the boudoir sooner than his wife had expected him to do, had directed his eyes to the screen ever since he had heard the opening and the shutting of the door. One of his hands was resting on his thigh, the other hung down holding negligently a number of some gazette which was partly resting on the floor. Though not very big, that piece of paper attracted Cosmo’s eyes; and it was in this way that he became aware of the brown fingers covered with rings, of the gaunt legs encased in silk stockings, and of the crossed feet in dress shoes with gold buckles, almost before he took in the impression of the broad but lean face which seemed to have been stained with walnut juice long enough for the stain to have worn down thin, letting the native pallor come through. The same tint extended to the bald

top of the head. But what was really extraordinary was the hair: two patches of black behind each temple, obviously dyed. The man, as to whose identity Cosmo could have no doubt, got up, displaying the full length of his bony frame, in a tense and soldierly stiffness associated with cross-belts and a cowhide knapsack on the back. "A grenadier," thought Cosmo, startled by this unexpected meeting, which also caused him profound annoyance, as though he had been induced to walk into a trap. What he could not understand was why the man should make that grimace at him. It convulsed his whole physiognomy, involving his lips, his cheeks, and his very eyes in a sort of spasm. The most awful thing was that it stayed there. . . . "Why, it's a smile," thought Cosmo, with sudden relief. It was so sudden that it broke into a smile without any particular volition of his own. Thereupon the face of Count Helion recovered its normal aspect and Cosmo heard his voice for the first time. It proceeded from the depths of his chest. It was resonant and blurred and portentous with an effect of stiffness somehow in accord with the man's bearing. It informed Cosmo that Count Helion had been waiting in the Countess's boudoir on purpose to make his acquaintance, while in the man's eyes there was a watchfulness as though he had been uttering a momentous disclosure and was anxious as to its effect. A perfectly horizontal, jet-black moustache underlining the nose of Count Helion, which was broad at the base and thin at the end, suggested comic possibilities in that head, which had too much individuality to be looked upon by Cosmo simply as the head of Adele's husband; and Cosmo hardly looked at it in that light. His hold on that fact was slippery. He preserved his equanimity perfectly and said that he himself had wondered whether he would have the pleasure of making the Count's acquaintance that evening. Both men sat down.

"My occupations kept me late to-night," said the Count. "The courier came in."

He pointed with his fingers to the gazette lying on the floor, and Cosmo asked if there were any news.

"In the gazette, no. At least nothing interesting. The world is full of vanities and scandals, rumours of conspiracies. Very poor stuff. I don't know any of those people the papers mention every day. That's more my wife's affair. For years now she has spent about ten months of every year in Paris or near Paris. I am a provincial. My interests are in the orphanage I have founded in my native country. I am also building an asylum for . . ."

He got up suddenly, approached the mantelpiece in three strides, and turned round exactly like a soldier in the ranks of a company changing front. He was wearing a blue coat cut away in front and having a long skirt, something recalling the cut of a uniform, though the material was fine and there was a good deal of gold lace about it, as also on his white satin waistcoat. Cosmo recalled the vague story he had heard about Count de Monteverso having served in more than one army before being given the rank of general by the King of Piedmont. The man had been drilled. Cosmo wondered whether he had ever been caned. He was a military adventurer of the commonest type. Some of them have been known to return with a fortune got by pillage and intrigue and

possibly even by real talents of a sort in the service of oriental courts full of splendours and crimes, tyrannies and treacheries and dark dramas of ambition, or love.

“He is the very thing,” Cosmo exclaimed mentally, gazing at the stiff figure leaning against the mantelpiece. Of course he got his fortune in India. What was remarkable about him was that he had managed to get away with his plunder, or at any rate a part of it, considerable enough to enable him to make a figure in the world and marry Adele d’Armand in England. That was only because of the Revolution. In royal France he would not have had the ghost of a chance; and even as it was, only the odious laxity of London society in accepting rich strangers had given him his opportunity. Cosmo, forcing himself to envisage this dubious person as the husband of Adele, felt very angry with the light-minded tolerance extended to foreigners characteristic of a certain part of London society. It was perfectly outrageous.

“Where the devil can my wife be?”

Those words made Cosmo start, though they had not been uttered very loudly. Almost mechanically he answered: “I don’t know,” and noticed that Count Helion was staring at him in a curiously unintelligent manner.

“I was really asking myself,” muttered the latter and stirred uneasily, without however taking his elbow off the mantelpiece. “It’s a natural thought since we are, God knows why, kept waiting for her here. I wasn’t aware I had spoken. Living for many years amongst people who didn’t understand any European language — I had hundreds of them in my palace in Sindh — I got into the habit of talking aloud, strange as it may appear to you.”

“Yes,” said Cosmo, with an air of innocence. “I suppose one acquires all sorts of strange habits in those distant countries. We in England have a class of men who return from India enriched. They are called nabobs. Some of them have most objectionable habits. Unluckily their mere wealth ... “

“There is nothing to compare with wealth,” interrupted the other in a soldierly voice and paused, then continued in the same tone of making a verbal report: “When I was in England I had the privilege to know many people of position. They were very kind to me. They didn’t seem to think lightly of wealth.”

Each phrase came curt, detached, but it was evident that the man did not mean to be offensive. Those statements originated obviously in sincere conviction; and after the Count had uttered them there appeared on his forehead the horizontal wrinkles of unintelligent worry. Cosmo asked himself whether the man before him was not really very stupid. Under the elevated eyebrows his eyes looked worn and empty of all thought.

“Lots of money, I mean,” M. de Monteverso began again. “Not your savings and scrapings. Money that one acquires boldly and enough of it to be profuse with.”

“Is he going to treat me to vulgar boasting?” thought Cosmo. He wished that Adele would come in and interrupt this *tete-a-tete* which was so very different from the one he had been expecting.

"I daresay money is very useful," he assented, with airy scorn which he thought might put an end to the subject. But his interlocutor persisted.

"You can't know anything about it," he affirmed, then added unexpectedly: "Money will give you even ideas. Lots of ideas. The worst of it is that any one of them may turn out damnable. Well, yes. There is of course danger in money, but what of that?"

"It can scarcely be if it is used for good works, as you seem to use it," said Cosmo with polite indifference. He meant it to be final, but Count de Montevezzo was not to be suppressed.

"It leads one into worries," he said. "For instance, that orphanage of mine, it is really a very large place. I am trying to be a benefactor to my native province, but

I want it to be in my own way. Well, since the Restoration, the priests are trying to get hold of it. They want to turn it to the glory of God and to the service of religion. I have seen enough of all sorts of religions not to know what that means. No sooner had the King entered Paris than the Bishop wrote to me pointing out that there was no chapel and suggesting that I should build one and appoint a chaplain. That Bishop is ... "

He threw up his head suddenly and Cosmo became aware of the presence of Adele without having heard even the rustle of her dress. He stood up hastily. There was a short silence.

"I see the acquaintance is made," said Adele, looking from one to the other. Her eyes lingered on Cosmo and then turned to her husband. "I didn't know you would be already here. I had to help my father to his room. I would have come at once here but he detained me." Again she turned to Cosmo. "You will pardon me."

"I found Count Helion here. I have not been alone for a minute," said Cosmo. "You owe me no apologies. I was delighted to make your husband's acquaintance, even if you were not here to introduce us to each other."

This was said in English and Count Helion by the mantelpiece waited till Cosmo had finished before he asked, "Where's Clelia?"

"I have sent her to bed," said Countess de Montevezzo. "Helion, my father would like to see you this evening."

"I am at the orders of M. le Marquis."

The grenadier-like figure at the mantelpiece did not stir, and those words were followed only by a slight twitch in the muscles of the face which might have had a sardonic intention. "To-night, at once," he repeated. "But with Mr. Latham here?"

"Pray don't mind me, I am going away directly," said Cosmo. "It is getting late."

"In Italy it is never late. I hope to find you here when I return. As the husband of a daughter of the house of D'Armand I know what is due to the name of Latham. Am I really expected at once?"

Adele moved forward a step or two, speaking rapidly. "There has been some news from Elba, or about Elba, which gives a certain concern to my father. As you have been to the public knowledge in direct touch with people from Elba my father would like to have your opinion."

Count Helion changed his attitude, and leaning his shoulders against the mantel-piece addressed himself to Cosmo.

“It was the most innocent thing in the world. It was something about the project for the exploitation of the Island of Pianosa. Napoleon sent his treasurer here to get in touch with a banker. I am a man of affairs. The banker consulted me — as a man who knew the spot. It’s true I know the spot, but if you hear it said that it is because of my relations with the Dey of Algiers, pray don’t believe it. I am in no way in touch with the Barbary States.”

He made a step forward, and then another, and stood still. “You two had better sit down and talk. Yes, sit down and talk. Renew the acquaintance of your early youth . . . your early youth,” he repeated in a faint voice. “Those youthful friendships . . .” he made a convulsive grimace which Cosmo had discovered to be the effect of a smile. “There is something so charming in those youthful friendships. As to myself I don’t remember ever being youthful.” He stepped out towards the door through which Cosmo had seen Clelia enter that morning. “Let me find you when

I return, enjoying yourselves most sentimentally. Most delightful.”

His long stiff back swayed in the doorway and the door came to with a crash.

Cosmo and Addle looked at each other with a smile. Cosmo, hat in hand, asked just audibly, “I suppose I had better stay?” She made an affirmative sign and, moving away from him, put her foot on the marble Cender of the fireplace where nothing was left but hot ashes hiding a reddish glow.

Chapter 5

Cosmo, ill at ease, remained looking at her. He was in doubt what the sign she had made meant, a nervous and imperious gesture, which might have been a command for him to go or to stay. In his irresolution he gazed at her, thinking that she was lovely to an incredible degree and that the word “radiant” applied to her extraordinary aptness. Light entered into her composition. And it was not the cold light of marble. “She actually glows,” he said to himself, amazed, “like ripe fruit in the foliage, like a big flower in the shade.”

“Don’t gaze at my blushes,” said Madame de Monteverso in an even tone tinged with a little mockery and a little bitterness. “Would you believe that when I was a girl I was so shy that I used to blush crimson whenever anybody looked at me or spoke to me? It’s a failing which does not meet with much sympathy. And yet my suffering was very real. It would reach such a pitch at times that I was ready to cry.”

“Shall I go away?” asked Cosmo in a deadened voice. He waited for a moment while she seemed to debate in her mind the answer to the question. In his fear of being sent away he went on: “God knows I don’t want to leave you. And after all the Count is coming back and ...”

“Oh, yes, he is coming back. Sit down. Yes. It would be better. Sit down. . . .” Cosmo sat down where he could see her admirable shoulders, the roundness of her averted head, coiffee en boucles and girt with a gold circlet, the shadowy retreating view of her profile. The long drapery of her train flowed to the ground in a dark blue shimmer. . . . “He is inevitable. He has always been inevitable,” came further from her lips which he couldn’t see, for the mirror above the mantelpiece reflected nothing but her forehead with the gold mist of her hair above.

Cosmo remained silent. For nothing in the world would he have made a sound. He held his breath with expectation; and in the extreme tension of his whole being the lights grew dim around him, while her white shoulders, the thick clustering curls, the arm on which she leaned, and the other bare arm hanging inert by her side, seemed the only source of light in the room.

“You don’t know me at all,” began the Countess de Montevezzo. “I don’t charge you with forgetting; but the little you may remember of me cannot be of any use. It is only natural that I should be a stranger to you. But you cannot be a stranger to me. For one thing you were a boy and then you were not a child of outcasts without a country, of refugees with a ruined past and with no future. You were a young Latham, as rooted in your native soil as the old trees of your park. Even then there seemed to me something enviable about you.”

She turned her head a little to glance at him. “You had no idea what it was like after we had gone to London. My ignorance of the world was so profound that I felt ill at ease in it. I hoped I had an attractive face, but I only discovered that I was pretty from the remarks of the people in the street I overheard. I spent my life by the side of my mother’s couch. I never went out except attended by my father or by Aglae. My only amusement was to play a game of chess now and then with an old doctor, also a refugee, who looked after my mother, or listen to the conversation of the people who came to see us. Amongst them there were all the prominent men and women of the old regime. Refugees. They seldom spoke the truth to each other, and yet they were no more stupid than the rest of the world. Nobody could be more good-natured and better company, more frivolous or more inconsiderate. I have seen women of the highest rank work ten hours a day to get bread for their children, but they also slandered one another, told falsehoods about their conduct and their work, and quarrelled among themselves in the style of washerwomen. Morals were even looser than in the times before the Revolution. Manners were forgotten. Every transgression was excused in those who were regarded as good royalists. I don’t mean this to apply to the great body of the refugees. Some of them led irreproachable lives. Round our Princes there were some most absurd intrigues. I didn’t know much of all this, but I remember my poor father’s helpless indignations and my own appalled disgust at the things I could not help hearing and seeing.”

She turned her head to look at Cosmo. “I am telling you all this to give you some idea of the air I had to breathe,” she said in a changed tone. “I don’t think it contaminated me. I felt its odiousness; but all this seemed without remedy. I didn’t even suffer much

from it. What I suffered most from was our domestic anxieties; my mother's fears lest the small resources we had to live on should fail us altogether. Our daily crust of bread seemed to depend on political events in Europe, and they were going against us. Battles, negotiations, everything. A blight seemed to have fallen on the royalist cause. My mother didn't conceal her distress. What touched me more still was the careworn, silent anxiety of my poor father."

She paused, looking at Cosmo intently, meeting his eyes fixed on her face. "I was getting on for sixteen," she continued. "No one ever paid the slightest attention to me. The only genuine passion in my heart was filial love. . . . But is it any good in going on? And then I can't tell what you may have heard already."

"All I have heard," said Cosmo in a tone of profound respect, "is that Adele de Monteverso's life has been irreproachable."

"I remember the time when all the world was doing its best to make it impossible. Would it shock you very much if I told you that I don't care at all about its good opinion now? There was a time when it would put the worst construction possible on my distress, on my bewilderment, on my very innocence."

"Why should the world do that to you?" asked Cosmo.

"Why? But I see you know nothing. I met my husband first at a select concert that was given by the music-master of the late Queen of France. My mother was feeling a little better and insisted on my going out a little. Those were small fashionable affairs. I had a good voice myself, and that evening I sang with Madame Seppio. An English gentleman — his name doesn't matter — presented M. de Monteverso to me as a friend of his just returned from India and anxious to be introduced to the best society. What with my usual shyness and the unattractive appearance of the man, I don't think I received his attentions very well. There was really no reason I should notice him particularly. It wasn't difficult to see that he had not the manners of a man of the world. Where could he have acquired them? He had left his village at seventeen, he enlisted in the Irish Regiment which served in France, then he deserted, perhaps. I only know that some years afterwards he was a captain in the service of Russia. From there he made his way to India. I believe the governor-general used him as a sort of unofficial agent amongst the native princes, but he got into some scrape with the company. By what steps he managed to get on to the back of an elephant and command the army of a native prince I really don't know. And even if I had known then it would not have made him more interesting in my eyes. I was relieved when he made me a deep bow with his hand on his heart and went away. He left a most fugitive impression, but the very next morning he sent his English friend to ask my parents for my hand. That friend was a nobleman, a mail of honour, and the offers he was empowered to make were so generous that my parents thought they must tell me of them. I was so astonished that at first I couldn't speak. I simply went away and shut myself up in my room. They were not people to press me for an answer. The poor worried dears thought that I wouldn't even consent to contemplate this marriage; while I, shut up in my room — I was afraid, remembering the way they had spoken to me

of that offer, that they would reject it without consulting me any further. I sent word by Aglae that I would give my answer next day and that I begged to be left to myself. Then I escaped from the house, followed by Aglae, who was never so frightened in her life, and went to see the wife of that friend of my present husband. I begged her to send at once for General de Monteverso — at that time he called himself General. The King of Sardinia had given him this rank in acknowledgment of some service that his great wealth had enabled him to render to the Court of Turin. That lady of course had many scruples about doing something so highly unconventional, but at last, overcome by the exaltation of my feelings, she consented.”

“She did that?” murmured Cosmo. “What an extraordinary thing!”

“Yes. She did that, instead of taking me home. People will do extraordinary things to please a man of fabulous wealth. She sent out two or three messengers to look for him all over the town. They were some time in finding him. I waited. I was perfectly calm. I was calmer than I am now, telling you my story. I was possessed by the spirit of self-sacrifice. I had no misgivings. I remember even how cold I was in that small drawing room with a big coal fire. He arrived out of breath. He was splendidly dressed and behaved very ceremoniously. I felt his emotion without sharing it. I, who used to blush violently at the smallest provocation, didn’t feel the slightest embarrassment in addressing that big stiff man so much older than myself. I could not appreciate what a fatal mistake I was committing by telling him that I didn’t care for him in the least and probably never should; but that if he would secure my parents’ future comfort my gratitude would be so great that I could marry him, without reluctance and be his loyal friend and wife for life. He stood there stiff and ominous and told me that he didn’t flatter himself with the possibility of inspiring any deeper feeling.

“We stood there facing each other for a bit. I felt nothing but an inward glow of satisfaction at having, as I thought, acted honourably. As to him I think he was simply made dumb with rage. At last he bowed with his hands on his heart and said that he would not even ask now for the favour of kissing my hand. I appreciated his delicacy at that moment. It would have been an immense trial to my shyness. I think now that he was simply afraid of putting my hand to his lips lest he should lose his self-control and bite it. He told me later, in one of those moments when people don’t care what they say, that at that moment he positively hated me, not the sight of me, you understand, but my aristocratic insolence.”

She paused, and in the youthful sincerity of his sympathy Cosmo uttered a subdued exclamation of distress. Madame de Monteverso looked at him again and then averted her face.

“I heard afterwards some gossip to the effect that he had been jilted by a girl to whom he was engaged, the daughter of some captain on half-pay, and that he proposed to me simply to show her that he could find a girl prettier, of higher rank, and in every way more distinguished that would consent to be his wife. I believe that it was this that prevented him from drawing back before my frankness. As to me, I went home, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, caring for nothing, as though I had done with the

world, as though I had taken the veil. I can find no other comparison for the peace that was in me. I faced my mother's reproaches calmly. She was of course very much hurt at my not confiding in her at this crisis of my life. My father, too. But how could I have confided in them in this matter on which their security and welfare depended? How could I have confided in any of the men and women around me who seemed to me as if mad, whose conduct and opinions I despised with youthful severity as foolish and immoral? There was one human being in the world in whom I might perhaps have confided, that perhaps would have understood me. That was your father, Cosmo. But he was three hundred miles away. There was no time. Tell me, did he understand? Has he cast me out of his thoughts for ever?"

"My father," said Cosmo, "has lived like a hermit for years. There was nothing to make him forget you. Yes, he was a man in whom you could have confided.

He would have understood you. That doesn't mean to say that he would have approved. I wish he had been by your side. He would have brought pressure on your parents with the authority of an old and tried friend."

"And benefactor," struck in the Countess de Montevevo. "My father, I believe, had an inkling of the truth. He begged me again and again to think well of what I was doing. I told him that I was perfectly satisfied with what I had done. It was perfectly true then. I had satisfied my conscience by telling my suitor that I could never love him. I felt strangely confident that I could fulfil the duties of my new position, and I was absorbed by the happiness of having saved my parents from all anxiety for the future. I was not aware of having made any sacrifice. Probably if I had been twenty or more I would have been less confident; perhaps I wouldn't have had the courage! But at that age I didn't know that my whole life was at stake. Three weeks afterwards I was married.

"As you see, there was no time lost. During that period our intercourse was of the most formal kind only I never even attempted to observe him with any attention. He was very stiff and ceremonious, but he was in a hurry, because I believe he was afraid from his previous experience that I would change my mind. His usual answer to the expression of all my wishes and to most of my speeches was a profound bow — and, sometimes, I was amused. In the lightness of my heart a thought would come to me that a lifetime on such terms would be a funny affair. I don't say he deceived me in anything. He had brought an immense fortune out of India and the world took him at its face value. With no more falsehood than holding his tongue and watching his behaviour he kept me in the dark about his character, his family, his antecedents, his very name. When we first were married he was ostentatious and rather mean at the same time. His long life in India added the force of oriental jealousy to that which would be in a sense natural to a man of his age. Moreover, his character was naturally disagreeable. The only way he could make the power of his great fortune felt was by hurting the feelings of other people, of his servants, of his dependents, of his friends. His wife came in for her share. An older and cleverer woman with a certain power of deception and caring for the material pleasures of life could have done better for herself

and for him in the situation in which I was placed, but I, almost a child, with an honest and proud character and caring nothing for what wealth could give, I was perfectly helpless. I was being constantly surprised and shocked by the displays of evil passions and his fits of ridiculous jealousy which were expressed in such a coarse manner that they could only arouse my resentment and contempt.

“Meantime we lived in great style — dinner parties, concerts. I had a very good voice. I daresay he was anxious enough to show off his latest acquisition, but at the same time he could not bear me being looked at or even spoken to. A fit of oriental jealousy would come over him, especially when I had been much applauded. He would express his feelings to me in barrack-room language. At last, one evening he made a most scandalous scene before about two hundred guests, and then went out of the house, leaving me to make the best of it before all those people. It caused the greatest possible scandal. The party of course broke up. I spent the rest of the night sitting in my bedroom, too overcome to take off my splendid dress and those jewels with which he always insisted I should bedeck myself. With the first signs of dawn he returned, and coming up into my room found me sitting there. He told me then that living with me was too much of a torture for him and proposed I should go back to my parents for a time.

“We had been married for a little over a year then. For the first time since the wedding I felt really happy. They, poor dears, were delighted. We were all so innocent together that we thought this would be the end of all our troubles, that the man was chivalrous enough to have seen his mistake in the proper light, and to bear the consequences nobly. Hadn’t I told him I could never love him, exactly in so many words?

“I ought to have known that he was incapable of any generosity. As a matter of fact I didn’t think much about it. I, who had overcome my shyness enough to become, young as I was, a perfect hostess in a world which I knew so little — because after all that sort of thing was in my tradition — I was really too stupid, too unsophisticated for those ten months to have been a lesson to me. I had learned nothing, any more than one learns from a nightmare or from a period of painful illness. I simply breathed freely. I became again the old Adele. I dismissed M. de Monteverso from my thoughts as though he had never lived. Can you believe this, Cosmo? It is astonishing how facts can fail to impress one; brutalities, abuse, scenes of passion, and exhibitions of jealousy, as long as they do not attack your conception of your moral personality. All this fell off me like a poisoned robe, leaving hardly a smart behind. I raised my head like a flower after a thunderstorm. Don’t think my character is shallow, Cosmo. There were depths in me that could be reached, but till then I had been only tormented, shocked, surprised, but hardly even frightened. It was he who had suffered. But my turn was to come.”

“I don’t think you were ever a person of shallow feelings.”

“One’s feelings must mature like everything else, and I assure you I had not yet stopped growing. The next six months were to finish my education. For by that time I

had lost all my illusions. While I was breathing freely between my father and mother, forgetting the world around us, Monteverso was going about the town with his complaints and his suspicions; regretting he had let me go and enraged that I should have gone from him so easily. And you may be sure he found sympathizers. A rich man, you understand! Who could refuse sympathy to so much wealth? He was obviously a much ill-used man, all the faults of course were on my side; in less than a month I found myself the centre of underhand intrigues and the victim of a hateful persecution. Friends, relatives, mere acquaintances in the world of emigration entered M. de Monteverso's service. They spied on my conduct and tampered with the servants. There were assemblies in his house where my character was torn to shreds. Some of those good friends offered him their influence in Rome for the annulment of the marriage, for a consideration of course. Others discovered flaws in the marriage contract. They invented atrocious tales. There were even horrors made about that scandal; till at last he himself became disgusted with the wretches and closed his house and his purse to them. Years later he showed me a note of their names and the amounts paid for all those manifestations of sympathy. He must have been impressed and disgusted by the retrospect, because it was a big lot of money. As to the names, they were aristocratic enough to flatter his plebeian pride. He showed the list to me just to hurt my feelings.

"Some sinners have been stoned, but I, an innocent girl of seventeen, had been pelted with mud beyond endurance. It was impossible to induce him to come to any sort of arrangement that would leave me in peace. All the world, influenced by his paid friends, was against me. What could I do? Calumnies are hard to bear. Harder than truth. Even my parents weakened. He promised to make amends. Of course I went back to him, as one would crawl out of the mud amongst clean thorns that can but tear one's flesh. He received me back with apologies that were as nearly public as such things can be. It was a vindication of my character. But directly he had me with him again he gave way to his fits of hatred as before, such hatred as only black jealousy can inspire. It was terrible. For even jealousy has its gradations, coloured by doubts and hopes, and his was the worst, the hopeless kind, since he could never forget my honest declaration."

The Countess de Monteverso's voice died out and then Cosmo looked up. She was a little pale, which made her eyes appear darker than ever he had seen them before. Cosmo was too young yet to understand the full meaning of this confession, but his very youth invested the facts with a sort of romantic grandeur, while the woman before him felt crushed by the feelings of their squalid littleness. Without looking at him she said:

"We went travelling for a year and a half, stayed for a time in Paris, where he began to make me scenes again, and then we went on to Italy. The pretext was to make me known to some of his relations. I don't believe he could remember his mother, and his father, an old dealer in rabbit skins, I believe, had died some time before.

As to the rest, I think his heart failed him notwithstanding the brutal pride he used at times to display to me. He took me to see some decayed people living in old ruined

houses whom I verily believe he bribed to pass for his more distant connections. It was a strange pilgrimage amongst the most squalid shams, something that you cannot conceive, yet I didn't rebel against the horrible humiliation of it. It was part of the bargain. Sometimes I thought that he would kill me in one of those wild places in some lost valley where the people, only a degree removed from peasants in their dress and speech, fawned upon him as the wealthy cousin and benefactor. I am certain that during those wanderings he was half distracted. It was I who went through all this unmoved. But I don't suppose my life was ever in any danger. At that time none of his moods lasted long enough to let him carry out any definite purpose. And then he is not a man of criminal instincts. After all, he is perhaps a great adventurer. He has commanded armies of a hundred thousand men. He has in a sense faced the power of England in India. The very fact that he had managed to get out of it with so much wealth and with quite a genuine reputation shows that there is something in him. I don't know whether it's that that obtained for him a very gracious reception from Bonaparte when he dragged me back to Paris."

Chapter 6

Madame de Monteverso paused, looking at the white ashes in which the sparks had not died out yet. "Yes," she went on, "I lived near Paris through the whole time of the Empire. I had a charming house in the country. Monsieur de Monteverso had established me in a style which he considered worthy of himself if not of me. He could never forgive me for being what I am. He was tolerated by the returned emigration for my sake, but he grew weary of his own unhappiness and resolved to live by himself in his own province where he could be a great personage. Perhaps he is not altogether a bad man. He consented eagerly to my parents, who had obtained permission to return to France, joining me in the country. I tasted again some happiness in the peace of our semi-retired life and in their affection. Our world was that of old society, the world of returned nobles. They hated and despised the imperial power, but most of them were ready to cringe before it. Yes, even the best were overawed by the real might under the tinsel of that greatness. Our circle was very small and composed of convinced royalists, but I could not share their hatreds and their contempts. I felt myself a Frenchwoman. I had liberal ideas. . . ."

She noticed Cosmo's eyes fixed on her with eager and friendly curiosity, and paused with a faint smile.

"You understand me, Cosmo?" she asked. The latter gave a little nod without detaching his eyes from the face which seemed to him to glow with the light of generous feelings, but already Madame de Monteverso was going on.

"I did not want to be patronized by all those returned duchesses who wanted to teach me how to feel and how to behave. Their own behaviour was a mixture of insolence and self-seeking before that government which they feared and despised. I didn't fear it but

neither could I despise it. My heart was heavy during all those years but it was not downcast. All Europe was aflame and the blaze scorched and dazzled and filled one with awe and with forebodings; but then one always heard that fire purifies all which it cannot destroy. The world would perhaps come out better from it.”

“Well, it’s all over,” said Cosmo, “and what has it done? The smoke hangs about yet and I cannot see, but how do you feel?”

Madame de Monteverso, leaning on her elbow on the mantelpiece, with one foot on the fender, looked down at the ashes in which a spark gleamed here and there.

“I feel a little cold,” she said, “and dazed perhaps. One doesn’t know where to look.”

Cosmo got up and made a step forward. His voice, however, was subdued. “Formerly there was a man.”

“A man, yes. One couldn’t help looking towards him. There was something unnatural in that uniqueness, but do you know, Cosmo, the man was nothing. You smile, you think you hear a royalist speaking, a woman full of silly aristocratic prejudice; a woman who sees only a small Corsican squire who hadn’t even the sense to catch the opportunity by the hair as it flew by and be the restorer of the Bourbon dynasty. You imagine all that of me! ... Of me!”

She kept her pose, desolate, as if looking down at the ashes of a burnt-up world.

“I don’t think you could be stupid if you tried,” he said. “But if the man was nothing, then what has done it?”

Madame de Monteverso remained silent for a while before murmuring the word “Destiny,” and only then turned her head slightly towards Cosmo. “What are you staring at in that corner? “ she asked, after another period of silence.

“Was I staring?” he said with a little start. “I didn’t know. Your words evoked a draped figure with an averted head.”

“Then it wasn’t that,” she said, looking at him with friendly eyes. “ Whatever your fancy might have seen it was not Destiny. One must live a very long time to see even the hem of her robe. Live a very, very long time,” she repeated in a tone of such weariness, tinged by fear, that Cosmo felt impelled to step forward, take up the hand that hung by her side, and press it to his lips. When released, it fell slowly to its previous position. But Madame de Monteverso did not move.

“ That’s very nice,” she said. “ It was a movement of sympathy. I have had very little of that in my life. There is something in me that does not appeal to the people with whom I live. My father, of course, loves me; but that is not quite the same thing. Your father, I believe, sympathized with the child and I am touched to see that the son seems to understand something of the woman; of an almost old woman.”

Cosmo would have been amused at the tone of unaffected conviction in which she called herself an old woman had it not been for the profound trouble on that young face bent downwards, and at the melancholy grace of the whole attitude of that woman who had once been the child Adele; a foreign, homeless child, sheltered for a moment by the old walls of his ancestral home, and the sharer of its hfe’s stately intimacies.

“No,” he said, marvelling that so much bitter experience should have been the lot of such a resplendent figure. “No. Destiny works quickly enough. We are both still young, and yet think of what we have already seen.”

He fancied she had shuddered a little. He felt ashamed at the thought of what she had lived through, how she had been affected in her daily life by what to him had been only a spectacle after all, though his country had played its part, the impressive part of a rock upraising its head above the flood. But he continued: “Why, the Man of Destiny himself is young yet. You must have seen him many times.”

“No. Once or twice a year I went to the Tuileries in the company of some reconciled royalist ladies and very much against my wish. It was expected from Madame de Montevesso and I always came away thankful to think that it was over for a time. You could hardly imagine how dull that Empire time was. All hopes were crushed. It was like a dreadful overdressed masquerade with the everlasting sound of the guns in the distance. Every year I spent a month with my husband to save appearances. That was in the bond. He used then to invite all the provincial grandees for a series of dinners. But even in the provinces one felt the sinister moral constraint of that imperial glory. No doubt all my movements were noticed and recorded by the proper people. Naturally I saw the Emperor several times. I saw him also in theatres, in his carriage driving about, but he spoke to me only once.”

“Only once!” exclaimed Cosmo under his breath.

“You may imagine I tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, and I did not belong to the Court. It was on the occasion of a ball given to the Princess of Baden. There was an enormous crowd. Early in the evening I found myself standing in the front row in the Gaierie de Diane between two women who were perfect strangers to me. By and by the Court came in, the Empress, the Princess, the Chamberlains in full dress, and took their place on a platform at the end. In the intervals of dancing the Emperor came down alone, speaking only to the women. He wore his imperial dress of red velvet, laced in all the seams, with white satin breeches, with diamonds on the hilt of his sword and the buckles of his shoes and on his cap with white plumes. It was a well-designed costume but with his short thick figure and the clumsiness of his movements he looked to me frightful and like a mock king. When he came opposite me he stopped. I am certain he knew who I was, but he asked me my name. I told him.

“Your husband lives in his province?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Your husband employs much labour, I hear. I am grateful to him for giving work to the people. This is the proper use of wealth. Hasn’t he served in the English army in India?”

“His tone was friendly. I said I didn’t know that-but I did know that he had fought against them there.

“He smiled in a fascinating manner and said, ‘That’s very possible. A soldier of fortune. He is a native of Piedmont, is he not?’

“Yes, sire.”

“But you are French, entirely French. We have a claim on you. How old are you?”

“I told him. He said, ‘You look younger.’ Then he came nearer to me and, speaking in a confidential tone, said, ‘You have no children. I know. I know. It isn’t your fault, but you should try to make some other arrangement. Believe me, I am giving you good advice.’

“I was dumb with astonishment. He gave me again a very gracious smile and went on. That is the only conversation I ever had with the Emperor.”

She fell silent with downcast eyes, then she added: “It was very characteristic of him.” Cosmo was mainly struck by the fact that he knew so little of her, that this was the first intimation he had of the Monte-vessos being childless. He had never asked himself the question before, but this positive if indirect statement was agreeable to him.

“I did not make any other arrangements,” began Madame de Montevezzo with a slightly ironic intonation. “I was only too thankful to be left alone. At the time the Russian campaign began I paid my annual visit to Monsieur de Montevezzo. Except for the usual entertainments to local people I was alone with Count Helion, and as usual when we were quite alone he behaved in a tolerable way. There was nobody and nothing that could arouse his jealousy and the dormant hatred he nurses for me deep down in his heart. We had only the slight discussion, at the end of which he admitted, gnashing his teeth, that he had nothing to reproach me with except that I was what I was. I told him I could not help it and that as things were he ought rather to congratulate himself on that fact. He gave me only a black look. He can restrain himself wonderfully when he likes. Upon the whole I had a quiet time. I played and sang to myself, I read a little, I took long walks, I rode almost every day, attended by Bernard. That wasn’t so agreeable. You remember Bernard?”

Cosmo nodded.

“For years he had been a very devoted and faithful servant to us but I suppose he, too, like so many of his betters, fell under the spell of Monsieur de Montevezzo’s wealth. When my parents rejoined me in France he had his wish at last and married Aglae, my mulatto maid. He was quite infatuated with her and now he makes her terribly wretched. She is really devoted to me, and there cannot be any doubt that Bernard has been bribed by my husband to play the part of a spy. It seems incredible but I have had it from the Count in so many words. Bernard let himself be corrupted years ago, when M. de Montevezzo first sent me back to my parents in a rage and next day was nearly out of his mind with agony at having done so. Yes, it dates as far back as that. That man so faithful to us in our misfortunes allowed himself to be bought with the greatest ease. Everybody, from the highest to the lowest, was in a conspiracy against a poor girl whose only sin was her perfect frankness. When Bernard came over to France with my parents I was already aware of this, but Aglae wanted to marry him and so I said nothing. She probably would not have believed me then.”

“And could you bear that wretch near you all those years?” exclaimed Cosmo, full of indignation. She smiled sadly. She had borne the disclosure and had kept the secret

of greater infamies. She had all her illusions about rectitude destroyed so early that it did not matter to her now what she knew of the people about her.

“Oh, Cosmo,” she exclaimed suddenly, “I am a hardened woman now, but I assure you that sometimes when I remember the girl of sixteen I was, without an evil thought in her head and in her ignorance surrounded by the basest slanderers and intrigues, tears come into my eyes. And since the baseness of selfish passions I have seen seething round the detestable glory of that man in Elba, it seems to me that there is nowhere any honesty on earth — nowhere!” The energy of that outburst, contrasted with the immobility of the pose, gave to Cosmo the sensation of a chill.

“I will not mention us two,” said Cosmo, “herein this room. But I know of at least two honest men on earth. They are your father and mine. Why didn’t you write to Father, Adele?”

“I tell you I was a child. What could I write to him? Hasn’t he retired out of the world for so many years only not to see and not to hear? That’s one of your honest men. And as to my poor father, who is the soul of honour, such is the effect of long misfortune on the best characters and of temptations associated with his restored rank, that there have been moments when I watched his conduct with dread. Caste prejudices are an awful thing, but thank God he had never a thought of vengeance in his mind. He is not a courtier.”

“I have heard about it,” interrupted Cosmo, “from the Marquis himself. He is a dear old man.”

The two by the mantelpiece exchanged dim smiles.

“I had to come here with him,” said Adele. “He cannot do without me. I too was glad to get away from the evil passions and the hopeless stupidities of all the people that had come back without a single patriotic feeling, without a single new idea in their heads, like merciless spectres out of a grave, hating the world to which they had returned. They had forgotten nothing and learned nothing.”

“I have seen something of that myself,” murmured Cosmo. “But the world can’t be put back where it was before you and I were born.”

“No! But to see them trying to do it was intolerable. Then my husband appeared on the scene, hired this Palazzo, and insisted on us all living here. It was impossible to raise a rational objection to that. Father was never aware of half I went through in my life. I learned early to suppress every expression of feeling. But in the main we understand each other without talking. When he received Count Helion’s letter offering us this house he just looked at me and said, ‘I suppose we must.’ For my part, I go through life without raising any objections to anything. One has to preserve one’s dignity in some way; and is there another way open to me? Yes, I have made up my mind; but I must tell you, Cosmo, that notwithstanding that amazing tour we made ten years ago amongst M. de Monteverso’s problematic relations, those two sisters and that niece have been a perfect novelty to me. I only hope I never betrayed my surprise or any feeling at all about it.” The Countess raised her eyes to Cosmo’s face. “I have spoken of it to you as I have never spoken to anybody in my life, because

of old memories which are so much to me and because I could not mistrust anybody of your name. Have you been wearied by this long tale?"

"No," said Cosmo. "But have you thought how it is going to end?"

"To end?" she said in a startled tone which affected Cosmo profoundly. "To end? What do you mean? Everything is ended already."

"I was thinking of your endurance," said Cosmo.

"Do I look worn out?" she asked.

Cosmo raised his head and looked at her steadily. The impression of her grace and her strength filled his breast with an admiring and almost oppressive emotion. He could find nothing to say, not knowing what was uppermost in his mind, pity or admiration, mingled with a vague anger.

"Well, what do you see in my face?"

"I never have seen such serenity on any face," said Cosmo. "How sure of itself your soul must be!"

Her colour became heightened for a moment, her eyes darkened as she said in a grateful tone, "You are right, Cosmo. My face is not a mask."

But he hardly heard her. He was lost in wonder at the sudden disorder of his thoughts. When he regained his mental composure he noticed that Madame de Montevezzo seemed to be listening.

"I wonder whether the Count is still with my father," she said. "Ring that bell on the table at your hand* Cosmo."

Cosmo did so and they waited, looking at each other. Presently the door swung open, and at the same time the cartel above it began to strike the hour. Cosmo counted eleven and then Madame de Montevezzo spoke to Bernard, who waited in silence.

"Is M. le Comte still with my father?"

"I haven't seen him come out yet, Madame la Comtesse."

"Tell your wife not to wait for me, Bernard."

"Yes, Madame la Comtesse." Bernard backed out respectfully through the door.

"How fat he is, and what sleek hair," marvelled Cosmo. "And what a solemn manner. No wonder I did not recognize him at once. He showed me into your father's room, you know. He looks a Special Envoy's confidential man all over. And to think that he is your household spy! I wonder at your patience."

"Perhaps if I had anything to conceal I would have had less patience with the spy," she said, equably. "I believe that when we lived in Paris he wrote every week to M. de Montevezzo, because, you know, he can write quite well. I wonder what he found to write about.

Lists of names, I suppose. Or perhaps his own views of the people who called with bits of overheard conversations."

"It's incredible," murmured Cosmo. "It's fantastic. What contempt he must have for your husband."

"The most remarkable thing," said Madame de Montevezzo, "is that I am convinced that he doesn't write any lies."

“Yes,” said Cosmo, “I assume that. And do you mean that the Count is paying him every week for that sort of thing. It’s an ugly farce.”

“Don’t you think,” said the Countess, “that something serious may come of it some day?” “Cosmo made a hopeless gesture.

“The man you married is mad,” he said with intense conviction.

“There have been times when I felt as if I were mad myself,” murmured Madame de Montevezzo. “Take up your hat,” she added quickly.

She had heard footsteps outside the door. A moment after, Count Helion came in and fixed his black glance on his wife and Cosmo. He did not open his lips and remained ominously by the door for a time. The strain of the silence was made sinister by the stiff bearing of the man, the immobility of the carven brown face, crossed by the inky-black moustache in harsh contrast with the powdered head. He might have been a sergeant come at the stroke of the hour to tell those two people that the firing squad was waiting for them outside the door. Madame de Montevezzo broke the dumb spell.

“I did my best to entertain Mr. Latham, but we had given you up. He was just going.”

She glanced serenely at Cosmo, whom the sweetness of her tone, her easy self-possession before that barrack’ room figure, stung to the heart. At that moment no words could have expressed the intensity of his hatred for the Count de Montevezzo, at whom he was looking with a smile of the utmost banality. The latter moved forward stiffly.

“Your father hopes you will see him for a moment presently,” he said to his wife. “He has not gone to bed yet.”

“Then I will go to him at once.”

Madame de Montevezzo extended her hand to Cosmo, who raised the tips of her fingers to his lips ceremoniously.

“I will see Mr. Latham out,” said the Count, bowing to his wife, who went out of the room without looking at him. Cosmo, following her with his eyes, forgot Count Helion’s existence. He forgot it so thoroughly that it was with a perceptible start that he perceived the Count’s eyes fixed on him in an odd way. “He will never look at ease anywhere,” thought Cosmo scornfully. A great part of his hatred had evaporated. “I suppose he means to be pilot. I wonder how he looked on the back of an elephant.”

“It was very good of you to wait so long for my return,” said Count Helion. “I have been detained by an absurd discussion arising out of probably false reports.”

“The time passed quickly,” said truthful Cosmo; but, before the black weary glance of the other, hastened to add with assumed care, “We talked of old times.”

“Old times,” repeated Count Helion without any particular accent. “My wife is very young yet, though she must be older than you are. Isn’t she older?”

Cosmo said curtly that he really did not know. When they were running about as children together she was the tallest of the three.

“And now,” took up the inexpressive voice of Count de Monteverso, “without her high heels she would be a little shorter than you. As you stood together you looked to me exactly the same height. And so you renewed the memories of your youth. They must have been delightful.”

“They were no doubt more delightful for me than they could have been for Mme. la Comtesse,” said Cosmo, making a motion towards taking leave.

“A moment. Let me have the honour to see you out.” Count Helion walked round the room blowing out the candles in three candelabras in succession and taking up the fourth in his hand.

“Why take this trouble?” protested Cosmo. “I know my way.”

“Every light has been extinguished in the reception rooms; or at least ought to have been. I detest waste of all kinds. It is perhaps because I have made my own fortune, and by God’s favour it is so considerable in its power for good that it requires the most careful management. It is perhaps a peculiar point of view, but I have explained it to Mme. de Monteverso.”

“She must have been interested,” muttered Cosmo between his teeth, following across the room and round the screen the possessor of these immensely important riches, who, candelabra in hand, preceded him by a pace or two and threw open the door behind the screen. Cosmo, crossing in the wake of Count Helion the room of the evening reception, saw dimly the disarranged furniture about the mantelpiece, the armchair in which Lady William had sat, the great sofa in which little Countess Bubna had been shyly ensconced, the card table with the chairs pushed back and all the cards in a heap in the middle. The swaying flames of the candles, leaping from one long strip of mirror to another, preceded him into the next salon where all the furniture stood ranged expectantly against the walls. The next two salons were exactly alike except for the colour of the hangings and the size of the pictures on the walls. As to their subjects, Cosmo could not make them out.

Not a single lackey was to be seen in the anteroom of white walls and red benches; but Cosmo was surprised at the presence of a peasant-like woman, who must have been sitting there in the dark for some time. The light of the candelabra fell on the gnarled hands lying in her lap. The edge of a dark shawl shaded her features with the exception of her ancient chin. She never stirred. Count Helion, disregarding her as though she had been invisible, put down the candelabra on a little table and wished Cosmo good-night with a formal bow. At the same time he expressed harshly the hope of seeing Cosmo often during his stay in Genoa. Then with an unexpected attempt to soften his tone he muttered something about his wife — “the friend of your childhood.”

The allusions exasperated Cosmo. The more he saw of the grown woman, the less connection she seemed to have with the early Adele. The contrast was too strong. He felt tempted to tell M. de Monteverso that he by no means cherished that old memory. The nearest he came to it was the statement that he had the privilege to hear much of Madame de Monteverso in Paris. M. de Monteverso, contemplating now the dark

peasantlike figure huddled up on the crimson seat against a white wall, hastened to turn towards Cosmo the black weariness of his eyes.

“Mme. de Montevezzo has led a very retired life during the Empire. Her conduct was marked by the greatest circumspection. But she is a person of rank.

God knows what gossip you may have heard. The world is censorious.”

Brusquely Cosmo stepped out into the outer gallery. Listening to M. de Montevezzo was no pleasure. The Count accompanied him as far as the head of the great staircase and stayed to watch his descent with a face that expressed no more than the face of a soldier on parade, till, all at once, his eyes started to roll about wildly as if looking for some object he could snatch up and throw down the stairs at Cosmo’s head. But this lasted only for a moment. He reentered the anteroom quietly and busied himself in closing and locking the door with care. After doing this he approached the figure on the bench and stood over it silently. vn

The old woman pushed back her shawl and raised her wrinkled soft face without much expression to say:

“The child has been calling for you for the last hour or more.”

Helion de Montevezzo walked all the length of the anteroom and back again; then stood over the old woman as before.

“You know what she is,” she began directly the Count had stopped. “She won’t give us any rest. When she was little one could always give her a beating but now there is no doing anything with her. You had better come and see for yourself.”

“Very unruly?” asked the Count de Montevezzo.

“She is sixteen,” said the old woman crisply, getting up and moving towards the stairs leading to the upper floor. A stick that had been lying concealed in the folds of her dress was now in her hand. She ascended the stairs more nimbly than her appearance would have led one to expect, and the Count de Montevezzo followed her down a long corridor, where at last the shuffle of her slippers and the tapping of her stick ceased in front of a closed door. A profound silence reigned in this remote part of the old palace which the enormous vanity of the upstart had hired for the entertainment of his wife and his father-in-law in the face of the restored monarchies of Europe. The old peasant woman turned to the stiff figure which, holding the candelabra and in its laced coat, recalled a gorgeous lackey.

“We have put her to bed,” she said, “but as to holding her down in it, that was another matter. Maria is strong but she got weary of it at last. We had to send for Father Paul. Shameless as she is she would not attempt to get out of her bed in her nightdress before a priest. The Father promised to stay till we could fetch you to her, so I came down, but I dared not go further than the anteroom. A valet told me you had still a guest with you, so I sent him away and sat down to wait. The wretch to revenge himself on me put out the lights before he went.”

“He shall be flung out to-morrow,” said M. de Montevezzo in a low tone.

“I hope I have done nothing wrong, Helion.”

"No," said M. de Monteverso in the same subdued tone. He lent his ear to catch some slight sound on the other side of the door. But the stillness behind it was like the stillness of a sick room to which people listen with apprehension. The old woman laid her hand lightly on the sleeve of the gorgeous coat. "You are a great man ..."

"I am," said Count Helion without exultation.

The old woman, dragged out at the age of seventy from the depths of her native valley by the irresistible will of the great man, tried to find utterance for a few simple thoughts. Old age with its blunted feelings had alone preserved her from utter bewilderment at the sudden change; but she was overpowered by its greatness. She lived inside that palace as if enchanted into a state of resignation. Ever since she had arrived in Genoa, which was just five weeks ago, she had kept to the upper floor. Only the extreme necessity of the case had induced her to come so far downstairs as the white anteroom. She was conscious of not having neglected her duty.

"I did beat her faithfully/' she declared with the calmness of old age and conscious rectitude. The lips of M. de Monteverso twitched slightly. "I did really, though often feeling too weary to raise my arm. Then I would throw a shawl over my head and go in the rain to speak to Father Paul. He had taught her to read and write. He is full of charity. He would shrug his shoulders and tell me to put my trust in God. It was all very well for him to talk like that. True that on your account I was the greatest person for miles around. I had the first place everywhere. But now that you made us come out here just because of your fancy to turn the child into a Contessa, all my poor senses leave my old body. For, you know, if I did beat her, being entrusted with your authority, everybody else in the village waited on a turn of her finger. She was full of pride and wilfulness then. Now since you have introduced her amongst all these grandissimi signori of whom she had only heard as one hears of angels in heaven, she seems to have lost her head with the excess of pride and obstinacy. What is one to do? The other day on account of something I said she fastened her ten fingers into my gray hair. . . ." She threw her shawl off and raised her creased eyelids. . . . "This gray hair, on the oldest head of your family, Helion. If it hadn't been for Maria she would have left me a corpse on the floor." The mild bearing of the old woman had a dignity of its own, but at this point it broke down and she became agitated.

"Many a time I sat up in my bed thinking half the night. I am an old woman. I can read the signs. This is a matter for priests. When I was a big girl in our village they had to exorcise a comely youth, a herdsman. I am not fit to talk of such matters. But you, Helion, could say a word or two to Father Paul.

He would know what to do ... or get the Bishop . . ."

"Amazing superstition," Count Helion exclaimed in a rasping growl. "The days of priests and devils are gone," he went on angrily, but paused as if struck with a sudden doubt or a new idea. The old woman shook her head slightly. In the depths of her native valley all the days were alike in their hopes and fears as far back as she could remember. She did not know how she had offended her brother and emitted a sigh of resignation.

“What’s the trouble now?” Count Helion asked brusquely.

The old woman shrugged her shoulders expressively. Count Helion insisted. “There must be some cause.”

“The cause, as I am a sinner, can be no other but that young signore that came out with you and to whom you bowed so low. I didn’t know you had to bow to anybody unless perhaps to the King who has come back lately. But then a king is anointed with holy oils! I couldn’t believe my eyes. What kind of prince was that?” She waited, screwing her eyes up at Count Helion, who looked down at her inscrutably and at last condescended to say:

“That was an Englishman.”

She moaned with astonishment and alarm. A heretic! She thought no heretic could be good-looking. Didn’t they have their wickedness written on their faces?

“No,” said Count Helion. “No man has that, and no woman, either.”

Again he paused to think. “Let us go in now,” he added.

The big room (all the rooms in that Palazzo were big unless they happened to be mere dark and airless cupboards), which they entered as quietly as if a sick person had been lying in there at the point of death, contained amongst its gilt furniture also a few wooden stools and a dark walnut table brought down from the farmhouse for the convenience of its rustic occupants. A priest sitting in a gorgeous armchair held to the light of a common brass oil lamp an open book, the shadow of which darkened a whole corner of the vast space between the high walls decorated with rare marbles, long mirrors, and heavy hangings. A few small pieces of washing were hung out to dry on a string stretched from a window latch to the back of a chair. A common brazier stood in the fireplace and, near it, a gaunt, bony woman dressed in black with a white handkerchief on her head was stirring something in a little earthen pot. Ranged at the foot of a dais bearing a magnificent but dismantled couch of state were two small wooden bedsteads, on one of which lay the girl whom Cosmo knew only as “Clelia, my husband’s niece,” with a hand under her cheek. The other cheek was much flushed; a tangle of loose black hair covered the pillow. Whether from respect for the priest or from mere exhaustion she was keeping perfectly still under her bedclothes pulled up to her very neck so that only her head remained uncovered.

At the entrance of the Count the priest closed his book and stood up, but the woman by the mantelpiece went on stirring her pot. Count Helion returned a “Bonsoir, AbbS” to the priest’s silent bow, put down the candelabra on a console, and walked straight to the bedstead. The other three people, the gaunt woman still with her pot in her hand, approached it too but kept their distance.

The girl Clelia remained perfectly still under the downward thoughtful gaze of Count Helion. In that face half buried in the pillow one eye glittered full of tears. She refused to make the slightest sound in reply to Count Helion’s questions, orders, and remonstrances. Even his coaxings, addressed to her in the same low, harsh tone, were received in obstinate silence. Whenever he paused he could hear at his back the old woman whispering to the priest. At last even that stopped. Count Helion resisted the

temptation to grab all that hair on the pillow and pull the child out of bed by it. He waited a little longer and then said in his harsh tone:

“I thought you loved*me.”

For the first time there was a movement under the blanket. But that was all. Count Helion turned his back on the bed and met three pairs of eyes fixed on him with different expressions. He avoided meeting any of them. “Perhaps if you were to leave us alone,” he said.

They obeyed in silence, but at the last moment he called the priest back and took him aside to a distant part of the room where the brass oil lamp stood on the walnut-wood table. The full physiognomy of Father Paul Carpi with its thin eyebrows and pouting mouth was overspread by a self-conscious professional placidity that seemed ready to see or hear anything without surprise. Count de Montevezzo was always impressed by it. “Abbe,” he said brusquely, “you know that my sister thinks that the child is possessed. I suppose she means by a devil.”

He looked with impatience at the priest, who remained silent, and burst out in a subdued voice:

“I believe you people are hoping now to bring him back into the world again, that old friend of yours.” He waited for a moment. “Sit down, Abbe.”

Father Carpi sank into the armchair with some dignity while Count Helion snatched a three-legged stool and planted himself on it on the other side of the table. “Now, wouldn’t you?”

Something not bitter, not mocking, but as if disillusioned seemed to touch the lips of Father Carpi at the very moment he opened them to say quietly:

“Only as a witness to the reign of God.”

“Which of course would be your reign. Never mind, a man like me can be master under any reign.” He jerked his head slightly towards the bed. “Now what sort of devil would it be in that child?”

The deprecatory gesture of Father Carpi did not detract from his dignity. “I should call it dumb myself,” continued Count Helion. “We will leave it alone for a time. What hurts me often is the difficulty of getting at your thoughts, Abbe. Haven’t I been a good enough friend to you?” To this, too, Father Carpi answered by a deferential gesture and deprecatory murmur. Count Helion had restored the church, rebuilt the presbytery, and had behaved generally with great munificence. Father Carpi, sprung from shop-keeping stock in the town of Novi, had lived through times difficult for the clergy. He had been contented to exist. Now, at the age of forty or more, the downfall of the Empire, which seemed to carry with it the ruin of the impious forces of the Revolution, had awakened in him the first stirrings of ambition. Its immediate object was the chaplaincy to the Count de Montevezzo’s various charitable foundations.

There was a man, one of the great of this world, whom, without understanding him in any deeper sense or ever trying to judge his nature, he could see plainly enough to be unhappy. And that was a great point. For the unhappy are more amenable to obscure influences, religious and others. But Father Carpi was too intelligent to intrude

upon the griefs of that man with the mysterious past either religious consolation or secular advice. For a long time now he had watched and waited, keeping his thoughts so secret that they seemed even hidden from himself. To the outbreaks of that rough, arrogant, contemptuous, and oppressive temper he could oppose only the gravity of his sacerdotal character as Adele did her lofty serenity, that detachment, both scornful and inaccessible, which seemed to place her on another plane.

Father Carpi had never been before confronted so directly by the difficulties of his position as at that very moment and on the occasion of that intolerable and hopeless girl. To gain time he smiled, a slight, noncommittal smile.

"We priests, M. le Comte, are recommended not to enter into discussion of theological matters with people who, whatever their accomplishments and wisdom, are not properly instructed in them. As to anything else I am always at Monseigneur's service."

He gave this qualification to Count Helion because it was not beyond the bounds of respect due from a poor parish priest to a titled great man of his province.

"Have you been much about amongst the town people?" asked Count Helion.

"I go out every morning about seven to say mass in that church you may have noticed near by. I have visited also once or twice an old friend from my seminary days, a priest of a poor parish here. We rejoice together at the return of the Holy Father to Rome. For the rest I had an idea, Monseigneur, that you did not wish me to make myself prominent in any way in this town."

"Perhaps I didn't. It may be convenient, though, to know what are the rumours current amongst the populace. That class has its own thoughts. I suppose your friend would know something of that."

"No doubt. But I can tell you, Monseigneur, what the people think. They think that if they can't be

Genoese as before, they would rather be French than Piedmontese. That, Monseigneur, is a general feeling even amongst the better class of citizens."

"Much would they gain by it," mumbled Count de Montevezzo. "Unless the Other were to come back. Abbe," he added sharply, "is there any talk of him coming back?"

"That indeed would be a misfortune." Father Carpi's tone betrayed a certain emotion which Count Helion noticed, faint as it was.

"Whatever happens you will have always a friend in me," he said, and Father Carpi acknowledged the assurance by a slight inclination of his body.

"Surely God would not allow it," he murmured uneasily. But the stare of his interlocutor augmented his alarm. He was still more startled when he heard Count de Montevezzo make the remark that the only thing which seemed to put a limit to the power of God was the folly of men. He had too poor an opinion of Count de Montevezzo to be shocked by the blasphemy. To him it was only the proof that the Count had been very much upset by something, some fact or some news.

"And people are very foolish just now both in Paris and in Vienna," added Count de Montevezzo after a long pause.

It was news then. Father Carpi betrayed nothing of his anxious curiosity. The inward unrest which pervaded the whole basin of the Western Mediterranean was strongest in Italy perhaps and was very strong in the heart of Father Carpi, who was both an Italian and a priest. Perhaps he would be told something! He almost held his breath, but Count de Monteverso took his head between his hands and said only:

“One is pestered by folly of all sorts. Abbe, see whether you can bring that child to reason.”

However low in the scale of humanity Father Carpi placed the Count de Monteverso, he never questioned his social position. Father Carpi was made furious by the request, but he obeyed. He approached the rustic bedstead and looked at the occupant with sombre disgust. Nothing was obscure to him in the situation. If he couldn't tell exactly what devil possessed that creature he remembered perfectly her mother, a rash sort of girl who was found drowned years ago in a remarkably shallow pond amongst some rocks not quite a mile away from the presbytery. It might have been an accident. He had consented to bury her in consecrated ground not from any compassion, but because of the revolutionary spirit which had penetrated even the thick skulls of his parishioners and probably would have caused a riot and shaken the precarious power of the Church in his obscure valley. He stood erect by the head of the couch, looking down at the girl's uncovered eye whose sombre iris swam on the glistening white. He could have laughed with contempt and fury. He regulated his deep voice so that it reached Count de Monteverso at the other side of the room only as a solemn admonishing murmur.

“You miserable little wretch,” he said, “can't you behave yourself? You have been a torment to me for years.”

The sense of his own powerlessness overcame him so completely that he felt tempted for a moment to throw everything up, walk out of the room, seek refuge amongst sinners that would believe either in God or in the devil.

“You are a scourge to us all,” he continued in the same equable murmur. “If you don't speak out, you little beast, and put an end to this scene soon I will exorcise you.”

The only effect of that threat was the sudden immobility of the rolling eye. Father Carpi turned towards the Count.

“It is probably some sort of malady,” he said coldly. “Perhaps a doctor could prescribe some remedy.”

Count Helion came out of his listless attitude. A moment ago a doctor was in the house in conference with M. le Marquis. Perhaps he was still there. Count Helion got up impetuously and asked the Abbe to go along to the other side and find out.

“Take a light with you. All the lights are out down there. Knock at the Marquis's door and inquire from Bernard, and if the doctor is still there bring him along.”

Father Carpi went out hastily and Count de Monteverso, keeping the women outside, paced the whole length of the room. The fellow called himself a doctor whatever else he might have been. Whether he did any good to the child or not — Count de Monteverso stopped and looked fixedly at the bed — this was an extremely favourable opportunity to get in touch with him personally. What could tell what use could be made of him in

his other capacities, apart from the fact that he probably could really prescribe some remedy? Count de Monte-vezzo's heart was softened paternally. His progress from European barrack-rooms to an Eastern palace left on his mind a sort of bewilderment. He even thought the girl attractive. There she was, a prey of some sort of illness. He bent over her face and instantly a pair of thin bare arms darted from under the blankets and clasped him round the neck with a force that really surprised him. "I hat one loves me," he thought. He did not know that she would have hung round anybody's neck in the passion of obtaining what she wanted. He thought with a sort of dull insight that everybody was a little bit against her. He abandoned his neck to the passionate clasp for a little time, then disengaged himself gently.

"What makes you behave like this?" he asked. "Do you feel a pain anywhere?"

No emotion could change the harshness of his voice, but it was very low and there was an accent in it which the girl could not mistake. She sat up suddenly with her long wild hair covering her shoulders. With her round eyes, the predatory character of her face, the ruffled fury of her aspect, she looked like an angry bird; and there was something bird-like in the screech of her voice.

"Pain? No. But if I didn't hate them so I would like to die. I would ..."

Count de Montevezzo put one hand at the back of her head and clapped the other broad palm over her mouth. This action surprised her so much that she didn't even struggle. When the Count took his hands away she remained silent without looking at him.

"Don't scream like this," he murmured harshly but with obvious indulgence. "Your aunts are outside and they will tell the priest all about it."

Clelia drew up her knees, clasped her hands round them outside the blanket, and stared.

"It is just your temper!" suggested Count Helion reproachfully.

"All those dressed-up witches despise me. I am not frightened. And the worst of them is that yellow-haired witch, your wife. If I had gone in there in my bare feet they could not have stared more down on me. ... I shall fly at their faces. I can read their thoughts as they put their glasses to their eyes. 'What animal is this?' they seem to ask themselves. I am a brute beast to them."

A shadow seemed to fall on Count de Montevezzo's face for the moment. Clelia unclasped her fingers, shook her fists at the empty space, then clasped her legs again. These movements, full of sombre energy, were observed silently by the Count de Montevezzo. He uttered the word "Patienza," which in its humility is the word of the ambitious, of the unforgiving who keep a strict account with the world; a word of indomitable hope. "You wait till you are a little older. You will have plenty of people at your feet; and then you will be able to spurn anybody you like."

"You mean when I am married," said Clelia in a faraway voice and staring straight over her knees.

"Yes," said the Count de Montevezzo, "but you will first have to learn to be gentle."

This recommendation apparently missed the ear for which it was destined. For a whole minute Clelia seemed to contemplate some sort of vision with her predatory and pathetic stare. One side of her nightgown had slipped off her shoulder. Suddenly she pushed her scattered hair back, and extending her arm towards Count Helion patted him caressingly on the cheek.

When she had done patting him he asked, unmoved: "Now, what is it you want?"

She was careful not to turn her face his way while she whispered: "I want that young signor that came today to make eyes at my aunt."

"Impossible."

"Why impossible? I was with them in the morning. They did nothing but look at each other. But I went for him myself."

"That Englishman! You can't have an Englishman like this. I am thinking of something better for you, a marquis or a count."

This was the exact truth, not a sudden idea to meet a hopeless case.

"You have hardly had time to have a good look at him," added Count Helion.

"I looked at him this evening with all my eyes, with all my soul. I would have sat up all night to look at him. But he got up and turned his back on me. He has no eyes for anybody but my aunt."

"Did you speak together, you two?"

"Yes," she said, "he sat down by me and all those witches stared as if he had been making up to a monster. Am I a monster? He too looked at me as if I had been one."

"Was he rude to you?" asked the Count de Montevezzo.

"He was as insolent as all the people I have seen since we came to this town. His heart was black as of all the rest of them. He was gentle to me as one is gentle to an old beggar for the sake of charity. Oh, how I hated him."

"Well, then," said Count de Montevezzo in a harsh unsympathetic tone, "you may safely despise him."

Clelia threw herself half out of bed on the neck of Count Helion, who preserved an unsympathetic rigidity though he did not actually repulse her wild and vehement caress.

"Oh, dearest uncle of mine," she whispered ardently into his ear, "he is handsome! I must have him for myself."

There was a knocking at the door. Count Helion tore the bare arms from his neck and pushed the girl back into bed.

"Cover yourself up," he commanded hurriedly. He arranged the blanket at her back. "Lie still and say nothing of all this, and then you need have no fear."

But if you breathe a word of this to anybody, then . . . Come in," he shouted to the renewed knocking and had just time to shake his finger at Clelia menacingly before the Abbe and the doctor entered the room.

Part 3

Chapter 1

Cosmo walked away with no more than one look back, just before turning the corner, at the tensely alert griffins guarding the portals of the Palazzo. At the entrance of his inn a small knot of men on the pavement paused in their low conversation to look at him. After he had passed he heard a voice say, "This is the English milord." He found the dimly lit hall empty and he went up the empty staircase into the upper regions of silence. His face, which to the men on the pavement had appeared passionless and pale as marble, looked at him suddenly out of the mirror over the fireplace, and he was startled as though he had seen a ghost.

Spire had been told not to wait for his return. His empty room had welcomed him with a bright flame on the hearth and with lighted candles. He turned away from his own image and stood with his back to the fire looking downwards and vaguely oppressed by the profound as if expectant silence around him. The strength and novelty of the impressions received during that day, the intimacy of their appeal, had affected his fortitude. He felt mortally weary and began to undress; but after he got into bed he remained for a time in a sitting posture. For the first time in his life he tasted of loneliness. His father was at least thirty-five years his senior. An age! His sister was just a young girl. Clever, of course. He was very fond of her, but the mere fact of her being a girl raised a wall between them. He had never made any real friends. He had nothing to do; and he did not seem to know what to think of anything in the world. Now, for instance there was that vanquished fat figure in a little cocked hat. . . . Still an emperor.

Cosmo came with a start out of a deep sleep that seemed to have lasted only a moment. But he knew at once where he was, though at first he had to argue himself out of the conviction of having parted from Count Helion at the top of a staircase less than five minutes ago. Meantime he watched Spire flooding the room with brilliant sunshine, for the three windows of the room faced east.

"Very fine morning, sir," said Spire over his shoulder. "Quite a spring day."

A delicious freshness flowed over Cosmo. It did not bring joy to him, but dismay. Daylight already! It had come too soon. He had had no time yet to decide what to do. He had gone to sleep. A most extraordinary thing! His distress was appeased by the simple thought that there was no need for him to do anything. After drinking his chocolate, which Spire received on a tray from some woman on the other side of the

door, he informed him that he intended to devote the whole day to his correspondence. A table having been arranged to that end close to an open window, he started writing at once. On retiring without a sound Spire left the goose-quill flying over the paper. It was past noon before Cosmo, hearing him come in again on some pretence or other, raised his head for the first time and dropped the pen to say: "Give me my coat, I will go down to the dining room."

By that time the murmur of voices in the piazza had died out. The good Genoese had gone indoors to eat. Coming out of his light-filled room Cosmo found the corridors cold and dark like subterranean passages cut in rock, and the hall downstairs gloomy like a burial vault. In contrast with it the long dining room had a festive air, a brilliancy that was almost crude. In a corner where the man who called himself Doctor Martel had his table this glare was toned down by half-closed shutters and Cosmo made his way there. Cantelucci's benefactor, seated sideways with one arm thrown over the chair's back, took Cosmo's arrival as a matter of course, greeted him with an amiable growl, and declared himself very sharp set. Presently laying down his knife and fork he enquired what Cosmo had been doing that morning. Writing? Really? Thought that perhaps Cosmo had been doing the churches. One could see very pretty girls in the morning, waiting for their turn at the confessional.

Cosmo, raising suddenly his eyes from his plate, caught his companion examining him keenly. The doctor burst into a loud laugh till Cosmo's grave face recalled him to himself.

"I beg your pardon. I remembered suddenly a very funny thing that happened to me last night. I am afraid you think me very impolite. It was extremely funny."

"Won't you tell me of it?" asked Cosmo coldly.

"No, my dear sir. You are not in the mood. I prefer to apologize. There is a secret in it which is not mine. But as to the girls I was perfectly serious. If you seek female beauty you must look to the people for it and in Genoa you will not look in vain. The women of the upper classes are alike everywhere. You must have remarked that."

"I have hardly had time to look about me as yet," said Cosmo. He was no longer annoyed with the doctor, not even after he heard him say:

"Surely yesterday evening you must have had an opportunity. You came home late."

"I wonder who takes the trouble to watch my movements?" remarked Cosmo carelessly.

"Town-police spies, of course," said the doctor grimly; "and perhaps one or two of the most enterprising thieves. You must make up your mind to that. After all, why should you care?"

"Yes, why should I?" repeated Cosmo nonchalantly. "Do they report to you?"

The doctor laughed again. "I see you haven't forgiven me my untimely merriment; but I will answer your question. No doubt I could hear a lot if I wanted to, both from the police and the thieves. But as a matter of fact it was my courier who told me. He was talking with some friends outside this inn when you came home. You know, you are a noticeable figure."

“Oh, your courier. I suppose he hasn’t got much else to do!”

“I see you are bent on quarrelling, Mr. Latham,” said the other, while two unexpected dimples appeared on his round cheeks. “All right. Only hadn’t we better wait for some other opportunity? Don’t you allow your man to talk while he is assisting you to dress? I must confess I let my fellow run on while he is shaving me in the morning. But then I am an easy-going sort of tramp. For I am just a tramp. I have no Latham Hall to go back to.”

He pushed his chair away from the table, stretched his legs, plunged his hands in his pockets complacently. How long was it he had been a tramp? he mused aloud. Twenty years? Or a little more. From one end of Europe to the other. From Madrid to Moscow, as one might say. Exactly like that Corsican fellow. Only he hadn’t dragged a tail of two hundred thousand men behind him, and had done no more blood-letting than his lancet was equal to.

He looked up at Cosmo suddenly.

“The lancet’s my weapon, you know. Not bayonet or sabre. Cold steel anyhow. Of course I found occasion to fire off my pistols more than once, in the course of my travels, and I must say for myself that whenever I fired them it settled the business. One evening, I remember, in Transylvania, stepping out of a wretched inn to take a look round, I ran against a coalition of three powerful Haiduks in tarry breeches, with moustaches a foot long. The moonlight was bright as day. I took in the situation at a glance and I assure you two of them never made a sound as they fell, while the third just grunted once. I fancy they had designs on my poor horse. He was inside the inn, you know. A custom of the country. Men and animals under the same roof. I used to be sorry for the animals. When I came in again the Jew had just finished frying the eggs. He had been very surly before but when he served me I noticed that he was shaking like a leaf. He tried to propitiate me by the offer of a sausage. I was simply ravenous. It made me ill for two days. That’s why I haven’t forgotten the occurrence. He nearly managed to avenge those bandits. Luckily I had the right kind of drugs in my valise, and my iron constitution helped me to pull through. But I should like to have seen Bonaparte in that predicament. He wouldn’t have known what to do. And, anyhow, the sausage would have finished him. His constitution is not like mine. He’s unhealthy, sir, unhealthy.”

“You had occasion to observe him often?” asked Cosmo, simply because he was reluctant to go back to his writing.

“Our paths seldom crossed,” stated the other simply. “But some time after the abdication I was passing through Valence — it’s a tramp’s business, you know, to keep moving — and I just had a good look at him outside the post-house. You may take it from me, he won’t reach the term of the Psalmist. Well, Mr. Latham, when I take a survey of the past, here we are, the Corsi-can and I, within, say, a hundred miles of each other, at the end of twenty years of tramping, and, frankly, which of us is the better off when all’s said and done?”

“That’s a point of view,” murmured Cosmo wearily. He added, however, that there were various ways of appreciating the careers of the world’s great men.

“There are,” assented the other. “For instance, you would say that nothing short of the whole of Europe was needed to crush that fellow. But Pozzo di Borgo thinks that he has done it all by himself.”

At the name of the Emperor’s Corsican enemy Cosmo raised his head. He had caught sight in Paris of that personage at one or other of those great receptions from which he used to come away disgusted with the world and dissatisfied with himself. The doctor seemed inwardly amused by his recollection of Pozzo di Borgo.

“He said to me,” he continued, “cAh! If Bonaparte had had the sense not to quarrel with me he wouldn’t be in Elba now.’ What do you think of that, Mr. Latham? Is that a point of view?”

“I should call it mad egotism.”

“Yes. But the most amusing thing is that there is some truth in it. The private enmity of one man may be more dangerous and more effective than the hatred of millions on public grounds. Pozzo has the ear of the Russian Emperor. The fate of the Bourbons hung on a hair. Alexander’s word was law — and who knows!”

Cosmo, plunged in abstraction, was repeating to himself mechanically, “The fate of the Bourbons hung on a hair — the fate of the Bourbons.” . . . Those words seemed meaningless. He tried to rouse himself. “Yes, Alexander,” he murmured vaguely. The doctor raised his voice suddenly in a peevish tone.

“I am not talking of Alexander of Macedon, Mr. Latham.” His vanity had been hurt by Cosmo’s attitude. The young man’s faint smile placated him, and the incongruous dimples reappeared on the doctor’s cheeks while he continued: “Here you are. For Pozzo, Napoleon has always been a starveling squireen. For the Prince, he has been principally the born enemy of good taste. . . .”

“The Prince?” repeated Cosmo, struggling to keep his head above the black waters of melancholia which seemed to lap about his very lips. “You have said the Prince, haven’t you? What Prince?”

“Why, ‘lalleyrand, of course. He did once tell him so, too. Pretty audacious! What? . . . Well, I don’t know. Suppose you were master of the world, and somebody were to tell you something of the sort to your face — what could you do? Nothing. You would have to gulp it, feeling pretty small. A private gentleman of good position could resent such a remark from an equal, but a master of the world couldn’t. A master of the world, Mr. Latham, is very small potatoes; and I will tell you why: it’s because he is alone of his kind, stuck up like a thief in the pillory, for dead cats and cabbage stalks to be thrown at him. A devil of a position to be in unless for a moment. But no man born of woman is a monster. There never was such a thing. A man who would really be a monster would arouse nothing but loathing and hatred. But this man has been loved by an army, by a people. For years his soldiers died for him with joy. Now, didn’t they?”

Cosmo perceived that he had managed to forget himself. "Yes," he said, "that cannot be denied."

"No," continued the doctor. "And now, within twenty yards of us, on the other side of the wall there are millions of people who still love him. Hey! Cantelucci!" he called across the now empty length of the room. "Come here."

The innkeeper, who had been noiselessly busy about a distant sideboard, approached with deference, in his shirt-sleeves, girt with a long apron of which one corner was turned up, and with a white cap on his head. Being asked whether it was true that Italians loved Napoleon, he answered by a bow and "Excellency."

"You think yourself that he is a great man, don't you?" pursued the doctor, and obtained another bow and another murmured "Excellency."

The doctor turned to Cosmo triumphantly. "You see! And Bonaparte has been stealing from them all he could lay his hands on for years. All their works of art. I am surprised he didn't take away the wall on which The Last Supper is painted. It makes my blood boil. I love Italy, you know." He addressed again the motionless Cantelucci.

"But what is it that makes you people love this man?"

This time Cantelucci did not bow. He seemed to make an effort: "Signore, it is the idea."

The doctor directed his eyes again to Cosmo in silence. At last the innkeeper stepped back three paces before turning away from his English clients. The dimples had vanished from the doctor's full cheeks. There was something contemptuous in the peevishness of his thin lips and the extreme hardness of his eyes. They softened somewhat before he addressed Cosmo.

"Here is another point of view for you. Devil only knows what that idea is, but I suspect it's vague enough to include every illusion that ever fooled mankind.

There must be some charm in that gray coat and that old three-cornered hat of his, for the man himself has betrayed every hatred and every hope that have helped him on his way."

"What I am wondering at," Cosmo said at last, "is whether you have ever talked like this to anybody before."

The doctor seemed taken aback a little.

"Oh. You mean about Bonaparte," he said. "If you had gone to that other inn, Pollegrini's, more suitable to your nationality and social position, you would have heard nothing of that kind. I am not very communicative really, but to sit at meals like two mutes would have been impossible. What could we have conversed about? One must have some subject other than the weather and, frankly, what other subject would we have had here in Genoa, or for that matter in any other spot of the civilized world? I know there are amongst us in England a good many young men who call themselves revolutionists and even republicans. Charming young men, generous and all that. Friends of Boney. You might be one of them."

As he paused markedly Cosmo murmured that he was hardly prepared to state what he was. That other inn, the Pollegrini, was full when he arrived.

“Well, there had been three departures this morning,” the doctor informed him. “You can have your things packed up this afternoon and carried across the Place. You know, by staying here you make yourself conspicuous to the spies, not to speak of the thieves; they ask themselves: ‘What sort of inferior Englishman is that?’ With me it is different. I am known for a man who has his own work to do. People are curious. And as my work is confidential I prefer to keep out of the way rather than have to be rude. But for you it would be more amusing to live over there. New faces all the time; endless gossip about all sorts of people.”

“I do not think it is worth while to change now,” said Cosmo coldly.

“Of course not, if you are not going to prolong your stay. If you project a visit to Elba, Livorno is the port for that. And if you are anxious to hear about Napoleon you will hear plenty of gossip about him there. Here you have nothing but my talk.”

“I have found it very interesting,” said Cosmo, rising to go away. The doctor smiled without amiability. He was determined never to let Cosmo guess that he knew of his acquaintance with the people occupying the palace guarded by the symbolic griffins. Of that fact he had been made aware by the Count de Monteverso who, once he had got the doctor into Clelia’s room, decided to take him into his confidence — on the ground that one must be frank with a medical man. The real reason was, however, that knowing Doctor Martel to be employed on secret political work by the statesmen of the Alliance, and having a very great idea of his occult influences in all sorts of spheres, he hoped to get from him another sort of assistance. His last words were, “You see yourself the state the child is in. I want that popinjay moved out of Genoa.”

The only answer of the doctor to this, and the last sound during that professional visit that Count de Monteverso heard from him, was a short wooden laugh. That man of political intrigues, confidential missions (often he had more than one at a time on his hands), inordinately vain of his backstairs importance, was not mercenary. He had always preserved a most independent attitude towards his employers. To him the Count de Monteverso was but a common stupid soldier of fortune of no importance and of no position except as the son-in-law of the Marquis d’Armand. He had never seen him before, but his marital life was known to him as it was known to the rest of the world. To be waylaid by a strange priest just as he was leaving the Marquis’s room was annoying enough, but he could not very well refuse the request since it seemed to be a case of sudden illness. He was soon enlightened as to its nature by Clelia, who had treated him and the Count to another of her indescribable performances. Characteristically enough the doctor had never been for a moment irritated with the girl. He behaved by her tempestuous bedside like a man of science, calm, attentive, impenetrable. But it was afterwards, when he had been drawn aside by the Count for a confidential talk, that he had asked himself whether he were dreaming or awake. His scorn for the man helped him to preserve his self-command, and to the end the Count was not intelligent enough to perceive its character.

The doctor left the Palazzo about an hour after Cosmo (but not by the same staircase) and on his way to his inn gave rein to his indignation. Did the stupid brute

imagine that he had any sort of claim on his services? Ah, he wanted that popinjay removed from Genoa! Indeed! And what the devil did he care for it? Was he expected to arrange a neat little assassination to please that solemn wooden imbecile? The doctor's sense of self-importance was grievously hurt. Even in the morning after a good night's rest he had not shaken off the impression. However, he was reasonable enough not to make Cosmo in any way responsible for what he defined to himself as the most incredibly offensive experience of his life. He only looked at him when he came to lunch with a sort of acid amusement as the being who had had the power to arouse a passion of love in the primitive soul of that curious little savage.

As the meal proceeded, the doctor seemed to notice that his young countryman was somehow changed. He watched him covertly. What had happened to him since last evening? Surely he hadn't been smitten himself by the little savage that under no circumstances could have been made fit to be a housemaid in an English family.

After he had been left by Cosmo alone in the dining room, the doctor's body continued to loll in the chair while his thoughts continued to circle around that funny affair, of which you couldn't say whether it was love at first sight or a manifestation of some inherited lunacy. Quite a good-looking young man. Out of the common too, in a distinguished way. Altogether a specimen of one's countrymen one could well be proud of, mused further the doctor, whose tastes had been formed by much intercourse with all kinds of people. Characteristically enough, too, he felt for a moment sorry in his grumpy contemptuous way for the little dishevelled savage with a hooked nose and burning cheeks and her thin sticks of bare arms. The doctor was humane. The origin of his reputation sprang from his humanity. But his thought, as soon as it left Clelia, stopped short as it were before another image that replaced it in his mind. He had remembered the Countess de Monteverso. He knew her of old, by sight and reputation. He had seen her no further back than last night by the side of the old Marquis's chair. Now he had seen the Count de Monteverso himself, he could well believe all the stories of a lifelong jealousy. The doctor's hard, active eyes stared fixedly at the truth. It was not because of that little savage that that gloomy self-tormenting ass of a drill sergeant to an Indian prince wanted young Latham removed from Genoa.

Oh, dear no. That wasn't it at all. It was much more serious.

Before he walked out of the empty dining room Doctor Martel concluded that it would be perhaps just as well for young Latham not to linger too long in Genoa.

Chapter 2

Cosmo, having returned to his room, sat down again at the writing table: for was not this day to be devoted to correspondence? Long after the shade had invaded the greater part of the square below he went on, while the faint shuffle of footsteps and the faint murmur of voices reached him from the pavement like the composite sound of agitated insect life that can be heard in the depths of a forest. It required all his

courage to keep on, piling up words which dealt exclusively with towns, roads, rivers, mountains, the colours of the sky. It was like labouring the description of the scenery of a stage after a great play had come to an end. A vain thing. And still he travelled on. Having at last descended into the Italian plain (for the benefit of Henrietta), he dropped his pen and thought: "At this rate I will never arrive in Genoa." He fell back in his chair like a weary traveller. He was suddenly overcome by that weary distaste a frank nature feels after an effort at concealing an overpowering sentiment.

But had he really anything to conceal? he asked himself.

Suddenly the door flew open and Spire marched in with four lighted candles on a tray. It was only then that Cosmo became aware how late it was. "Had I not better tear all this up?" he thought, looking down at the sheets before him.

Spire put two candlesticks on the table, disposed the two others, one each side of the mantelpiece, and was going out.

"Wait!" cried Cosmo.

It was like a cry of distress. Spire shut the door quietly and turned about, betraying no emotion. Cosmo seized the pen again and concluded hastily:

I have been in Genoa for the last two days. I have seen Adele and the Marquis. They send their love. You shall have lots about them in my next. I have no time now to tell you what a wonderful person she has become. But perhaps you would not think so.

After he had signed it the thought struck him that there was nothing about Napoleon in his letter. He must put in something about Napoleon. He added a P.S.:

You can form no idea of the state of suspense in which all classes live here from the highest to the lowest, as to what may happen next. All their thoughts are concentrated on Bonaparte. Rumours are flying about of some sort of violence that may be offered to him, assassination, kidnapping. It's difficult to credit it all, though I do believe that the Congress in Vienna is capable of any atrocity. A person I met here suggested that I should go to Livorno. Perhaps I will. But I have lost, I don't know why, all desire to travel. Should I find a ship ready to sail for England in Livorno, I may take passage in her and come home at once by sea.

Cosmo collected the pages, and while closing the packet asked himself whether he ought to tell her that. Was it the fact that he had lost all wish to travel? However, he let Spire take the packet to the post and during the man's absence took a turn or two in the room. He had got through the day. Now there was the evening to get through somehow. But when it occurred to him that the evening would be followed by the hours of an endless night, filled by the conflict of shadowy thoughts that haunt the birth of a passion, the desolation of the prospect was so overpowering that he could only meet it with a bitter laugh. Spire, returning, stood thunderstruck at the door.

"What's the matter with you? Have you seen a ghost?" asked Cosmo, who ceased laughing suddenly and fixed the valet with distracted eyes.

"No, sir, certainly not. I was wondering whether you hadn't better dine in your room."

“What do you mean? Am I not fit to be seen?” asked Cosmo captiously, glancing at himself in the mirror as though the crisis through which he had passed in the last three or four minutes could have distorted his face. Spire made no answer. The sound of that laugh had made him lose his conventional bearing; while Cosmo wondered what had happened to that imbecile and glared at him suspiciously.

“Give me my coat,” he said at last. “I am going downstairs.”

This broke the spell and Spire, getting into motion, regained his composure.

“Noisy company down there, sir. I thought you might not like it.”

Cosmo felt a sudden longing to hear noise, lots of it, senseless, loud, common, absurd noise; noise loud enough to prevent one from thinking, the sort of noise that would cause one to become, as it were, insensible.

“What do you want?” he asked savagely of Spire, who was hovering at his back.

“I am ready to help you with your coat, sir,” said Spire, in an apathetic voice. He had been profoundly shocked. After his master had gone out, slamming the door behind him, he busied himself with a stony face in putting the room to rights, before he blew out the candles and left it to get his supper.

“Didn’t you advise me this morning to go to Livorno?” asked Cosmo, falling heavily into the chair.

Doctor Martel was already at table, and, except that he had changed his boots for silk stockings and shoes, he might not have moved from there all the afternoon.

“Livorno,” repeated that strange man. “Did I? Yes. The road along the Riviera di Levante is delightful for any person sensible to the beauties of Italian landscapes.” He paused with a sour expression in the noise of voices filling the room, and muttered that no doubt Cantelucci found that sort of thing pay but that the place was becoming impossible.

Cosmo was just thinking that there was not half enough uproar there. The naval officers seemed strangely subdued that evening. The same old lieutenant with sunken cheeks and a sharp nose, in the same shabby uniform, was at the head of the table. Cantelucci, wearing a long-skirted maroon coat, now glided about the room, unobtrusive and vigilant. His benefactor beckoned to him.

“You would know where to find a man with four good horses for the signore’s carriage?” he asked; and accepting Cantelucci’s low bow as an affirmative, addressed himself to Cosmo. “The road’s perfectly safe. The country’s full of Austrian troops.”

“I think I would prefer to go by sea,” said Cosmo, who had not thought of making any arrangements for the journey. Instantly Cantelucci glided away, while the doctor emitted a grunt and applied himself to his dinner. Cosmo thought desperately, “Oh, yes, the sea, why not by sea, away from everybody?” He had been rolling and bumping on the roads, good, bad, and indifferent, in dust or mud, meeting in inns ladies and gentlemen for days and days between Paris and Genoa, and for a moment he was fascinated by the notion of a steady gliding progress in company of three or four bronzed sailors over a blue sea in sight of a picturesque coast of rocks and hills crowded with pines, with opening valleys, with white villages, and purple promontories of lovely

shape. It was like a dream which lasted till the doctor was heard suddenly saying, "I think I could find somebody that would take your travelling carriage off your hands" — and the awakening came with an inward recoil of all Cosmo's being, as if before a vision of irrevocable consequences.

The doctor lowered his eyelids. "He is changed," he said to himself. "Oh yes, he is changed." This, however, did not prevent him from feeling irritated by Cosmo's lack of response to the offer to dispose of his travelling carriage.

"There are many people that would consider themselves lucky to have such an offer made to them," he remarked, after a period of silence. "It is not so easy at this time to get rid of a travelling carriage. Nor yet to have an opportunity to hire a dependable man with four good horses if you want to go by land. I mean at a time like this when anything may happen any day."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you," said Cosmo, "but I am really in no hurry."

The doctor took notice of Cosmo's languid attitude and the untouched plate before him.

"The trouble is that you don't seem to have any aim at all. Isn't that it?"

"Yes. I confess," said Cosmo carelessly. "I think I want a rest."

"Well, Mr. Latham, you had better see that you get it, then. This place isn't restful, it is merely dull. And then suppose you were suddenly to perceive an aim, such for instance as a visit to Elba — you may be too late if you linger unduly. You know, you are not likely to see a specimen like that one over there again in your lifetime. And even he may not be with us very long."

"You seem very positive about that," said Cosmo, looking at his interlocutor searchingly. "This is the third or fourth time that I hear that sort of allusion from you. Have you any special information?"

"Yes, of a sort. It has been my lot to hear much of what is said in high places, and the nature of my occupation has given me much practice in appreciating what is said."

"In high places!" interjected Cosmo.

"And in low, too," retorted the doctor a little impatiently, "if that is the distinction you have in your mind, Mr. Latham. However, I told you I have been in Vienna quite recently, and I have heard something there."

"From Prince Talleyrand?" was Cosmo's stolid suggestion.

The doctor smiled acidly. "Not a bad guess. I did hear something at Prince Talleyrand's. I heard it from Montrond. You know whom I mean?"

"Never heard of him. Who is he?"

"Never heard of Montrond? Oh, I forgot, you have been shut up in that tight island of oars. Monsieur Montrond has the advantage to live near the rose. You understand me? He is the intimate companion to the Prince. Has been for many years. The Prince told somebody once that he liked Montrond because he was not 'excessively' scrupulous, that just paints the man for you. I was talking with Monsieur Montrond about Bonaparte's future — and I was not trying to be unkind, either. I pointed out that one

could hardly expect him to settle down if the French Government were not made to pay him the money guaranteed under the Treaty. He could see the moment when he would find himself without a penny. That's enough to make any human being restive. He was bound to try and do something. A man must live, I said. And Montrond looks at me, sideways, and says deliberately: 'Oh, here we don't see the necessity.' You understand that after a hint like this I dropped the subject. It's a point of view like another, eh, Mr. Latham?"

Cosmo was impressed. "I heard last night," he said, "that he is taking precautions for his personal safety."

"He remembered perhaps what happened to a certain Due d'Enghien, a young man who obviously didn't take precautions. So you heard that story? Well, in Livorno you will hear many sorts of stories. Livorno is an exciting place, and an excellent point to start from for a visit to Elba, which would be a great memory for your old age. And if you happen to observe anything remarkable there I would thank you to drop me a line, care of Cantelucci. You see, I have put some money into a deal of oil, and I don't know how it is, everything in the world, even a little twopenny affair like that, is affected by this feeling of suspense that man's presence gives rise to: hopes, plans, affections, love affairs. If I were you, Mr. Latham, I would certainly go to Livorno." He waited a little before he got up, muttering something about having a lot of pen work to do, and went out, Cantelucci hastening to open the door for him.

Cosmo remained passive in his chair. The room emptied itself gradually, and there was not even a servant left in it when Cosmo rose in his turn. He went back to his room, threw a few pieces of wood on the fire, and sat down. He felt as if lost in a strange world.

He doubted whether he ought not to have called that day at the Palace, if only to say good-bye. And suddenly all the occurrences and even words of the day before assailed his memory. The morning call, the mulatto girl, the sunshine in Madame de Monteverso's boudoir, the seduction of her voice, the emotional appeal of her story, had stirred him to the depths of his soul. Where was the man who could have imagined the existence of a being of such splendid humanity, with such a voice, with such amazing harmony of aspect, expression, gesture — with such a face in this gross world of mortals in which Lady Jane and Mrs. R.'s daughters counted for the most exquisite products offered to the love of men? And yet Cosmo remembered now that even while all his senses had been thrown into confusion by the first sight of Madame de Monteverso he had felt dimly that she was no stranger, that he had seen her glory before: the presence, the glance, the lips. He did not connect that dim recognition with the child Adele. No child could have promised a woman like this. It was rather like the awed recollection of a prophetic vision. And it had been in Latham Hall — but not in a dream; he was certain no man ever found the premonition of such a marvel in the obscure promptings of slumbering flesh. And it was not in a vision of his own; such visions were for artists, for inspired seers. She must have been foretold to him in some picture he had seen in Latham Hall, where one came on pictures (mostly of the Italian school) in unexpected

places, on landings, at the end of dark corridors, in spare bedrooms. A luminous oval face on the dark background — the noble full-length woman, stepping out of the narrow frame with long draperies held by jewelled clasps and girdle, with pearls on head and bosom, carrying a book and a pen (or was it a palm?) and — yes! he saw it plainly with terror — with her left breast pierced by a dagger. He saw it there plainly as if the blow had been struck before his eyes. The released hilt seemed to vibrate yet, while the eyes looked straight at him, profound, unconscious in miraculous tranquillity.

Terror-struck as if at the discovery of a crime, he jumped up, trembling in every limb. He had a horror of the room, of being alone within its four bare walls on which there were no pictures except that awful one which seemed to hang in the air before his eyes. Cosmo felt that he must get away from it. He snatched up his cloak and hat and fled into the corridor. The hour was late and everything was very still. He did not see as much as a flitting shadow on the bare rough walls of the unfinished palace awaiting the decoration of marbles and bronzes that would never cover its nakedness now. The dwelling of the Grazianis stood as dumb and cold in all its lofty depths as at that desolate hour of the dreadful siege, when its owner lay dead of hunger at the foot of the great flight of stairs. It was only in the hall below that Cosmo caught from behind one of the closed doors faint, almost ghostly, murmurs of disputing voices. The two hanging lanterns could not light up that grandly planned cavern in all its extent, but Cosmo made out a dim shape of the elderly lieutenant sitting all alone and perfectly still against the wall, with a bottle of wine before him. By the time he had reached the pavement Cosmo had mastered his trembling and had steadied his thoughts. He wanted to keep away from that house for hours, for hours. He glanced right and left, hesitating. In the whole town he knew only the way to the Palazzo and the way to the port. He took the latter direction. He walked by the faint starlight falling into the narrow streets resembling lofty unroofed corridors as if the whole town had been one palace, recognizing on his way the massive shape of one or two jutting balconies he remembered seeing before, and also a remarkable doorway, the arch of which was held up by bowed giants with flowing beards, like two captive sons of the god of the sea.

Chapter 3

At the moment when Cosmo was leaving his room to escape the haunting vision of an old picture representing a beautiful martyr with a dagger in her breast, Doctor Martel was at work finishing what he called a confidential memorandum which he proposed to hand over to the Marquis d'Armand. The doctor applied very high standards of honour and fidelity to his appreciation of men's character. He had a very great respect for the old Marquis. He was anxious to make him the recipient of that crop of valuable out-of-the-way information interesting to the French Bourbons which he had gathered lately.

Having sat up half the night, he slept late and was just finishing shaving when, a little before eleven o'clock, there was a knock at his door and Cantelucci entered. The innkeeper offered no apology for this intrusion, but announced without preliminaries that the young English gentleman had vanished during the night from the inn. The woman who took the chocolate in the morning upstairs found no servant ready to receive it as usual. The bedroom door was ajar. After much hesitation she had ventured to put her head through. The shutters being open, she had seen that the bed had not been slept in. . . . The doctor left off dabbing his cheeks with eau de cologne and turned to stare at the innkeeper. At last he shrugged his shoulders slightly.

Cantelucci took the point immediately. Yes. But in this case it was impossible to dismiss the affair lightly.

The young English signore had not been much more than forty-eight hours in Genoa. He had no time to make many acquaintances. And in any case, Cantelucci thought, he ought to have been back by this time.

The doctor picked up his wig and adjusted it on his head thoughtfully, like a considering cap. That simple action altered his physiognomy so completely that Cantelucci was secretly affected. He made one of his austerely deferential bows, which seemed to put the whole matter into the doctor's hands at once.

"You seem very much upset," said the doctor. "Have you seen his servant? He must know something."

"I doubt it, Excellency. He has been upstairs to open the shutters, of course. He is now at the front door, looking out. I did speak to him. He had too much wine last evening and fell asleep with his head on the table. I saw him myself before I retired."

The doctor preserving a sort of watchful silence, Cantelucci added that he, himself, had retired early on account of one of those periodical headaches he had suffered from since the days of his youth when he had been chained up in the dungeons of St. Elmo for months.

The doctor thought the fellow did look as though he had had a bad night. "Why didn't you come to see me? You know I can cure worse ailments."

The innkeeper raised his hands in horror at the mere idea. He would never have dared to disturb His Excellency for such a trifle as a headache. But the cause of his trouble was quite other. A partisan of the revolutionary French from his early youth, Cantelucci had been an active conspirator against the old order of things. Now that kings and priests were raising their heads out of the dust he had again become very busy. The latest matter in hand had been the sending of some important documents to the conspirators in the South. He had found the messenger, had taken steps for getting him away secretly, had given him full instructions the last thing before going to bed. The young fellow was brave, intelligent, and resourceful, beyond the common. But somehow the very perfection of his arrangements kept the old conspirator awake. He reviewed them again and again. He could not have done better. At last he fell asleep, but almost immediately, it seemed to him, he was roused by the old crone whose task it was to light the fires in the morning. Sordid and witchlike, she conveyed to him in

a toothless mumble the intelligence that Checca was in the kitchen, all in tears and demanding to see him at once.

This Checca was primarily and principally a pretty girl, an orphan left to his care by his late sister. She was not consulted when her uncle, of whom she stood in awe, married her to the middle-aged owner of a wineshop in the low quarter of the town extending along the shore near the harbour. He was good-natured, slow-witted, and heavy-handed at times. But Checca was much less afraid of him than of her austere uncle. It amused her to be the padrona of an osteria which in the days of Empire was a notable resort for the officers of French privateers. But on the peace that clientele had disappeared and Checca's husband, leaving the wine-casks to her management, employed his leisure in petty smuggling operations which kept him away from home.

Cantelucci connected his niece's irruption with some trouble that men might have got into. He was vexed. He had other matters to think of. He was astonished by the violence of her grief. "When she could speak at last her tale turned out to be more in the nature of a confession. The old conspirator could hardly believe his ears when he heard that the man whom he had trusted had committed the crime of betraying the secrecy of his mission by going to the osteria late at night to say good-bye to Checca. She assured him that he had been there only a very few moments.

"What, in a wine-shop! Before all the people! With spies swarming everywhere!"

"No," she said. It was much later. Everybody was gone. He had scratched at the barred door.

"And you were on the other side waiting to let him in — miserable girl," Cantelucci hissed ferociously.

She stared at her terrible uncle with streaming eyes. "Yes, I was." She had not the heart to refuse him. He stayed only a little moment. . . . (Cantelucci ground his teeth with rage. It was the first he had heard of this affair. Here was a most promising plot endangered by this bestialita.) . . . Only one little hug, and then she pushed him out herself. Before she had finished putting up the bar she heard a tumult in the street. Shots, too. Perhaps she would have rushed out but her husband was home for a few days. He came down to the wine-shop very cross and boxed her ears, she did not know why. Perhaps for being in the shop at that late hour. That did not matter; but he drove her before him up the stairs and she had to sham sleep for hours till he began to snore regularly. She had grown so desperate that she took the risk of running out and telling her uncle all about it. She thought he ought to know. What brought her to the inn really was a faint hope that Attilio, having eluded the assassins (she was sure they were assassins), had taken refuge there unscathed — or wounded perhaps. She said nothing of this, however. Before Cantelucci's stony bearing she broke down. "He is dead — poverino. My own hands pushed him to his death," she moaned to herself crazily, standing in front of her silent uncle before the blazing kitchen fire in the yet slumbering house.

Rage kept Cantelucci dumb. He was as shocked by what he had heard as the most rigid moralist could desire. But he was a conspirator, and all he could see in this was

the criminal conduct of those young people who ought to have thought of nothing but the liberation of Italy. For Attilio had taken the oath of the Carbonari; and Checca belonged to the women's organization of that secret society. She was an ortolana, as they called themselves. He had initiated her and was responsible for her conduct. The baseness — the stupidity — the frivolity — the selfishness!

By severe exercise of self-restraint he refrained from throwing her out into the street all in tears as she was. He only muttered awfully at her, "Get out of my sight, you little fool," with a menacing gesture; but she stood her ground; she never flinched before his raised hand. And as it fell harmless by his side she seized it in both her own, pressing it to her lips and breast in turn, whispering the while all sorts of endearing names at the infuriated Cantelucci. He heard the sounds of his staff beginning the work of the day, their voices, their footsteps. They would wonder — but his niece did not care. She clung to his hand, and he did not get rid of her till he had actually promised to send her news directly he had heard something himself. And she even thought of the means. There was that fine sailor with black whiskers in attendance on the English officers frequenting the hotel. He was a good-natured man. He knew the way to the wine-shop.

This reminded her of her husband. What if he should wake in her absence? And still distracted, she ran off at last, leaving Cantelucci to face the situation.

He was dismayed. He did not really know what had happened — not to his messenger but to the documents. The old conspirator, battling with his thoughts, moved so silent and stern amongst his people that nobody dared approach him for a couple of hours. And when they did at last come to him with the news of the young "milord's" disappearance he simply swore at them. But as the morning advanced he came to the conclusion that for various reasons it would be best for him to seek his old benefactor. He did so with a harassed face which caused the doctor to believe in the story of a sleepless night. Of course he spoke only of Cosmo's absence.

The doctor, leaning back against the edge of his dressing table, gazed silently at the innkeeper. He was profoundly disturbed by the intelligence. "Got your snuffbox on you?" he asked.

The alacrity of Cantelucci in producing his snuffbox was equalled by the deferential flourish with which he held it out to his benefactor.

"The young English signore," he remarked, "visited the Palazzo of the Griffins the evening before."

The doctor helped himself to a pinch. "He didn't spend the night there, though," he observed. "You know who lives in the Palazzo, don't you, Cantelucci?"

"Some Piedmontese general, I understand, Your Excellency," said Cantelucci, who had been in touch with Count Helion ever since the Austrian occupation, and had even forwarded secretly one or two letters for the Count to Elba. But these were addressed to a grain merchant in Porto Ferraio. "I will open all my mind to Your Excellency," continued Cantelucci. "An English milord is a person of consequence. If I were to report

his disappearance the police would be coming here to make investigation. I don't want any police in my house."

The doctor lost his meditative air. "I daresay you don't," he said grimly.

"I recommend myself to Your Excellency's protective influence," murmured Cantelucci insinuatingly.

The doctor let drop the pinch of snuff between his thumb and finger. "And he may have come back while we are talking here," he said hopefully. "Go down, Cantelucci, and send me my courier."

But the doctor's man was already at the door, bringing the brushed clothes over his arm. While dressing, the doctor speculated on the mystery. It baffled all his conjectures. A man may go out in the evening for a breath of fresh air and get knocked on the head. But how unlikely! He spoke casually to his man who was ministering to him in gloomy silence.

"You will have to step over to the police presently and find out whether anything has happened last night. Do it quietly."

"I understand," said the courier surlily. The thought that the fellow had been drunk recently crossed the doctor's mind.

"Whom were you drinking with last night?" he asked sharply.

"The English servant," confessed the courier-valet grumpily. "His master let him off his services last night."

"Yes. And you made him pay the shot." With these words the doctor left the room. While crossing the great hall downstairs he had the view of Spire's back framed in the entrance doorway. The valet had not apparently budged from there since seven. So Mr. Latham had not returned. In the dining room there were only two naval officers at the table reserved for them: the elderly gentleman in his usual place at the head, and a round-faced florid person in a bobbed wig, who might have been the ship's surgeon. During their meal the doctor did not hear them exchange a single remark. They went away together, and after the last of the town customers had left the room, too, the doctor sat alone before his table, toying with a half-empty glass thoughtfully. His grave face was start-lingly at variance with the short abrupt laugh which he emitted as he rose, pushing his chair back. It was provoked by the thought that only last evening he had been urging half jestingly his young countryman to leave Genoa in one of the conventional ways, by road or sea, and now he was gone with a vengeance — spirited away, by Jove! The doctor was startled at the profound change of his own feelings. Count Helion's venomous, "I don't want that popinjay here" did not sound so funny in his recollection now. Very extraordinary things could and did happen under the run of everyday life. Was it possible that the word of the riddle could be found there? he asked himself.

This investigator of the secret discontents and aspirations of his time had never shut his ears to the mere social gossip that came in his way. He had lived long, he remembered much. For instance, he could remember things that were said about Sir Charles Latham long before Cosmo was born. As to the story of the Monteverso marriage, that

had made noise enough in its time in society and also amongst the French Emigres. Its celebration, the subsequent differences, reconciliations, recriminations, and final arrangement had kept idle tongues wagging for years. Of course it was that match which had given that dubious Monteverso his social standing; and what followed had invested that absurd individual with the celebrity of a character out of a Moliere comedy: "Le Jaloux." The elderly jealous husband. Comic enough.

But that was the sort of comedy that soon takes a tragic turn. A special provocation, a sudden opportunity are enough. What puzzled the doctor was the suddenness of the problem. Yet one could not tell what an orientalized brute, no stranger probably to palace murders, had not the means of doing. He might have been harbouring in that barn of a palace some retainers of a deadly kind. A Corsican desperado, or a couple of rascals from his own native mountains. Had he not two unattractive old peasant women concealed there?

The doctor believed that unlikely things happened every day. This view was not the result of inborn credulity but of much acquired knowledge of a secret sort. A serious, fastidious, and obviously earnest-minded young man, like Latham, was particularly liable to get into trouble of a grave kind. A manifestation of perfectly innocent sympathy could do it, and even less. An unguarded glance. An unconscious warmth of tone. Confound it! Yet he could not let a young countryman of his, a nice, likable young gentleman, vanish from under his nose without taking some steps.

The doctor stepped out into the hall, attractively dim and cool in the middle of the day. Spire had disappeared, but the doctor had given up the hope of Cosmo's return. In a dark corner he perceived the shadowy shape of a cocked hat, and made out the old lieutenant leaning back against the wall with his arms crossed and his chin on his breast. He had a bottle of wine and a glass standing in front of him.

"I suppose," thought the doctor, "this is what he comes ashore for."

The product of twenty years of war. The reeking loom that converted such as he into food for guns had stopped suddenly. There would be no demand for heroes for a long, long time, and somehow the fact that the fellow had all his limbs about him made him even more pathetic. The doctor had almost forgotten Cosmo. He did not notice Spire coming down the stairs, and he started at the sound of the words, "I beg your pardon, sir," uttered almost in his ears. The elderly valet was very much shaken. He said in a low murmur, "I am nearly out of my mind, sir. My master ..."

"I know," interrupted the doctor. He pounced upon Spire like a bird of prey. "Come, what do you know about it?"

This reception roused Spire's dislike of that sour and off-hand person like no medical man he had ever seen and certainly no gentleman. On the principle, "like master like man," Spire was more sensitive to manner than to any trait of personality. He pulled himself together and steadied his voice. "I know nothing, sir, except that you were the last person seen speaking to Mr. Latham."

"You don't think I have got him in my pocket, do you?" asked Doctor Martel, noting the hostile stare. "Don't you attend your master when he retires for the night?"

"I got dismissed early last night. I am sorry to say I sat downstairs after supper very late, listening to tales about one thing and another. I ... I went to sleep there," added Spire with a sort of desperation.

"Listening to tales," repeated the doctor jeeringly. "Pretty tales they must have been, too. Zillers is no company for a respectable English servant. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Well, and then?"

"I went up, sir, and ..."

"In the middle of the night," suggested the doctor.

"It was pretty late. I . . ."

He faltered at the remembrance. The waking up in the cold dark kitchen, the cold dark staircase, the light shining through the keyhole of Mr. Cosmo's bedroom, the first vague feeling that there was something wrong, the empty room. And most awful of all, the bed not slept in, and the candles in the candelabras burning low. He remembered his horror, incredulity, his collapse into an armchair where he sat till broad daylight in a pitiable state of mental agitation.

A slight tremor passed through his portly frame before he forced himself to speak.

"Mr. Latham had emptied his pockets, sir, as if he were making ready to go to bed. All the change and the keys were lying on the mantelpiece. One would think he had been kidnapped. Of course it can't be," he added in a low, intense tone.

"Do you mean to say he disappeared without his hat?" asked the doctor.

"No, sir, hat and cloak aren't there." And to the doctor's further questions Spire confessed that he had spoken to no one in the house that morning. He would only have been told lies. He did not think much of the people in the inn.

"So I took the liberty of speaking to you, sir. Mr. Latham may turn up any moment and I don't know that he would like to find that I have been to the police already."

"No, perhaps he wouldn't," assented the doctor reflectively.

"That's just it, sir," murmured Spire. "Mr. Cosmo is a very peculiar young gentleman. He doesn't like notice to be taken."

"Doesn't he? Well then, you had better wait before you go to the police. We had better give him till four o'clock."

"Very well, sir," said Spire, fighting down his feeling that nothing in the world would be worse than this waiting. The doctor nodded dismissal, then at the last moment:

"By the by, hadn't you better look up all the papers that may be lying about?"

Spire was favourably impressed by the suggestion. "Yes, sir, we have a small strong box with us. I will go and do it at once."

During that colloquy, conducted in low tones at the foot of the grand staircase, nobody had appeared in the hall. Not even the vigilant Cantelucci. But the elderly lieutenant had raised his head, and his dull uninterested eyes followed the doctor across the hall and out through the door into the sunshine of the square. In all its vast and paved extent only very few figures were moving. The doctor's tastes and even his destiny had made of him a nocturnal visitor to the abodes of the great. At this time of the day, however, there was almost as little risk of being seen entering the Palace of

the Griffins as in the middle of the night. The populace, the shopkeepers, the Austrian garrison, the gendarmes, the sbirri, the spies, and even the conspirators were indulging in midday repose. The very team of dapple-gray horses, harnessed to an enormous two-wheeled cart drawn up in the shade, dozed over their empty nosebags. Dogs slumbered in the doorways in utter abandonment; and only the bronze griffins seated on their narrow pedestals of granite before the doorway of the Palace preserved their alert wide-awake pose of everlasting watchfulness. They were really very fine. And the doctor gave them an appreciative glance before crossing the empty quadrangle. He felt the only wide-awake person in a slumbering world. He wondered if he would succeed in getting admitted to the Palace. If not, he confessed to himself, he would be at a loss what to do next. Very disagreeable. He had, however, the memorandum for the Marquis in his pocket as a pretext for his visit.

All was still without and within; but in the noble anteroom at the foot of the marble staircase he was met by a sight characteristic of the easy Italian ways. Extended face downward on one of the red and gold benches, one of the footmen in shirt-sleeves and with his breeches untied at the knees was sleeping profoundly. His dishevelled head rested on his forearm. At an unceremonious poke in the ribs he jumped up to his feet, looking scared and wild. But Doctor Martel was ready for him.

“What’s the matter, my friend?” he asked softly. “Is there a price set on your head?”

The man remained open-mouthed as if paralysed by the caustic enquiry.

“Fetch the major-domo here,” commanded the doctor, thinking that he had seldom seen a more banditlike figure. While waiting, the doctor reflected that a livery coat was a good disguise. It occurred to him also that in the house of a man having such retainers all sorts of things might happen. This was Italy. The silence as of a tomb, which pervaded the whole house, though nothing extraordinary in the hour of siesta, produced the effect of sinister mystery. The arrival of the sleek Bernard did not destroy that bad impression. The doctor, who had never seen him before by daylight, said to himself that this was no doubt only another kind of villain. On learning that the Marquis had been very ill during the night and that Bernard could not think of taking in his name, the doctor inquired whether Madame de Monteverso would see him on most important business. To his great relief (because he had been asking himself all along how he could contrive to get private speech with the Countess) Bernard raised no objections. He simply went away. And again the dumbness around him grew oppressive to Doctor Martel. He fell into a brown study. This palace, famed for the treasures of art, for the splendours of its marbles and paintings and gildings, was no better than a gorgeous tomb. Men’s vanity erected these magnificent abodes only to receive in them the unavoidable guest, Death, with all the ceremonies of superstitious fear. The sense of human mortality evoked by this dumb palazzo was very disagreeable. He was relieved by the return of the noiseless Bernard, all in black and grave like a sleek caretaker of that particular tomb, who stood before him saying in a low voice: “Follow me, please.”

Bernard introduced the doctor into a comparatively small, well-lighted boudoir. At the same moment Madame de Monteverso entered it from her bedroom by another

door. The doctor had an impression of a gown with a train, trimmed with ribbons and lace, surmounted by a radiant fair head. The face was pale. Madame de Monteverso had been up most of the night with her father. The Marquis was too ill to see anybody.

The doctor expressed his regret in a formal tone. Meantime he took out of his pocket the memoir and begged Madame la Comtesse to keep it under lock and key till she could hand it over to her father. He was also in possession of information which, he said, would be of the greatest interest to the French court; but he could disclose it only to the French King or to Monsieur de Jaucourt. He was ready to proceed to Paris should the Marquis be impressed sufficiently by the memoir to procure for him a private audience from the King or the minister.

This curt, businesslike declaration called out a smile on that charming face — just a flicker — a suspicion of it. He could not be offended with that glorious being. He felt only that he “must assert himself.

“I cannot deal with lesser people,” he said simply. “This must be Understood in Paris. I make my own conditions. I am not a hireling. Your father has known me for years. Monsieur le Marquis and I met in other, dangerous times, in various parts of Europe. Each of us was risking his life.”

The Marquis had often talked with his daughter of his past. She had heard from him of a certain agent Martel, a singular personage. Her curiosity was aroused. She said:

“I know. I believe he was indebted to you for his safety on one occasion. I can understand my father’s motives. But you will forgive me for saying that as to yours ...”

“Oh! It was not the love of absolutism. The fact is, I discovered early in life that I was not made for a country practice. I started on my travels with no definite purpose, except to do a little good — here and there. I arrived in Italy while it was being revolutionized by Jacobins. I was not in love with them either. Humane impulses, circumstances, and so on, did the rest.”

He looked straight at her. This tête-a-tête was a unique experience. She was a marvellous being somehow and a very great lady. And yet she was as simple as a village maid — a glorified village maid. The trials of a life of exile and poverty had stripped her of the faintest trace of affectation or artificiality of any kind. The doctor was lost in wonder. What humanizing force there was in the beauty of that face to make him talk like that the first time he saw her! And suddenly the thought, “her face has been her fortune,” came to him with great force, evoking by the side of her noble unconscious grace the stiff wooden figure of Count de Monteverso. The effect was horrible, but the doctor’s hard gray eyes betrayed neither his horror nor his indignation. He only asked Madame de Monteverso, who was locking up his memoir in the drawer of a little writing table, if it would be safe there, and was told that nobody ever came into the room but a confidential mulatto maid who had been with the Countess for years.

“Yes, as far as you know,” the doctor ventured significantly. With this beginning he found no difficulty in discovering that Madame de Monteverso knew nothing of

the composition of the household. She did not know how many servants there were. She had not been interested enough to look over the Palazzo. Apart from the private apartments and the suite of rooms for small receptions she had seen nothing of it, she confessed, looking a little surprised. It was clear that she knew nothing, suspected nothing, had lived in that enormous and magnificent building like a lost child in a forest. The doctor felt himself at the end of his resources, till it occurred to him to say that he hoped that she was not specially anxious about her father. No, Madame de Monteverso was not specially anxious. He seemed better this morning. Doctor Martel was very much gratified; and then, by a sudden inspiration, added that it would be a pleasure to give the good news to Mr. Latham whom he hoped to see this evening.

Madame de Monteverso turned rigid with surprise for a moment at the sound of that name. "You have met Mr. Latham ..." she faltered out.

"Oh! By the merest chance. We are staying at the same inn. He shares my table. He is very attractive."

Madame de Monteverso looked no longer as though she expected her visitor to go away. The doctor had just time to note the change before he was asked point-blank:

"Did Mr. Latham tell you that he was a friend of ours?"

He answered evasively that he knew very little about Mr. Latham, except what he could see for himself — that Mr. Latham was very superior to the young men of fashion coming over in such numbers from England since the end of the war. That generation struck him as very crude and utterly uninteresting. It was different, as far as Mr. Latham was concerned. A situation had arisen which would make a little information as to his affairs very desirable.

"Desirable?" repeated Madame de Monteverso in a whisper.

"Yes, helpful. . . ."

The deliberate stress which he put on that word augmented Madame de Monteverso's bewilderment.

"I don't quite understand. In what way? Helpful for you — or helpful for Mr. Latham?"

"You see," said the doctor slowly, "though our acquaintance was short my interest was aroused. I am a useful person to know for those who travel in Italy."

Madame de Monteverso sank into a bergere, pointing at the same time to a chair which faced it. But the doctor, after a slight bow, only rested his hand on its high back. At the end of five minutes Adble was in possession of all the doctor knew about Cosmo's disappearance. She sat silent, her head drooped, her eyes cast down. The doctor was beginning to feel restive when she spoke, without looking up.

"And this is the real motive for your visit here."

The doctor was moved by the hopeless tone. It might have been an attempt to appear indifferent, but, only in a moment, she seemed to have become lifeless.

"Well," he said, "on the spot: of the moment it seemed the only thing to do. . . . There is somebody in the next room. May I shut the door?"

"It's only my maid," said Madame de Monteverso. "She couldn't hear us from there."

“Well, then perhaps we had better leave the door as it is. It’s best to avoid all appearance of secrecy.” The doctor was thinking of Count Helion, but Madame de Montevezzo made no sign. The doctor lowered his voice still more.

“I wanted to ask you if you had seen him yesterday — • last night. No? But he may have called without your knowledge.”

She admitted that it was possible. People had been sent away from the door on account of her father’s illness. There had been no reception in the evening. But Mr. Latham would have asked for her. She thought she would have been told. The doctor suggested that Mr. Latham might have asked for the Count. Madame de Montevezzo had only seen her husband for a moment in her father’s bedroom the day before, and not at all yet this day. For all she knew he may have been away for the day on a visit in the country. “But I know nothing of his interests, really,” she said in a little less deadened voice.

She could not explain to the doctor that she was a stranger in that house; an unwilling visitor with an unsympathetic host whose motives one cannot help suspecting. Beyond the time she spent by arrangement every year at Count de Montevezzo’s country-house she knew nothing of his life. What could have been the motives which brought him to Genoa, she had and could have not the slightest idea. She only felt that she ought not to have accepted his pressing invitation to this hired palazzo. But then she could not have come with her father to Genoa. And yet he could not have done without her. And indeed it seemed but a small thing. The alarming thought crossed her mind that, all unwittingly, she had taken a fatal step.

The doctor, who had quite an accurate notion of the state of affairs, hastened to say:

“After all, I don’t know that this is of any importance. I have heard that Mr. Latham was busy writing all yesterday. If he had come to Italy with some sort of purpose,” he continued as if arguing with himself, “one could ...” Then sharply: “You couldn’t tell me anything, could you?” he asked Adele.

“This is the first time I have seen him for ten years.” Madame de Montevezzo raised her eyes, full of trouble, to the doctor’s face. “Since we were children together in Yorkshire. We talked of old times. Only of old times,” she repeated.

“Of course — very natural,” mumbled the doctor. He made the mental remark that one did not disappear like this after talking of old times. And aloud he said, “I suppose Mr. Latham made the acquaintance of Count de Montevezzo.”

“Certainly.”

“I presume that they had an opportunity to have a conversation together.”

“I don’t think that Cosmo — that Mr. Latham made any confidences to Count de Montevezzo.” While saying those words Adele looked the doctor straight in the face.

He was asking himself whether she could read his thoughts, when she got up suddenly and walked away to the window, without haste and with a grace of movement which aroused the doctor’s admiration. He could not tell her what he had in his mind.

He looked irresolutely at the figure in the window. It was growing enigmatic in its immobility. He began to feel some little awe, when he heard unexpectedly the words:

“You suspect a crime?”

The doctor could not guess the effort which went to the uttering of those few words. It was the stunning force of the shock which enabled Adele de Monteverso to appear so calm. It was the general humanity of Doctor Martel’s disposition which dictated his answer.

“I suspect some imprudence,” he admitted in an easy tone. At that moment he drew the gloomiest view of Cosmo’s disappearance, from the sinister conviction that twenty-four hours was enough to arrange an assassination. “The difficulty is to imagine a cause for it. To find the motive. . . .”

Madame de Monteverso continued to face the window as if lost in the contemplation of a vast landscape. “And you came to look for it here,” she said.

“I don’t think I need to apologize,” he said, with a movement of annoyance like a man who has received a home thrust. “Of course I might have simply gone about my own affairs, which are of some importance to a good many people. My advice to Mr. Latham was to leave Genoa, since he did not seem to have any object in remaining and seemed to have a half-formed wish to visit Elba. I suggested Leghorn as the best port for crossing over.”

It was impossible to say whether the woman at the window was listening to him at all. She did not stir, she seemed to have forgotten his existence. But that immobility might have been also the effect of concentrated attention. He made up his mind to go on speak-ing.

“His mind, his imagination seemed very busy with Napoleon. It seemed to me the only reason for his travels.” He paused.

“I believe the only reason for Mr. Latham coming to Genoa was to see us.” Madame de Monteverso turned round and moved back towards the bergere. She was extremely pale. “I mean Father and myself,” she explained. “He came to see me the day before yesterday in the morning. I invited him to our usual evening reception. He stayed after everybody else was gone. I asked him to. But my father needed me and I had to leave Mr. Latham with Monsieur de Monteverso.”

The doctor interrupted her gently. “I know, Madame. I was in the Palazzo with the Marquis, in the very room, when he sent for your husband.”

“I forgot,” confessed Madame de Monteverso simply. “But Mr. Latham got back to his inn safely.”

“Yes. He was writing letters next day till late in the evening, and seems to have been spirited away in the middle of that occupation. But people like Mr. Latham are not spirited out of their bedrooms by main force. I advised the servant to wait till four o’clock, then I came straight here.”

“Till four o’clock,” repeated Madame de Monteverso under her breath.

The doctor, a man of special capacity in confronting enigmatical situations, showed himself as perplexed before this one as the most innocent of mortals.

"I don't know. It seems to me that a man who puts on his hat and cloak before vanishing like this must turn up again. He ought to be given a chance to do so at any rate. He left all his money behind, too. I mean even to the small change."

The glimpse of helpless concern in that man affected Adele with a feeling of actual bodily anguish. She got brusquely out of the bergre and moved into the middle of the room. The doctor, letting go the back of the chair, turned to face her.

"I am appalled," she murmured.

This came out as if extracted from her by torture. It moved the doctor more than anything he had heard for years. His voice sank into a soothing murmur.

"I do believe, Madame, that if there had been a murder committed last night anywhere in this town I would have heard something about it this morning. My inn is just the place for such news. I will go back there now. I shall question his servant again. He may give us a gleam of light."

Her intent, distressed gaze was unbearable, yet held him bound to the spot. It was difficult to abandon a woman in that state! He became aware of the sound of voices outside the door. Some sort of dispute. He hastened to make his bow, and Madame de Monteverso, moving after him, whispered eagerly: "Yes! A gleam of light! Do let me know. I won't draw a free breath till I hear something."

Her extended arms dropped by her side a moment before the door flew open and Bernard was heard announcing with calm formality:

"Signorina Clelia."

The doctor, turning away from Madame de Monteverso, saw "that little wretch" standing just within the room, evidently very much taken aback by the unexpected meeting. He guessed that she had snatched at some opportunity to escape from the old women. It had given her no time to pull on her stockings, a fact made evident by the shortness of the dark petticoat which, with a white jacket, comprised all her costume. She had managed to thrust her bare feet into a pair of old slippers, and her loose hair, tied with a blue ribbon at the back of her head, produced a most incongruous effect of neatness. Her invasion was alarming and inexplicable. The doctor, as he passed out, compressed his lips and stared fiercely with some idea of scaring her into good behaviour. She met this demonstration with a round stupid stare of astonishment. The next moment he found himself outside in the corridor alone with Bernard, who had shut the door quietly and remained with his back to it. The exasperated doctor looked him up and down coolly.

"How long have you been in the habit of hanging about your lady's door, my friend?" he asked with ominous familiarity.

The simple-minded factotum of the London days, the love-lorn naive swain of the mulatto maid, was a figure of the past now. The doctor was confronted by a calm unmoved servant of much experience, somewhat inclining to stoutness, made respectable by the black well-fitting clothes. He did not flinch at the question, but he took his time. At last he said with the utmost placidity:

"Many years now. Pretty near all my life."

The tone was well calculated to surprise the doctor. Taking advantage of the latter's silence, Bernard paused before he continued reasonably: "Was I to let her rush in unannounced on Madame la Comtesse while you were there? I tried to send her away but she would think nothing of filling the air with her screams. I kept her back as long as it was prudent. . . ." He raised his open hand, palm outwards, warning the doctor to remain silent, while with conscientious gravity he applied his big ear to the door. When he came away he did not apparently intend to take any further notice of the doctor, but stood there with an air of perfect rectitude.

"Is that your constant practice?" asked the astonished doctor, with curiosity rather than indignation. "Suppose I told on you," he added with a glance at the door. "Suppose somebody else gave you away. . . ."

"You would not be thanked," was the unexpected answer.

"I wouldn't be believed — is that it? Well, I confess that I can hardly believe my own eyes."

"Oh, you would be believed," was the ready but dispassionate admission. Bernard's trust in his interlocutor's acuteness was not deceived.

"Do you mean that you have been found out already?" said the doctor in a changed tone. "Whew! You don't say! Well, stranger things have happened. Whose old retainer are you?"

"I have always belonged to Madame la Comtesse," said the old retainer without looking at the doctor, who, after some meditation, accepted the statement at its face value.

"I am staying at Cantelucci's inn," he said in an ordinary conversational tone. "And I would be glad to see you there any time you like to call. Especially if you had anything to tell me of Mr. Latham." Bernard not responding in any way to that invitation, the doctor added, "You know what I mean?"

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean." That answer came coldly from the lips of the respectable servant, who said nothing more while conscientiously escorting the doctor to the anteroom at the foot of the grand staircase. A little bowed old woman in black clothes clung to the balustrade half way down the marble steps, in the act of descending, while another, taller and upright, hovered anxiously on the landing above. Bernard's scandalized, "Go away! Go back!" sounded irresistibly authoritative. The doctor had no doubt that it would send the two crones back to their lair, but he did not stop to see.

Bernard went up the staircase slowly to the first landing, where he watched the retreat of the two weird apparitions down a long and dim corridor. They were very much intimidated by this man in black and with a priestly aspect. One of them, however, made a stand, and screamed in an angry cracked voice, "Where's the child? The child! We are looking for her."

"Why don't you take her back to your village and keep her there?" he cried out sternly. "I have seen her. She won't get lost."

A distant door slammed. They had vanished as if blown away by his voice; and Bernard with a muttered afterthought, "More's the pity," continued up one flight of stairs after another till he reached the wilderness of the garrets that once upon a time had been inhabited by a multitude of servants and retainers. The room he entered was low and sombre, with rough walls and a vast bare floor. His wife Aglae sat on the edge of the bed, with her hands in her lap and downcast eyes which she did not raise at his entrance. He looked at her with a serious and friendly expression before he sat down by her side. And even then she did not move. He took her tragic immobility in silence as a matter of course. His face, which had never been very mobile, had acquired with years a sort of blank dignity. It had been the work of years, of those married years which had crushed the last vestiges of pertness out of the more emotional Aglae. When she whispered to him, "Bernard, this thing kill me a little every day," he felt moved to put his arm round his wife's waist and made a mental remark which always occurred to him poignantly on such occasions, that she had grown very thin. In the trials of a life which had not kept its promise of contented bliss, he had been most impressed by the loss of that plumpness which years ago was so much appreciated by him. It seemed to give to that plaint which he had heard before more than once an awful sort of reality, a dreadful precision. ... A little. . . . Every day.

He took his arm away brusquely and got up.

"I thought I would find you here," he remarked in an indifferent marital tone. "That man has gone now," he added.

With a deep sigh the maid of Madame de Monteverso struggled out of the depths of despondency, only to fall a prey to anxiety.

"Oh, Bernard, what did that man want with Miss Ad&le?"

Bernard knew enough to have formed a conjecture that that English fellow must have either left some papers or a message for the Marquis with Madame de Monteverso.

Part 4

Chapter 1

In what seemed to him a very short time Cosmo found himself under the colonnade separating the town piled upon the hills from the flat ground of the waterside. A profound quietness reigned on the darkly polished surface of the harbour and the long, incurved range of the quays. This quietness that surrounded him on all sides through which, beyond the spars of clustered coasters, he could look at the night-horizon of the open sea, relieved that fantastic feeling of confinement within his own body with its intolerable tremors and shrinkings and imperious suggestions. Mere weaknesses all. His desire, however, to climb to the top of the tower, as if only there complete relief could be found for his captive spirit, was as strong as ever.

The only light on shore he could see issued in a dim streak from the door of the guardhouse which he had passed on his return from the tower on his first evening in Genoa. As he did not wish to pass near the Austrian sentry at the head of the landing-steps, Cosmo, instead of following the quay, kept under the portico at the back of the guardhouse. When he came to its end he had a view of the squat bulk of the tower across a considerable space of flat waste ground extending to the low rocks of the seashore. He made for it with the directness of a man possessed by a fixed idea. When he reached the iron-studded low door within the deep dark archway at the foot of the tower he found it immovable. Locked! How stupid! As if those heavy ship guns up there could be stolen! Disappointed, he leaned his shoulders against the side of the deep arch, lingering as people will before the finality of a closed door or of a situation without issue.

His superstitious mood had left him. An old picture was an old picture; and probably the face of that noble saint copied from an old triptych and of Madame de Monteverso were not at all alike. At most, a suggestion which may have been the doing of the copyist and so without meaning. A copyist is not an inspired person; not a seer of visions. He felt critical, almost ironic, towards the Cosmo of the morning, the Cosmo of the day, the Cosmo rushing away like a scared child from a fanciful resemblance, that probably did not even exist. What was he doing there? He might have asked the way to the public gardens. Lurking within the dark archway, muffled up in his blue cloak, he was a suspect figure like an ambushed spadassin waiting for his victim, or a conspirator hiding from the minions of a tyrant. "I am perfectly ridiculous," he thought. "I had better go back as soon as I can." This was his sudden conclusion, but he did not

move. It struck him that he was not anxious to face his empty room. Was he ready to get into another panic? he asked himself scornfully. ... At that moment he heard distinctly the sound of whispering as if through the wall, or from above or from the ground. He held his breath. The whispering went on, loquacious. When it stopped, another voice, as low but deeper and more distinct, muttered the words: "The hour is past."

Ha! Whispers in the air, sounds wandering without bodies, as mysterious as though they had come across a hundred miles, for he had heard no footsteps, no rustle, no sound of any sort. Nothing but the two voices. They were so weirdly disembodied and unbelievable that he had to clothe them in attributes: the excitable — the morose. They were quite near. But he did not know on which side of the arch within which he was hiding. For he was frankly hiding now — no doubt about it. He had remembered that he had left his pistols by his bedside. And he was certain he would hear the voices again. The wait seemed long before the fluent-loquacious came back through space and was punctually followed by the deep voice which this time emitted only an unintelligible grunt.

The disagreeable sense of having no means of defence in case of necessity prevented Cosmo from leaving the shelter of the deep arch. Two men, the excitable and the morose, were within a foot of him. Remembering that the tower was accessible on its seaward face, Cosmo surmised that they had just landed from a boat and had crept round barefooted, secret and, no doubt, ready to use their knives. Smugglers probably. That they should ply their trade within three hundred yards of the guardroom with a sentry outside did not surprise him very much. These were Austrian soldiers, ignorant of local conditions and certainly not concerned with the prevention of smuggling. Why didn't these men go about their business, then? The road was clear. But perhaps they had gone? It seemed to him he had been there glued to that door for an hour. As a matter of fact it was not ten minutes. Cosmo, who had no mind to be stabbed through a mere mistake as to his character, was just thinking of making a dash in the direction of the guardhouse when the morose but cautiously lowered voice began, close to the arch, abruptly: "Where did the beast get to? I thought a moment ago he was coming. Didn't you think too that there were footsteps — just as we landed?"

Cosmo's uplifted foot came down to the ground. Of the excitable whisperer's long rigmarole not a word could be made out. Cosmo imagined him short and thick. The other, whom Cosmo pictured to himself as lean and tall, uttered the word, "Why?" The excitable man hissed fiercely: "To say good-bye." — "Devil take all these women," commented the morose voice dispassionately. The whisper, now raised to the pitch of a strangled wheeze, remarked with some feeling: "He may never see her again."

It was clear they had never even dreamt of any human being besides themselves having anything to do on this part of the shore at this hour of the night. "Won't they be frightened when I rush out," thought Cosmo taking off his cloak and throwing it over his left forearm. If it came to an encounter he could always drop it. But he did not seriously think that he would be reduced to using his fists.

He judged it prudent to leave the archway with a bound which would get him well clear of the tower, and on alighting faced about quickly. He heard an exclamation but he saw no one. They had bolted! He would have laughed had he not been startled himself by a shot fired somewhere in the distance behind his back — the most brutally impressive sound that can break the silence of the night. Instantly, as if it had been a signal, a lot of shouting broke on his ear, yells of warning and encouragement, a savage clamour which made him think of a lot of people pursuing a mad dog. He advanced, however, in the direction of the portico, wishing himself out of the way of this odious commotion, when the flash of a musket shot showed him for a moment the tilted head in a shako and the white cross-belts of an Austrian soldier standing erect in the middle of the open ground. Cosmo stopped short, then inclined to the left, moving cautiously and staring into the darkness. The yelling had died out gradually away from the seashore, where he remembered a cluster of the poorer sort of houses nestled under the cliffs. He could not believe that the shot could have been fired at him, till another flash and report of a musket followed by the whizz of the bullet very near his hand persuaded him to the contrary. Thinking of nothing but getting out of the line of fire, he stooped low and ran on blindly till his shoulder came in contact with some obstacle extremely hard and perfectly immovable.

He put his hand on it, felt it rough and cold, and discovered it was a stone, an enormous square block such as are used in building breakwaters. Several others were lying about in a cluster like a miniature village on a miniature plain. He crept amongst them, spread his cloak on the ground, and sat down with his back against one of the blocks. He wondered at the marvellous eyesight of that confounded soldier. He was not aware that his dark figure had the starry sky for a background. "He nearly had me," he thought. His whole being recoiled with disgust from the risk of getting a musket ball through his body. He resolved to remain where he was till all that incomprehensible excitement had quietened down and that brute with wonderful powers of vision had gone away. Then his road would be clear. He would give him plenty of time.

The stillness all around continued, becoming more convincing, as the time passed, in its suggestion of everything being over, convincing enough to shame, to humiliate itself. Why this reluctance to go back to his room? What was a room in an inn, in any house? A small portion of space fenced off with bricks or stones in which innumerable individuals had been alone with their good and evil thoughts, temptations, fears, troubles of all sorts, and had gone out without leaving a trace. This train of thought led him to the reflection that no man could leave his troubles behind . . . never . . . never. . . . "It's no use trying," he thought with despair. Why should he go to Livorno? What would be the good of going home? Lengthening the distance would be like lengthening a chain. What use would it be to get out of sight? . . . "If I were to be struck blind to-morrow it wouldn't help me." He forgot where he was till the convincing silence round him crumbled to pieces before a faint and distant shout which recalled him to the sense of his position. Presently he heard more shouting, still distant but much nearer. This took his mind from himself and started his imagination on another track. The man hunt

was not over, then! The fellow had broken cover again and had been headed towards the tower. He depicted the hunted man to himself as long-legged, spare, agile, for no other reason than because he wished him to escape. He wondered whether the soldier with the sharp eyes would give him a shot. But no shot broke the silence which had succeeded the distant shouts. Got away perhaps? At least for a time. Very possibly he had stabbed somebody and ... by heaven! here he was!

Cosmo had caught the faint sound of running feet on the hard ground. And even before he had decided that it was no illusion it stopped short and a bulky object fell hurtling from the sky so near to him that Cosmo instinctively drew in his legs with a general start of his body which caused him to knock his hat off against the stone. He became aware of a man's back almost within reach of his arm. There could be no doubt he had taken a leap over the stone and had landed squatting on his heels. Cosmo expected him to rebound and vanish, but he only extended his arm to seize the hat as it rolled past him and at the same moment pivoted on his toes, preserving his squatting posture.

"If lie happens to have a knife in his hand he will plunge it into me," thought Cosmo. So without moving a limb he hastened to say in a loud whisper: "Run to the tower. Your friends are waiting for you." It was a sudden inspiration. The man without rising flung himself forward full length and, propped on his arms, brought his face close to Cosmo. His white eyeballs seemed to be starting out of his head. In this position the silence between them lasted for several seconds.

"My friends, but who are you?" muttered the man.

And then the recognition came, instantaneous and mutual. Cosmo simply said, "Hallo!" while the man, letting himself fall to the ground, uttered in a voice faint with emotion, "My Englishman!"

"There were two of them," said Cosmo.

"Two? Did they see you?"

Cosmo assured him that they had not. The other, still agitated by the unexpectedness of that meeting, asked, incredulous and even a little suspicious: "What am I to think, then? How could you know that they were my friends?"

Cosmo disregarded the question. "You will be caught if you linger here," he whispered.

The other, as though he had not heard the warning, insisted: "How could they have mentioned my name to you?"

"They mentioned no names. . . . Run."

"I don't think they are there now," said the fugitive.

"Yes. There was noise enough to scare anybody away," commented Cosmo. "What have you done?"

The other made no answer, and in the pause both men listened intently. The night remained dark. Cosmo thought: "Some smuggling affair," and the other muttered to himself, "I have misled them." He sat up by the side of Cosmo and put Cosmo's hat, which he had been apparently holding all the time, on the ground between them.

"You are a cool hand," said Cosmo. "The soldiers ..."

"Who cares for the soldiers? They can't run."

"They have muskets, though."

"Oh, yes. I heard the shots and wondered at whom they were fired."

"At me. That's why I have got in here. There is one of them who can see in the dark," explained Cosmo, who had been very much impressed. His friend of the tower emitted a little chuckle.

"And so you have hidden yourself in here. Soldiers, water, and fire soon make room for themselves. But they did not know who they were after. They got the alarm from that beast."

He paused suddenly, and Cosmo asked: "Who was after you?"

"One traitor and God knows how many sbirri. If they had been only ten minutes later they would have never set eyes on me."

"I wonder they didn't manage to cut you off, if they were so many," said Cosmo.

"They didn't know. Look! Even now I have deceived them by doubling back. You see I was in a house." He seemed to hesitate.

"Oh, yes," said Cosmo. "Saying good-bye."

The man by his side made a slight movement and preserved a profound silence for a time.

"As I have no demon," he began slowly, "to keep me informed about other people's affairs, I must ask you what you were doing here?"

"Why, taking the air like that other evening. But why don't you try to get away while there is time?"

"Yes, but where?"

"You were going to leave Genoa," said Cosmo. "Either on a very long or a very deadly journey."

Again the man by his side made a movement of surprise and remained silent for a while. This was very extraordinary, as though some devil having his own means to obtain knowledge had taken on himself for a disguise the body of an Englishman of the kind that travels and stays in inns. The acquaintance of Cosmo's almost first hour in Genoa was very much puzzled and a little suspicious, not as before something dangerous but as before something inexplicable, obscure to his mind like the instruments that fate makes use of sometimes in the affairs of men.

"So you did see two men a little while ago waiting for me?"

"I did not see them. They seemed to think you were late," was the surprising answer.

"And how do you know they were waiting for me?"

"I didn't," said Cosmo naturally. And the other muttered a remark that he was glad to hear of something that Cosmo did not know. But Cosmo continued: "Of course I didn't, not till you jumped in here."

The other made a gesture requesting silence and lent his ear to the unbroken stillness of the surroundings.

“Signore,” he said suddenly in a very quiet and distinct whisper, “it may be true that I was about to leave this town, but I never thought of leaving it by swimming. No doubt the noise was enough to frighten anybody away, but it has been quiet enough now for a long time and I think that I will crawl on as far as the tower to see whether perchance they didn’t think it worth while to bring their boat back to the foot of the tower. I have put my enemies off the track and I fancy they are looking for me in very distant places from here.

The treachery, signore, was not in the telling them where I was. Anybody with eyes could have seen me walking about Genoa. No, it was in the telling them who I was.”

He paused again to listen and suddenly changed his position, drawing in his legs.

“Well,” said Cosmo, “I myself wonder who you are.” He noticed the other’s eyes rolling, and the whisper came out of his lips much faster and, as it were, more confidential.

“Attilio, at your service,” the mocking whisper fell into Cosmo’s ear. “I see the signore is not so much of a wizard as I thought.” Then with great rapidity: “Should the signore find something, one never knows, Cantelucci would be the man to give it to.”

And suddenly with a half turn he ran off on all fours, looking for an instant monstrous and vanishing so suddenly that Cosmo remained confounded. He was trying to think what all this might mean, when his ears were invaded by the sound of many footsteps and before he could make a move to get up he found himself surrounded by quite a number of men. As a matter of fact there were only four; but they stood close over him as he sat on the ground, their dark figures blotting all view, with an overpowering effect. Very prudently Cosmo did not attempt to rise; he only picked up his hat, and as he did so it seemed to him that there was something strange about the feel of it. When he put it on his head some object neither very hard nor very heavy fell on the top of his head. He repressed the impulse to have a look at once. “What on earth can it be?” he thought. It felt like a parcel of papers. It was certainly flat. An awestruck voice said, “That’s a foreigner.” Another muttered, “What’s this devilry?” As Cosmo made an attempt to rise with what dignity he might, the nearest of the band stooped with alacrity and caught hold of his arm above the elbow as if to help him up, with a muttered, “Permesso, signore .” And as soon as he regained his feet his other arm was seized from behind by someone else without any ceremony. A slight attempt to shake himself free convinced Cosmo that they meant to stick on.

“Would it be an accomplice?” wondered a voice.

“No. Look at his hat. That’s an Englishman.”

“So much the worse. They are very troublesome. Authority is nothing to them.”

All this time one or another would take a turn to peer closely into Cosmo’s face, in a way which struck him as offensive. Cosmo had not the slightest doubt that he was in the hands of the municipal sbirri. That strange Attilio had detected their approach from afar. “He might have given me a warning,” he thought. His annoyance with the fugitive did not last long; but he began to be angry with his captors, of which every one, he noticed, carried a cudgel.

“What authority have you to interfere with me?” he asked haughtily. The wretch who was holding his right arm murmured judicially: “An Inglese, without a doubt.” A stout man in a wide-brimmed hat, who was standing in front of him, grunted: “The authority oi four against one,” then addressed his companions to the general effect that he didn’t know what the world was coming to if foreigners were allowed to mix themselves up with conspirators. It looked as if they had been a1 a loss what to do with their captive. One of them in sinuated: “ I don’t know. Those foreigners have plenty of money and are impatient of restraint. A poor mar may get a chance.”

Cosmo thought that probably each of them was pro vided with a stiletto. Nothing prevented them from stabbing him in several places, weighting his body with some stones from the seashore, and throwing it into the water. What an unlucky reputation to have! He remembered that he had no money with him. The few coins he used to carry in his pocket were lying on his mantelpiece in the bedroom at the inn. This would have made no difference if those men had been bandits, since they would not be aware of the emptiness of his pockets. “ I could have probably bribed them to let me go,” he thought, after he had heard the same man add with a little laugh, “I mean obliging poor men. Those English signori are rich and harmless.”

Cosmo regretted more than ever not being able to make them an offer. It would have been probably successful, as they seemed to be in doubt what to do next. He mentioned he was living at the Casa Graziani. “If one of you will go with me there you shall be recompensed for your trouble.” No answer was made to that proposal except that one of the men coughed slightly. Their chief in a hat with an enormous brim seemed lost in deep thought, and his immobility in front of Cosmo appeared to the latter amusingly mysterious and sinister. A sort of nervous impatience came over Cosmo, an absurd longing to tear himself away and make a dash for liberty, and then an absurd discouragement as though he were a criminal with no hiding-place to make for. The man in the big hat jerked up his head suddenly and disclosed the irritable state of his feelings at the failure of getting hold of that *furfante*. “As to that Englishman,” he continued in his rasping voice not corresponding to his physical bulk, “let him be taken to the guardroom. He will have to show his papers.”

Cosmo was provoked to say: “Do you expect a gentleman to carry his papers with him when he goes out for a walk?”

He was disconcerted by an outburst of laughter on three sides of him. The leader in the hat did not laugh; he only said bitterly: “We expect papers from a man we find hiding.”

“Well, I have no papers on me,” said Cosmo, and immediately in a sort of mental illumination thought, “ Except in my hat.” Of course that object reposing on the top of his head was a bundle of papers, dangerous documents. Attilio was a conspirator. Obviously! The mysterious allusion to something he was to find and hand over to Cantelucci became clear to Cosmo. He felt very indignant with his mysterious acquaintance. “Of course he couldn’t foresee I was going to get into this predicament,” he thought, as if trying to find an excuse for him already.

“Avanti,” commanded the man in front of him.

The grip on his arm of the two others tightened, resistance was no use though he felt sorely tempted again to engage in a struggle. If only he could free himself for a moment, dash off into the darkness, and throw that absurd packet away somewhere before they caught him again. It was a sort of solution; but he discovered in himself an unsuspected and unreasoning loyalty. “No! Somebody would find it and take it to the police,” he thought. “If we come near the quay I may manage to fling it on the water.”

He said with lofty negligence: “You needn’t hold my arms.”

This suggestion was met by a profound silence. Neither of the men holding him relaxed his grasp. Another was treading close on his heels, while the police-hound in the big hat marched a couple of paces in front of him, importantly.

Before long they approached the guardhouse close enough for Cosmo to see the sentry at the foot of the steps, who challenged them militarily. The sbirro in the hat advanced alone and made himself known in the light streaming through the door. It was too late to attempt anything. As he was impelled by his two captors inside the guardroom, which was lighted by a smoky lamp and also full of tobacco smoke, Cosmo thought, “I am in for it. What a horrible nuisance! I wonder whether they will search me?”

At Cosmo’s entrance with his escort several soldiers reclining on the floor raised their heads. It was a small place which may have been used as a store for sails or cordage. The furniture consisted of one long bench, a rack of muskets, a table, and one chair. A sergeant sitting on that chair rose and talked with the head sbirro for a time in a familiar and interested manner about the incidents of the chase, before he even looked at Cosmo. Cosmo could not hear the words. The sergeant was a fine man with long black moustaches and a great scar on his cheek. He nodded from time to time in an understanding manner to the man in the hat, whom the light of the guardroom disclosed as the possessor of very small eyes, a short thick beard, and a pear-shaped yellow physiognomy which had a pained expression. At the suggestion of the sbirri (they had let him go) Cosmo sat down on a bench running along the wall. Part of it was occupied by a soldier stretched at full length with his head on his knapsack and with his shako hung above him on the wall. He was profoundly asleep. “Perhaps that’s the fellow who took those shots at me,” thought Cosmo. Another of the sbirri approached Cosmo and with a propitiatory smile handed him his cloak. Cosmo had forgotten all about it.

“I carried it behind the signore all the way,” he murmured with an air of secrecy; and Cosmo was moved to say: “You ought to have brought it to me at Canteluc-ci’s inn,” in a significant tone. The man made a deprecatory gesture and said in a low voice: “The signore may want it to-night.”

He was young. His eyes met Cosmo’s without flinch-ing.

“I see,” whispered Cosmo. “What is going to be done with me?” The man looked away indifferently and said: “I am new at this work; but there is a post of royal gendarmerie on the other side of the harbour.”

He threw himself on the bench by Cosmo's side, stretched his legs out, folded his arms across his breast, and yawned unconcernedly.

"Can I trust him?" Cosmo asked himself. Nobody seemed to pay any attention to him. The sbirro in the hat bustled out of the guardroom in great haste; the other two remained on guard; the sergeant sitting astride the chair folded his arms on the back of it and stared at the night through the open door. The sbirro by Cosmo's side muttered, looking up at the ceiling: "I think Barbone is gone to find a boatman." From this Cosmo understood that he was going to be taken across the harbour and given up to the gendarmes. He thought, "If they insist upon searching me I would have to submit and in any case a hat is not a hiding-place. I may just as well hand the packet over without a struggle." A bright idea struck him. "If those fellows take me over there in a boat to save themselves the trouble of walking round the harbour I will simply contrive to drop my hat overboard — even if they do hold my arms during the passage." He was now convinced that Attilio belonged to some secret society. He certainly was no common fellow. He wondered what had happened to him. Was he slinking and dodging about the low parts of the town on his way to some refuge; or had he really found the excitable man and the grumpy man still waiting under the tower with a boat? Most unlikely after such an alarming commotion of yells and shots. He feared that Attilio, unable to get away, could hardly avoid being caught to-morrow, or at the furthest next day. He himself obviously did not expect anything better; or else he would not have been so anxious to get rid of those papers. Cosmo concluded that conspirators were perfectly absurd with their passion for documents, which were invariably found at a critical time and sent them all to the gallows.

He noticed the eyes of the sergeant, a Croat, with pendent black moustaches, fixed on his hat, and at once felt uneasy as if he had belonged to a secret society himself. His hat was the latest thing in men's round hats which he had bought in Paris. But, almost directly, the sergeant's eyes wandered off to the doorway and resumed their stare. Cosmo was relieved. He decided, however, to attempt no communication with the young police fellow whose lounging attitude, abandoned and drowsy, and almost touching elbows with him, seemed to Cosmo too suggestive to be trustworthy. And indeed, he reflected, what could he do for him?

His excitement about this adventure was combined in a strange way with a state of inward peace which he had not known for hours. He wondered at his loyalty to the astute Attilio. He would have been justified in regarding the transaction as a scurvy trick; whereas he found that he could not help contemplating it as a matter of trust. He went on exercising his wits upon the problem of those documents (he was sure those were papers of some kind) which he had been asked to give to Cantelucci (how surprised he would be), since apparently the innkeeper was a conspirator too. Yet, he thought, it would be better to destroy them than to let them fall into the hands of the Piedmontese justice, or the Austrian military command. "I must contrive," he thought, "to get rid of them in the boat. I can always shake my hat overboard accidentally." But the packet would float and some boatman would be sure to find it during the

day. On the other hand, by the time daylight came the handwriting would probably have become illegible. Or perhaps not? Fire, not water, was what he needed. If there had been a fire in that inexpressibly dirty guardroom he would have made use of it at once under the very noses of those wild-looking Croats. But would that have been the proper thing to do in such a hurry?

He had not come to any conclusion before Barbone returned, accompanied by a silver-haired, meek old fellow, with a nut-brown face, bare-footed and bare-armed, and carrying a pair of sculls over his shoulder, whom Barbone pushed in front of the sergeant. The latter took his short pipe out of his mouth, spat on one side, looked at the old man with a fixed savage stare, and finally nodded. At Cosmo he did not look at all, but to Barbone he handed a key with the words, "Bring it back." The sbirri closed round Cosmo and Barbone uttered a growl with a gesture towards the door. Why Barbone should require a key to take him out of doors Cosmo could not understand. Unless it were the key of liberty. But it was not likely that the fierce Croat and the gloomy Barbone should have indulged in symbolic actions. The mariner with the sculls on his shoulder followed the group patiently to where, on the very edge of the quay, the Austrian soldier with his musket shouldered paced to and fro across the streak of reddish light from the garrison door. He swung round and stood, very martial, in front of the group, but at the sight of the key exhibited to him by Barbone moved out of the way. The air was calm but chilly. Below the level of the quay there was the clinking of metal and the rattling of small chains, and Cosmo then discovered that the key belonged to a padlock securing the chain to which quite a lot of small rowing boats were moored. The young policeman said from behind into Cosmo's ear, "The signore is always forgetting his cloak," and threw it lightly on Cosmo's shoulders. He explained also that every night all the small boats in the port were collected and secured like this on both sides of the port and the Austrians furnished the sentry to look after them on this side. The object was that there should be no boats moving after ten o'clock, except the galley of the dogana and of course the boat of the English man-of-war.

"Come and see me at noon at Cantelucci's inn," whispered Cosmo, to which the other breathed out a, "Certainly, Excellency," feelingly before going up the steps.

Cosmo found himself presently sitting in a boat between two sbirri. The ancient fellow shoved off and shipped his oars. From the quay, high above, Barbone's voice shouted to him, "The gendarmes will take charge of your boat for the rest of the night." The old boatman's only answer was a deep sigh, and in a very few strokes the quay with the sentry receded into the darkness. One of the sbirri remarked in a tone of satisfaction, "Our service will be over after we have given up the signore there." The other said, "I hope the signore will consider we have been kept late on his account." Cosmo, who was contemplating with immense distaste the prospect of being delivered up to the gendarmes, emitted a mirthless laugh, and after a while said in a cold tone: "Why waste your time in pulling to the other side of the harbour? Put me on board the nearest vessel. I'll soon find my way to the quay from one tartane to another, and your service would be over at once."

The fellow on his left assumed an astonishing seriousness: "Most of those tartanes have a dog on board. We could not expose an illustrious stranger to get bitten by one of these ugly brutes."

But the other had no mind for grave mockery. In a harsh and overbearing tone he ordered the boatman to pull well into the middle of the harbour away from the moored craft.

It was like crossing a lake overshadowed by the hills with the breakwaters prolonging the shore to seaward. The old man raised and dipped his oars slowly, without a sound, and the long trails of starlight trembled on the ripples on each side of the boat. When they had progressed far enough to open the harbour entrance Cosmo detected between the end of the jetties far away — he was glancing casually about — a dark speck about the size of a man's head, which ought not to have been there. The air was perfectly still and the stars thick on the horizon. It struck him at once that it could be nothing than either the English man-of-war's boat or the boat of the dogana, since no others were allowed to move at night. His thoughts were, however, so busy with speculating as to what he had better do that he paid no more attention to that remarkable speck. He looked absently at the silver-haired boatman pulling an easy stroke and asked himself: Was it or was it not time to lose his hat overboard? How could he contrive to make it look plausible in this absurd calm? Then he reproached himself for reasoning as if those two low fellows (whose proximity had grown extremely irksome to him) had wits of preternatural sharpness. If he were to snatch it and fling it away they would probably conclude that he was trying to make himself troublesome, or simply mad, or anything in the world rather than guess that he had in his hat something which he wanted to destroy. He undid quietly the clasp of his cloak and rested his hands on his knees. His guardians did not think it necessary now to hold his arms. In fact they did not seem to pay much attention to him. Cosmo asked himself for a moment whether he would stand up suddenly and jump into the water. Of course he knew that fully clothed and in his boots they would very soon get hold of him, but the object would have been attained. However, the prospect of being towed behind a boat to the custom-house quay by the collar of his coat and being led into the presence of the gendarmes looking like a drowned rat was so disagreeable that he rejected that plan.

By that time the boat had reached little more than half way across the harbour. The great body of the shipping was merged with the shore. The nearest vessels were a polacca brig and xebec lying at anchor. Both were shadowy, and the last, with her low spars, a mere low smudge on the dim sheen of the water. From time to time the aged boatman emitted a moan. The boat seemed hardly to move. Everything afloat was silent and dark. The crews of the coasters were ashore or asleep; and if there were any dogs on board any of them they too seemed plunged in the same slumber that lay over all things of the earth, and by contrast with which the stars of heaven looked intensely wakeful. In the midst of his perplexities Cosmo enjoyed the feeling of peace that had come to him directly his trouble had begun.

“We will be all night getting across,” growled suddenly the man on his left. . . I don’t know what

Barbone was thinking of to get this antiquity out of his bed.”

“I told him there was hardly any breath in my old body,” declared the boatman’s tranquil voice.

Apparently in order to speak he had to cease rowing, for he rested on his oars while he went on in the gravelike silence. “But he raged like a devil; and rather than let him wake up all the neighbours I came out. I may just as well die in the boat as in bed.”

Both sbirri exclaimed indignantly against Barbone, but neither offered to take the sculls. With a painful groan the old man began to pull again. Cosmo asked: “What’s that dark thing between the heads of the jetties?” One of his captors, turning his head to look, said, “That must be the galley. I wish she would come this way. We would ask her for a tow.” The other man remarked sarcastically, “No fear, they are all snoozing in her except one perhaps to keep a lookout. It’s an easy life. . . . Voga, vecchio, voga.”

Cosmo thought suddenly that if by any chance the man-of-war boat happened to be pulling that way he would hail her without hesitation, and, surely, the officer in charge would not leave him in the hands of those villains without at least listening to his tale. Unluckily their way across the harbour did not take them near the man-of-war. The light at her mizzen peak seemed to Cosmo very far away; so that if it had not burned against the dark background of the land it would have seemed more distant than any star, and not half as brightly vigilant. He took his eyes from it and let them rest idly on the water ahead. The sbirro on his right hand emitted an immense yawn. This provided the other to mutter curses on the tediousness of all this affair. Cosmo had been too perplexed to feel bored.

Just then as if in antagonism to those offensive manifestations he felt very alert. Moreover, the moment when something would have to be done was approaching, a tension of all his senses accumulating in a sort of all-over impatience. While in that state, staring into the night, he caught sight of the man-of-war’s boat.

But was it? — well, it was something dark on the water, and as there was no other boat about . . . It was small — well, far off and probably end on. . . . He had heard no sound of rowing . . . lying on her oars . . . He could see nothing now . . . well, here goes, on the chance.

Without stirring a limb he took a long breath and let out the shout of “Boat ahoy” with all the force of his lungs. The volume of tone astonished himself. It seemed to fill the whole of the harbour so effectually that he felt he needn’t shout again and he remained as still as a statue. The effect on his neighbours was that both gave a violent start, which set the boat rolling slightly, and in their bewilderment they bent forward to peer into his face with immense eyes. After a time one of them asked in an awestruck murmur, “What’s the matter, signore?” and seized his cloak. The other, Cosmo heard distinctly whisper to himself, “That was a war cry,” while he also grabbed the cloak. The clasp being undone, it slipped off Cosmo’s shoulders and then they clung to his

arms. It struck Cosmo as remarkable that the old boatman had not ceased his feeble rowing for a moment.

The shout had done Cosmo good. It reestablished his self-respect somehow and it sent the blood moving through his veins as if indeed it had been a war cry. He had shaken their nerves. If they had not remained perfectly motionless holding his arms there would have started a scrimmage in that boat which would certainly have ended in the water. But their grip was feeble. They did nothing, but, bending towards each other in front of Cosmo till their heads almost touched, watched his lips from which such an extraordinary shout had come. Cosmo stared stonily ahead as if unconscious of their existence, and again he had that strange illusion of a dark spot ahead of the boat. He thought, "That's no illusion. What a fool I was. It must be a mooring buoy." A couple of minutes elapsed before he thought again, "That old fellow will be right into it, presently."

He didn't consider it his business to utter a warning because the bump he expected happened almost immediately. He had misjudged the distance. Owing to the slow pace the impact was very slight, slighter even than Cosmo expected against such a heavy body as a mooring buoy would be. It was really more like a feeble hollow sound than a shock. Cosmo, who was prepared for it, was really the one that felt it at once, and the ancient boatman looked sharply over his shoulder. He uttered no sound and did not even attempt to rise from the thwart. He simply, as it seemed to Cosmo, let go the oars. The sbirri only became aware of something having happened after the hollow bump was repeated, and Cosmo had become aware that the object on the water was not a buoy but another boat not much bigger than theirs. Then they both exclaimed and in their surprise their grip relaxed. One of them cried in astonishment, "An empty boat." It was indeed a surprising occurrence. With no particular purpose in his mind Cosmo stood up while one of the sbirri stood up either to catch hold of the boat or push it away, for the two boats were alongside each other by that time. A strange voice in the dark said very loud: "The man in the hat," and as if by enchantment three figures appeared standing in a row. Cosmo had not even time to feel surprised. The two boats started knocking about considerably, and he felt himself seized by the collar and one arm and dragged away violently from between the two sbirri by the power of irresistible arms which as suddenly let him go as if he were an inanimate object, and he fell heavily in the bottom of the second boat almost before his legs were altogether clear of the other. During this violent translation his hat fell off his head without any scheming on his part.

He was not exactly frightened but he was excusably flustered. One is not kidnapped like this without any preliminaries every day. He was painfully aware of being in the way of his new captors. He was kicked in the ribs and his legs were trodden upon. He heard blows being struck against hard substances which he knew were human skulls because of the abortive yells ending in groans. There was a determination and ferocity in this attack combined with the least possible amount of noise. All he could hear were

the heavy blows and the hard breathing of the assailants. Then came a sort of helpless splash. "Somebody will get drowned," he thought.

He made haste to pull himself forward from under the feet of the combatants. Luckily for his ribs they were bare, which also added to the quietness of that astonishing development. Once in the bows he sat up, and by that time everything was over. Three shadowy forms were standing in a row in the boat, motionless, like labourers who had accomplished a notable task. The boat out of which he had been dragged was floating within a yard or two, apparently empty. The whole affair, which could not have lasted more than a minute, seemed to Cosmo to have been absolutely instantaneous. Not a sound came from the shipping along the quays, not even from the brig and the xebec which were the nearest. A sense of final stillness such as follows, for instance, the explosion of a mine and resembles the annihilation of all one's perceptive faculties took possession of Cosmo for a moment. Presently he heard a very earnest but low voice cautioning the silent world: "If you dare make a noise I will come back and kill you." It was perfectly impersonal; it had no direction, no particular destination. Cosmo, who heard the words distinctly, could connect no image of a human being with them. He was roused at last when, dropping his hand on the gunwale, he felt human fingers under it. He snatched his hand away as if burnt and only then looked over. The white hair of the old boatman seemed to rest on the water right against the boat's side. He was holding on silently, even in this position displaying the meek patience of his venerable age — and Cosmo contemplated him in silence. A voice, not at all impersonal this time, said from the stern sheets, "Get out your oars."

"There is a man in the water here," said Cosmo, wondering at his own voice being heard in those fantastic conditions. It produced, however, the desired effect, and almost as soon as he had spoken Cosmo had to help a bearded sailor, who was a complete stranger to him, to haul the old man inside the boat. He was no great weight to get over the gunwale, but they had to handle him as if he had been drowned. He never attempted to help himself. The other men in the boat took an interest in the proceedings.

"Is he dead?" came a subdued inquiry from aft.

"He is very old and feeble," explained Cosmo in an undertone. Somebody swore long but softly, ending with the remark: "Here's a complication."

"That scoundrel Barbone dragged out a dying man," began Cosmo impulsively.

"Va bene, va bene . . . Bundle him in and come aft, signore."

Cosmo, obeying this injunction, found himself sitting in the stern sheets by the side of a man whose first act was to put his hand lightly upon his shoulder in a way that conveyed a sort of gentle exultation. The discovery that the man was Attilio was too startling for comment at the first moment. The next it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

"It seems as if nothing could keep us apart," said that extraordinary man in a low voice. He took his hand off Cosmo's shoulder and directed the two rowers — who, Cosmo surmised, were the whisperers of the tower — to pull under the bows of the

brig. "We must hide from those custom-house fellows," he said. "I fancy the galley is coming along."

No other word was uttered till one of the men got hold of the brig's cable and the boat came to a rest with her side against the stem of that vessel, when Cosmo, who now could himself hear the faint noise of rowing* asked Attilio in a whisper: "Are they after you?"

"If they are after anything," answered the other coolly, "they are after a very fine voice. What made you give that shout? "

"I had to behave like a frightened mouse before those sbirri on account of those papers you left with me, and I felt that I must assert myself." Cosmo gave this psychological explanation grimly. He changed his tone to add that, fancying he had seen the shape of the English man-of-war's boat, the temptation to hail her had been irresistible.

"Possibly that's what started them. They know nothing of us. Luck was on our side. We slipped in unseen." The sound of rowing meantime had grown loud enough to take away from them all desire for further conversation, for the noise of heavy oars working in their rowlocks has a purposeful relentless character on a still night, and the big twelve-oared galley, pulled with a short quick stroke, seemed to hold an unerring way in its hollow thundering progress. For those in the boat concealed under the bows of the brig the strain of having to listen without being able to see was growing intolerable. Cosmo asked himself anxiously whether he was going to be captured once more before this night of surprises was out, but at the last moment the galley swerved and passed under the stern of the polacca as if bent on taking merely a sweep round the harbour. Everybody in the boat drew a long breath. But almost immediately afterwards the sound of rowing stopped short and everyone in the boat seemed turned again into stone.

At last Attilio breathed into Cosmo's ear, "Per Dio I They have found the other boat."

Cosmo was almost ashamed at the swift eagerness of his fearfully whispered inquiry: "Are the men in her dead?"

"All I know is that if either of them is able to talk we are lost," Attilio whispered back.

"These sbirri were going to deliver me to the gendarmes," Cosmo began under his breath, when all at once the noise of the oars burst again on their ears abruptly; but soon all apprehension was at an end, because it became clear that the sound was receding towards the east side of the harbour. In fact the custom-house people who had started to row round because of a vague impression that there had been some shouting in the harbour had to their immense surprise come upon a boat which at first seemed empty but which, they soon discovered, contained two human forms huddled up on the bottom boards, apparently dead, but at any rate insensible if they were still breathing, Attilio's surmise that as the quickest way of dealing with this mystery the custom-house officer had decided to tow the boat at once to the police station on the east side was perfectly right; and also his conviction that now or never was his chance

to slip out of that harbour where he and his companions felt themselves in a trap the door of which might snap to at any time. At the best it was a desperate situation, he felt. Cosmo felt it, too, if in a more detached way — like a rather unwilling spectator. Yet his anxiety for the safety of his companions was as great as though he had known them all his life. Though he had in a way lost sight of his personal connection he could not help forming his own view, which he poured into Attilio's ear while the two rowers put all their strength into their work.

Tensely rigid at the tiller, Attilio had listened, keeping his eyes fixed on the gap of dark gleaming water between the black heads of the two breakwaters.

"The signore is right," he assented. "We could not hope to escape from that galley once she caught sight of us. Our only chance is to slip out of the port before she gets back to her station outside the jetties. This affair will be a great puzzle to them. They will lose some time talking it over with the gendarmes. Unless one or another of those sbirri comes to himself."

"Yes. Those sbirri . . ." murmured Cosmo.

"What would you have? We did our best with the boat-stretchers, I can assure you."

Cosmo had no doubt of that. The sound of crashing blows rained on those wretches' heads had been sickening, but the memory comforted him now. So did the return of the profound stillness after the noise of the galley's oars had died out in the distance. Cosmo took heart till it came upon him suddenly that there never had been a starry sky that gave so much light, no night so amazingly clear, no harbour of such an enormous extent. He felt he must not lose a minute. He jumped up and began to tear off his coat madly. Attilio exclaimed in dismay, "Stay! Don't!" It looked as though his Englishman had made up his mind to swim for it. But Cosmo with a muttered, "I must lend a hand," stepped lightly forward past the rowers, and began to feel under thwarts for a spare oar. Before he found it his hand came in contact with a naked foot. This recalled to him the existence of the ancient boatman. The poor old fellow who had taken no part in the fray had fallen overboard from mere weakness and had had a long soaking in chilly water. He lay curled up in the bows, shivering violently like a dog. For the moment Cosmo was simply vexed at this additional dead weight in the boat. He could think of nothing but of the custom-house galley. He imagined her long, slim, cleaving the glassy water, as if endowed with life, while the clumsy tub in which he sat felt to him a dead thing which had to be tugged along by main force every inch of the way. He set his teeth hard and pulled doggedly as if rowing in a losing race, without turning his head once. Suddenly he became aware of the end of the old Mole gliding past the boat, and that Attilio instead of holding on this way had taken a sweep and was following the outer side of the breakwater towards the shore. Presently, at his word, the oars were taken in, and the boat floated arrested in shallow water amongst the boulders strewn along the base of the Mole. The men panted after their exertions. Not a breath of wind stirred the chilly air. Cosmo returned aft and sat down by Attilio after putting on his coat.

It seemed as though Attilio, while steering with one hand, had managed with the other to go through the pockets of Cosmo's coat, for his first words murmured in an anxious tone were "Signore, where are those papers?"

Cosmo had forgotten all about them. The shock was severe. "The papers," he exclaimed faintly. "In my hat."

"Yes, I put them there. You had it on your head in the boat. I recognized you by it."

"Of course I had it on. Where is it?"

"God knows," said Attilio bitterly. "I was asking you for the papers."

"I only discovered that the packet was in my hat after I put it on," protested Cosmo. "Four sbirri were standing over me already."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Attilio, very low.

"Afterwards I was watched all the time."

While they were exchanging those words in the extremity of their consternation, the man nearest to them went down suddenly on his knees and began to grope under the thwarts industriously. Having heard the word "hat" he had remembered that while battling with the sbirri he had trodden on some round object which had given way under his foot. He assured the signore that it was a thing that could not be helped while he tendered to him apologetically the rim with one hand and the crown with the other. It was crushed flat like an empty bag, but it was seized with avidity and presently Cosmo's feelings were relieved by the discovery that it still contained the parcel of papers. Attilio took possession of it with a low nervous laugh. It was an emotional sound which, coming from that man, gave Cosmo food for wonder during the few moments the silence lasted before Attilio announced in a whisper, "Here she is."

Cosmo, looking seaward, saw on the black and gleaming water, polished like a mirror for the stars, an opaque hummock resembling the head of a rock; and he thought that the race had been won by a very narrow margin. The galley in fact had reached the heads of the jetties a very few minutes only after the boat. On getting back to his station the officer in the galley pulled about fifty yards clear of the end of the old Mole and ordered his men to lay oars in. He had left the solution of the mystery to the police. It was not his concern; and as he knew nothing of the existence of an outside boat, it never occurred to him to investigate along the coast. Attilio's boat lurking close inshore was invisible from seaward. The distance between the two was great enough to cause the considerable clatter which is made when several oars are laid in together at the word of command to reach Cosmo only as a very faint, almost mysterious, sound. It was the last he was to hear for a very long time. He surrendered to the soft and invincible stillness of air and sea and stars enveloping the active desires and the secret fears of men who have the sombre earth for their stage. At every momentary pause in his long and fantastic adventure it returned with its splendid charm and glorious serenity, resembling the power of a great and unfathomable love whose tenderness like a sacred spell lays to rest all the vividities and all the violences of passionate desire.

Dreamily Cosmo had lost control of the trend of his thoughts, as one does on the verge of sleep. He regained it with a slight start and looked up at the round tower looming up, bulky, at the water's edge. He was back again, having completed the cycle of his adventures and not knowing what would happen next. Everybody was silent. The two men at the thwarts had folded their arms and had let their chins sink on their breasts; while Attilio, sitting in the stern sheets, held his head up in an immobility to which his open eyes lent an air of extreme vigilance. The waste of waters seemed to extend from the shores of Italy to the very confines of the universe, with nothing on it but the black spot of the galley which moved no more than the head of a rock. "We can't stay here till daylight," thought Cosmo.

That same thought was in Attilio's mind. The race between his boat and the galley had been very close. It was very probable that had it not been for Cosmo volunteering to pull the third oar it would have resulted in a dead heat, which of course would have meant capture. As it was, Attilio had just escaped being seen by pulling short round the jetty instead of holding on into the open sea. It was a risky thing to do, but then, since he had jeopardized the success of his escape through his desire to get hold of Cosmo again, there was nothing before him but a choice of risks.

Attilio was a native of a tiny white townlet on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Genoa. His people were all small cultivators and fishermen. Their name was Pieschi, from whose blood came the well-known conspirator against the power of the Dorias and in the days of the Republic. Of this fact Attilio had heard only lately (Cantelucci had told him) with a certain satisfaction. In his early youth, spent on the coast of the South American continent, he had heard much talk of a subversive kind and had become familiar with the idea of revolt looked upon as an assertion of manly dignity and the spiritual aim of life. He had come back to his country about six months before and, beholding the aged faces of some of his people in the unchanged surroundings, it seemed to him that it was his own life that had been very long, though he was only about thirty. Being a relation of Cantelucci he found himself very soon in touch with the humbler members of secret societies, survivals of the revolutionary epoch, stirred up by the downfall of the Empire and inspired by grandiose ideas, by the hatred of the Austrian invaders bringing back with them the old tyrannical superstitions of religion and the oppression of privileged classes. Like the polite innkeeper he believed in the absolute equality of all men. He respected all religions but despised the priests who preached submission and perceived nothing extravagant in the formation of an Italian empire (of which he had the first hint from the irritable old cobbler, the uncle of Cecchina) since there was a great man — a great Emperor — to put at its head, very close at hand. The great thing was to keep him safe from the attempts of all these kings and princes now engaged in plotting against his life in Vienna — till the hour of action came. No small task, for the world outside the ranks of the people was full of his enemies.

Attilio, still and silent by Cosmo's side, was not reproaching himself for having gone in the evening to say good-bye to Cecchina. The girl herself had been surprised to see

him, for they had said good-bye already in the afternoon. But this love affair was not quite two months old and he could not have been satisfied with a hurried wordless good-bye, snatched behind a half-closed door, with several people drinking at the long table in Cantelucci's kitchen on one side and a crabbed old woman rummaging noisily in a storeroom at the end of the dark passage. Cecchina had, of course, reproached him for coming, but not very much. Neither of them dreamed of there being any danger in it. Then, straight out of her arms, as it were, he had stepped into that ambush! His presence of mind and his agility proved too much for the party of the stupid Barbone. It was only after he had given them the slip in the maze of small garden plots at the back of the houses that he had time, while lying behind a low wall, to think over

this unexpected trouble. He knew that the fellows who were after him belonged to the police, because they had called on the soldiers for assistance; but he concluded that he owed this surprise to some jealous admirer of Cecchina. It was easy enough for any base scoundrel to set the police after a man in these troubled times. It may even have been one of Cantelucci's affiliated friends. His suspicions rested on the small employees who took their meals at the inn, and especially on a lanky scribe with a pointed nose like a rat who had the habit of going in and out through the courier's room, only, Attilio believed, in order to make eyes at Cecchina. That the ambush had been laid on the eve-ning fixed for his departure was a mere coincidence.

The real danger of the position was in having the papers on him, but, anxious that his friends at the tower should not give him up, he came out of his hiding-place too soon. The soldiers had gone away, but the sbirri were still half-heartedly poking about in dark corners and caught sight of him. Another rush saved him for the moment. The position he felt was growing desperate. He dared not throw away the papers. The discovery of Cosmo sitting amongst the stones was an event so extraordinary in itself that it revolutionized his rational view of life as a whole in the way a miracle might have done. He felt suddenly an awed and confiding love for that marvellous person fate had thrown in his way. The pursuit was close. There was no time to explain. There was no need.

But directly he found himself safe in the boat Attilio began to regret having parted with the papers. It was not much use proceeding on his mission without these documents entrusted to him by Cantelucci, acting on behalf of superior powers.

He asked himself what could have happened to Cosmo? Did the fellows arrest him on suspicion? That was not very likely, and at worst it would not mean more than a short detention. They would not dare to search him, surely. But even if they found the packet Cosmo would declare it his own property and object to its being opened. He had a complete confidence in Cosmo's loyalty and, what was more, in that young Englishman's power to have his own way. He had the manner for that and the face for that. The face and bearing of a man with whom it was lucky to be associated in anything.

The galley being just then at the other end of her beat, Attilio saw his way clear to slip into the harbour. The state of perfect quietness over the whole extent of the

harbour encouraged his native audacity. He began by pulling to the east side where the gendarmerie office was near the quay. Everything was quiet there. He made his men lay their oars amongst the shadows of the anchored shipping and waited. Sleep, breathless sleep, reigned on shore and afloat. Attilio began to think that Cosmo could not have been discovered. If so, then he must be nearing Cantelucci's inn by this time. He resolved then to board one of the empty coasters moored to the quay, wait for the morning there, and then go himself to the inn, where he could remain concealed till another departure could be arranged. He told his men to pull gently to the darkest part of the quay. And then he heard Cosmo's mighty shout. He was nearly as confounded by it as the sbirri in the boat. That voice bursting out on the profound stillness seemed loud enough to wake up every sleeper in the town, to bring the stones rolling down the hillsides. And almost at once he thought, "What luck!" The luck of the Englishman's amazing impudence; for what other man would have thought of doing that thing? He told his rowers to lay their oars in quietly and get hold of the boat-stretchers. The extremely feeble pulling of the old boatman gave the time for these preparations. He whispered his instructions: "We've got to get a foreign signore out of that boat. The others in her will be sbirri. Hit them hard." Just before the boats came into contact he recognized Cosmo's form standing up. It was then that he pronounced the words, "the man in the hat," which were heard by Cosmo. Attilio ascribed it all to luck that attended those who had anything to do with that Englishman. Even the very escape unseen from the harbour he ascribed, not to Cosmo's extra oar, but to Cosmo's peculiar personality.

Without departing from his immobility he broke silence by a "signore," pronounced in a distinct but restrained voice. Cosmo was glad to learn the story before the moment came for them to part. But the theory of luck which Attilio tacked on to the facts did not seem to him convincing. He remarked that if Attilio had not come for him at all he would have been far on the way in his mysterious affairs, whereas now he was only in another trap.

For all answer the other murmured, "Si, but I wonder if it would have been the same. Signore, isn't it strange that we should have been drawn together from the first moment you put foot in Genoa?"

"It is," said Cosmo, with an emphasis that encouraged the other to continue, but with a less assured voice.

"Some people of old believed that stars have something to do with meetings and partings by their disposition and that some if not all men have each a star allotted to them."

"Perhaps," said Cosmo in the same subdued voice.

"But I believe there is a man greater than you or I who believes he has a star of his own."

"Napoleon, perhaps."

"So I have heard," said Cosmo, and thought, "Here he is, whenever two men meet he is a third, one can't get rid of him."

"I wonder where it is," said Attilio, as if to himself, looking up at the sky. "Or yours, or mine," he added in a still lower tone. "They must be pretty close together."

Cosmo humoured the superstitious strain absently, for he felt a secret sympathy for that man. "Yes, it looks as if yours and mine had been fated to draw together."

"No, I mean all three together."

"Do you? Then you must know more than I do. Though indeed as a matter of fact he is not very far from us where we sit. But don't you think, my friend, that there are men and women, too, whose stars mark them for loneliness no man can approach?"

"You mean because they are great."

"Because they are incomparable," said Cosmo after a short pause, in which Attilio seemed to ponder.

"I like that what you said," Attilio was heard at last. "Their stars may be lonely. Look how still they are. But men are more like ships that come suddenly upon each other without a warning. And yet they, too, are guided by the stars. I can't get over the wonder of our meeting to-night."

"If you hadn't been so long in saying good-bye we wouldn't have met," said Cosmo, looking at the two men dozing on the thwarts, the whisperers of the tower. They were not at all like what he had imagined them to be.

Attilio gazed at his Englishman for a time closely. He seemed to see a smile on Cosmo's lips. Wonder at his omniscience prevented him from making a reply. He preferred not to ask, and yet he was incapable of forming a guess, for there are certain kinds of obviousness that escape speculation.

"You may be right," he said. "It's the first time in my life that I found it hard to say good-bye. I begin to believe," he went on murmuring, "that there are people it would be better for one not to know. There are women ..."

"Yes," said Cosmo, very low and as if unconscious of what he was saying. "I have seen your faces very close together."

The other made a slight movement away from Cosmo and then bent towards him. "You have seen," he said slowly and stopped short. He was thinking of something that had happened only two hours before. "Oh well," he said with composure, "you know everything, you see everything that happens. Do you know what will happen to us two?"

"It's very likely that when we part we will never see each other again," Cosmo said, resting his elbows on his knees and taking his head between his hands. He did not look like a man preparing to go ashore.

There were no material difficulties absolutely to prevent him from landing. The foot of the tower with the narrow strip of ground which a boat could approach was not sixty yards off, and all this was in the shadow of its own reflection, the high side of the breakwater, the bulk of the tower, making the glassy water dark in that corner of the shore. And besides, the water in which the boat floated was so shallow that Cosmo could have got to land by wading from where the boat lay without wetting himself much above the knees, should

Attilio refuse to come out from under the shelter of the rock. But probably Attilio would not have objected. The difficulty was not there.

Attilio must have been thinking on the same subject, as became evident when he asked Cosmo whether those sbirri knew where he lived. After some reflection Cosmo said that he was quite certain they knew nothing about it. The sbirri had put no questions to him. They had not, he said, displayed any particular curiosity about what he was. "But why do you ask?"

"Don't you know?" said Attilio, with only half-affected surprise. "There might have been a dozen of them waiting for you in the neighbourhood on the chance of your returning, and you have no other place to go to."

"No, I haven't," said Cosmo in a tone as though he regretted that circumstance. He thought, however, that there might have been some of them out between the port and the town, and he knew only one way and that not very well, he added.

As a matter of fact that danger was altogether imaginary, because Barbone, who certainly was in the pay of the police for work of that sort, was not imaginative enough to do things without orders, and after sending his prisoner off left the rest of the gendarmes and went home to bed, while his young acolyte went about his own affairs. The other two sbirri were being medically attended to, one of them especially being very nearly half killed by an unlucky blow on the temple. All the other sbirro could say in a feeble voice was that there were four in the boat, that they were attacked by an inexplicable murderous gang, and that he imagined that the other two, the prisoner and the boatman, were now dead and very likely at the bottom of the harbour. The brigadier of the gendarmerie could not get any more out of him, and, knowing absolutely nothing of the affair, thought it would be time to make his report to the superior authorities in the morning. All he did was to go round to the places where the boats were chained, which were under his particular charge, and count the boats. Not one was wanting. His responsibility was not engaged.

Thus there was nothing between Cosmo and Cante-lucci's inn except his own distaste. There was a strange tameness in that proceeding, a lack of finality, something almost degrading. He imagined himself slinking like a criminal at the back of the beastly guardhouse, starting at shadows, creeping under the colonnade, getting lost in those dreadful deep lanes between palaces, with the constant dread of having suddenly the paws of those vile fellows laid on him and being dragged to some police post with an absurd tale on his lips and without a hat on his head and what for? Simply to get back to that abominable bedroom. However, he would have to go through it.

"Pity you don't know the town," Attilio's cautious voice was heard again, "or else I could tell you of a place where you could spend the remainder of the night and send word to your servant to-morrow. But you could not find it by yourself. And that's a pity. I assure Your Excellency that she is a real good woman. To have a secret place is not such a bad thing. One never knows what one may need, and she is a creature to be trusted. She has an Italian heart and she is a giardiniera too. What more could I tell you?"

Cosmo thought to himself vaguely that the girl he had seen in Cantelucci's kitchen did not look like a woman gardener, though of course if Attilio had a love affair it would be naturally amongst people of that sort. But it occurred to him that perhaps it was some other woman Attilio was talking about. He made no movement. Attilio's murmurs took on a tone of resignation. "Your luck, signore, will depart with you, and perhaps ours will follow after." Cosmo protested against that unreasonable assumption, which was of course an absurdity but nevertheless touched him in one of those sensitive spots which are like a *dSfaut d'armure* in the battle-harness of various conceits which one wears against one's kind. He considered luck less in a sudden overwhelming conviction of it, in the manner of a man who had crossed the path of a radiating influence, or who had awakened a sleeping and destructive power which would now pursue him to the end of his life. He was young, farouche, mistrustful and austere, not like a stoic, but in the more human way like a man who has been born fastidious. In a sense altogether unworldly. Attilio emitted an audible sigh.

"You won't call it your luck," he pursued. "Well, let us leave it without a name. It is something in you. Your carelessness in following your fantasy, signore, as when you forced your presence on me only two days ago," he insisted, as if carelessness and fantasy were the compelling instruments of success. His voice was at its lowest as he added: "Your genius makes you true to your will."

No human being could have been insensible to such words uttered unexpectedly in a tone of secret earnestness. But Cosmo's inward response was a feeling of profound despondency. He was crushed by their appalling unfitness. For the last twenty-four hours he had been asking himself whether he had a will of his own, and it had seemed to him that he had lost the notion of the real nature of courage. At that very moment while listening to the mysteriously low pitch of Attilio's voice the thought flashed through his mind that there was something within him that made of him a predestined victim of remorse.

"You can't possibly know anything about me, Attilio," he said, "and whatever you like to imagine about me, you will have to put me on shore presently. I can't stay here till the morning, and neither can you," he added. "What are you thinking of doing? What can you do?"

"Is it possible that it is of any interest to the signore? Only the other evening I could not induce you to leave me to myself, and now you are impatient to leave me to my fate. What can I do? I can always take a desperate chance," he paused, and added through his clenched teeth, "and when I think what little I need to make it almost safe ..." The piously uttered exclamation, "Ah, Dio/" was accompanied by a shake of a clenched fist apparently addressed to the universe, but made as it were discreetly, in keeping with the low and forcible tones.

"And what is that?" asked Cosmo, raising his head.

"Two pairs of stout arms, nothing more. With four oars and this boat and using a little judgment in getting away I would defy that fellow there." He jerked his head

towards the galley which in this tideless sea had not shifted her position a yard. "Yes," he went on, "I could even hope to remain unseen on account of a quick dash."

And he explained to Cosmo further that in an hour or so a little nearer the break of day, when men get heavy and sleepy, the watchfulness of those customhouse people would be relaxed and give him a better chance. But if he was seen then he could still hope to out-row them, though he would have preferred it the "her way because with a boat making for the open sea they would very soon guess that there must be some vessel waiting for her, and by telling the tale on shore, that government xebec lying in the harbour would soon be out in chase. She was fast, and in twenty-four hours she would soon manage to overhaul all the craft she would sight between this and the place he was going to.

"And where is that?" asked Cosmo, letting his head rest on his hands again.

"In the direction of Livorno," said the other, and checked himself. "But perhaps I had better not tell you, for should you happen to be interrogated by all those magistrates, or perhaps by the Austrians, you would of course want to speak the truth as becomes a gentleman — a nobilissimo signore — unless you manage to forget what I have already told you or perchance elect to come with us."

"Come with you," repeated Cosmo, before something peculiar in the tone made him sit up and face Attilio. "I believe you are capable of carrying me off."

"Dio ne voglio," was Attilio's answer, "God forbid. The noise you would make would bring no end of trouble. But for that perhaps it would have been better for me," he added reflectively. "Whereas I have made up my mind that there should be nothing but good from our association. Yet, signore, you very nearly went away with us without any question at all, for our head pointed to seaward and you could have had no idea that I was coming in here. Confess, signore, you didn't think of return then. I had only to hold the tiller straight another five minutes and I would have had you in my power."

"You were afraid of the dogana galley, my friend," said Cosmo as if arguing a point.

"Signore, this minute," said Attilio with the utmost seriousness. "Wake up there," he said in a raised undertone to his two men. "Take an oar, Pietro, and pull the boat to the foot of the tower."

"There is also that old boatman," said Cosmo.

"Hold," said Attilio. "Him I will not land. They will be at his place in the morning, and then he tells his tale . . . unless he is dead. See forward there."

A very subdued murmur arose in the bows and Attilio muttered, "Pietro would not talk to a dead man."

"He is extremely feeble," said Cosmo.

It appeared on Attilio's enquiry that this encumbrance as he called him was just strong enough to be helped over the thwarts. Presently, sustained under the elbows, he joined Cosmo in the stern sheets, where they made him sit between them. He let his big hands lie in his lap. From time to time he shivered patiently.

"That wretch Barbone knows no pity," observed Cosmo.

"I suppose he was the nearest he could get. What tyranny! The helpless are at the mercy of those fellows. He saved himself the trouble of going three doors farther."

They both looked at the ancient frame that age had not shrivelled.

"A fine man once," said Attilio in a low voice. "Can you hear me, vecchio?"

"Si, and see you too, but I don't know your voice," was the answer in a voice stronger than either of them expected, but betraying no sort of interest.

"They will certainly throw him into prison." And to Cosmo's indignant exclamation Attilio pointed out that the old man would be the only person they would be able to get hold of and he would have to pay for all the rest.

Cosmo expressed the opinion that he would not stay there long.

"Better for him to die under the open sky than in prison," murmured Attilio in a gloomy voice. "Listen, old man, could you keep the boat straight at a star if I were to point you one?"

"I was at home in a boat before I could speak plainly," was the answer, while the boatman raised his arm and let it rest on the tiller as if to prove that he had strength enough for that at least.

"I have my boat's crew, signore. Let him do something for all Italy if it is with his last breath, that old Genoese. And now if you were only to take that bow oar you have been using so well only a few moments ago, I will pull stroke and we will make this boat fly."

Cosmo felt the subdued vibration of this appeal without having paid any attention to the words. They required no answer. Attilio pressed him as though he had been arguing against objections. Surely he was no friend of tyranny or of Austrian oppressors and he wouldn't refuse to serve a man whom some hidden power had thrown in his way. He, Attilio, had not sought him. He would have been content never to have seen him. He surely had nothing that could call him back on shore this very night, since he had not been more than three days in Genoa. No time for him to have affairs. The words poured out of his lips into Cosmo's ear while the white-headed boatman sat still above the torrent of whispered speech, appearing to listen like a venerable judge. What could stand in the way of him lending his luck and the strength of his arm? Surely it couldn't be love, since he was travelling alone.

"Enough," said Cosmo, as if the word had been extorted from him by pain, but Attilio felt that his cause had been gained, though he hastened to apologize for the impropriety of the argument, and assure the milord

Inglese that nothing would be easier than to put him ashore in the course of the next day.

"What do you think, Excellency, there is my own native village not very far from Genoa on the Riviera di Ponente, and you will be amongst friends to carry out such orders as you may give, or pass you from one to another back to Genoa as fast as mules can climb or horses trot. And it would be the same from any point in Italy. They would get you into Genoa in disguise, or without disguise, and into the very

house of Cantelucci, so that you could appear there without a soul knowing how you entered or how you came back.”

Cosmo, feeling a sudden relief, wondered that he should have found it in the mere resolution to go off secretly with only the clothes he stood up in, absolutely without money or anything of value on him, not even a watch, and without a hat, at the mere bidding of a man bound on some secret work, God knows where and for what object, and who had volunteered to him no statement except that he had cousins in every spot in Italy and a love affair with an ortolana. The enormous absurdity of it made him impatient to be doing, and upon his expressed desire to make a start Attilio, with the words, “You command here, signore,” told his men it was time to be moving.

In less than half an hour the boat, with all her crew crouching at the bottom and using the oars for poling in the shallow water along the coast with infinite precaution to avoid knocks and bangs as though the boat, the oars, and everything in her were made of glass, had been moved far enough from the tower to have her nose put to the open sea. After the first few strokes Cosmo felt himself draw back again to the receding shore. But it was too late. He seemed to feel profoundly that he was not — perhaps no man was — a free agent. He felt a sort of fear, a faltering of all his limbs, as he swung back to his oar. Then his eyes caught the galley, indeed everybody’s eyes in the boat were turned that way except the eyes of the ancient steersman, the white-headed figure in an unexpectedly erect attitude who, with hardly any breath left in his body and a mere helpless victim of other men’s will, had a strange appearance of the man in command.

In less than ten minutes the galley became invisible, and even the long shadows of the jetties had sunk to the level of the sea. There was a moment when one of the men observed without excitement, “She’s after us,” but this remark provoked no answer and turned out to be mistaken, and for an hour longer Attilio, pulling stroke, watched the faint phosphorescent wake, the evanescent fire under the black smoothness of the sea, elusive like the tail of a comet amongst the dim reflections of the stars. Its straightness was the only proof of the silent helmsman with his arm resting along the tiller being still alive. Then he began to look about him, and presently, laying in his oar, relieved the old man at the tiller. He had to take his arm off it. The other never said a word.

The boat moved slowly now. The problem was to discover the awaiting felucca without lights and with her sails lowered. Several times Attilio stood up to have a look without being able to make out anything. He was growing uneasy. He spoke to Cosmo.

“I hope we haven’t passed her by. If we once get her between us and the land it will be hopeless to catch sight of her till the day breaks. Better rest on your oars.”

He remained standing himself. His eyes roamed to and fro patiently and suddenly he emitted a short laugh. “Why, there she is.”

He steered, still standing, while the others pulled gently. The old man, who had not emitted a sound, had slipped off the seat on to the stern sheets. Attilio said quietly, “Take your oars in,” and suddenly Cosmo felt the boat bump against the low side of the felucca, which he had never turned his head to see. No hail or even murmur came from

her. She had no lights. Attilio's voice said, "You first, signore," and Cosmo, looking up, saw three motionless heads above the bulwarks. No word was spoken to him. He was not even looked at by those silent and shadowy men. The first sound he heard were the words, "Take care," pronounced by Attilio in connection with getting the old boatman on board. Cosmo, standing aside, saw a group carry him over to the other side of the deck. While the sails were being hoisted he sat on the hatch and came to the very verge of believing himself invisible till suddenly Attilio stood by his side.

"Like this we will catch the very first breath of daybreak, and may a breeze follow it to take us out of sight of that town defiled by the Austrians and soon to be the prey of the nobles and the priests." He paused. "So at least Cantelucci says. There are bed places below, if you want to take some rest, signore."

"I am not sleepy," said Cosmo. If no longer invisible, he could still feel disembodied, as it were. He was neither sleepy nor tired, nor hungry, nor even curious, as if altogether freed from the weaknesses of the body, and not indifferent but without apprehensions or speculations of any sort to disturb his composure as if of a fully informed wisdom. He did not seem to himself to weigh more than a feather. He was suffering the reaction of the upheaval of all his feelings and the endless contest of his thoughts and that sort of mental agony which had taken possession of him while he was descending the great staircase of the Palazzo under the eye of the Count de Monteverso. It was as though one of those fevers in which the victim watches his own delirium had left him irresponsible, like a sick man in his bed. Attilio went on:

"Cantelucci's an experienced conspirator. He thinks that the force of the people is such that it would be like an uprising of the ground itself. May be, but where is the man that would know how to use it?"

Cosmo let it go by like a problem that could await solution or as a matter of mere vain words. The night air did not stir, and Attilio changed his tone.

"They had their lines out ever since the calm began. We will have fish to eat in the morning. You will have to be one of ourselves for a time and observe the customs of the common people."

"Tell me, Attilio," Cosmo questioned, not widely but in a quiet, almost confidential tone, and laying his hand for the first time on the shoulder of that man only a little older than himself. "Tell me, what am I doing here?"

Attilio, the wanderer of the seas along the southern shores of the earth and the pupil of the hermit of the plains that lie under the constellation of the southern sky, smiled in the dark, a faint friendly gleam of white teeth in an over-shadowed face. But all the answer he made was:

"Who would dare say now that our stars have not come together? Come to sit at the stern, signore. I can find a rug to throw over a coil of rope for a seat. I am now the padrone of that felucca, but of course barring her appointed work you are entirely the master of her."

These words were said with a marked accent of politeness such as one uses for a courtesy formula. But he stopped for a moment on his way aft to point his finger on the deck.

“We have thrown a bit of canvas over him. Yes, that is the old man whose last bit of work was to steer a boat, and strange to think perhaps it had been done for Italy.”

“Where is his star now?” said Cosmo, after looking down in silence for a time.

“Signore, it should be out,” said Attilio with studied intonation. “But who will miss it out of the sky?”

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