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Title: Sacrifice

Author: Stephen French Whitman

Release date: October 9, 2007 [eBook #22928]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SACRIFICE ***

E-text prepared by Al Haines



**"COME CLOSER, I WANT TO LOOK
AT YOU."**

SACRIFICE

BY

STEPHEN FRENCH WHITMAN

AUTHOR of "PREDESTINED," ETC.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK :: 1922 :: LONDON

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SACRIFICE

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

Lilla Delliver's parents, killed in a railway accident, left their child a legacy other than the fortune that the New York newspapers mentioned in the obituaries.

The mother had been tall, blonde, rather wildly handsome, with the look of one of those neurotic queens who suppress under a proud manner many psychic disturbances. Painfully fastidious in her tastes, she had avoided every unnecessary contact with mediocrity. Reclining on a couch in her boudoir, she read French novels saturated with an exquisite sophistication. Then, letting the book slip from her fingers, she gazed into space, as listless as a lady immured in a seraglio on the Bosphorous. At night, if the opera was *Tristan*, she went down to her limousine with the furtive eagerness of a woman escaping from monotony into a secret world. She drove home with feverish cheeks, and when her husband spoke to her she gave him the blank stare of a somnambulist.

After a busy social season she was liable to melancholia. She sat by the window in a charming negligée, paler than a camellia, hardly turning her head when, at twilight, her child was led in to kiss her.

Recovering, somehow, she traveled.

On those journeys every possible hardship was neutralized by wealth. Yet even for her the sea could not always be calm, or the skies of the Midi and the Riviera blue. In Venice, at midnight, the soft, hoarse cries of the gondoliers made her toss fretfully on her canopied bed. In Switzerland, as dawn flushed the snow peaks, awakened by the virile voices of the guides, she started up from her pillow in a daze of resentment and perverse antipathy.

She calmed herself by listening to the sermons of swamis in yellow robes, and by sitting in cathedrals with her eyes fixed upon the splendor of the altar.

Wherever they traveled, her husband went about inquiring for new physicians—"specialists in neurasthenia." But then he usually felt the need of a physician's services also.

He was taller than his wife, a brownish, meager, handsome man with dark circles round his eyes. A doctor had once told him that some persons never had more than a limited amount of nervous energy; so he was always trying to conserve his share, as if the prolongation of his idle life were very important. Yet he was not dull. He had written several essays, on classical subjects, that were privately circulated in sumptuous bindings. He played Brahms with unusual talent. But certain colors and perfumes set his nerves on edge, while the sight of blood, if more than a drop or two, made him feel faint.

Disillusioned from travel, because they had viewed all those fair, exotic scenes through the blurred auras of their emotional infirmities, he and his wife returned to their home in New York. There they were protected against all contact with ugliness, all ignoble influences, all sources of unhappiness except themselves.

It was a stately old house—for two hundred years the Dellivers and the Balbians had been stately families—a house always rather dim, its shadows aglimmer with richness, and here and there a beam of light illuminating some flawless, precious object. It was a house of silent servants, of faces imprinted with a gracious weariness, of beautifully modulated low voices, of noble reticence. Yet all the while the place quivered from secret transports of anguish.

In this atmosphere Lilla, the child, was like a delicate instrument on which are recorded, to be ultimately reproduced, myriad vibrations too subtle for appreciation by the five senses. Or, one might say, the small, apparent form that this man and this woman had created in their likeness—as it were a

fatal sublimation of their blended physical selves—became the fragile vessel into which, drop by drop, the essences of all their most unfortunate emotions were being distilled.

Sometimes, at a moment of perspicacity, the father's face was distorted by a spasm of remorse. Looking at his child, he was thinking:

"By what right have we done this?"

For that matter, he was always oppressed by miseries foreign to normal men. For instance, he fluctuated between the ardors of a pagan and an anchorite, at one hour reëmbreing aestheticism, at another fleeing back to a bleak sanctuary where he hoped to escape some vague, immense reproach. Too complex for an irrevocable decision, too weak to stand firm against the pressure either of pantheism or an absolutely spiritual idea, he was an insignificant creature worried and torn between two vast antagonists.

Then, too, he was afflicted with a frequent symptom of neuroticism, namely, superstition; and this superstition was sharpened by the usual morbid forebodings—the characteristic expectations of calamity.

He accepted the idea that there were persons who could fathom the destinies of others, that the palm of one's hand was cryptic with one's future fortunes, and that the remotest planets had an influence on one's life. Furtively, then, as one might enter a place dedicated to some shameful mystery, this erudite, handsome, wretched gentleman slipped into the sanctums of the diviners, where, with a feeling of degradation and imbecility, yet with a pounding heart, he listened to prophecies uttered by the aid of playing cards, horoscopes, and crystal balls.

All he asked was some assurance that he would presently find peace. They all promised him that this desire of his would soon be realized.

Perhaps they would have called it realized by that crash of trains in the night, which he and his wife hardly heard before their fine, restless bodies were bereft of life.

So one day, when Lilla was six years old, the drawing-room suddenly blossomed with white roses. Next morning the orphan was taken away by Aunt Althea Balbian to another house, on lower Fifth Avenue.

CHAPTER II

Miss Balbian's house provided an appropriate setting for its pale, aristocratic, chastely fervent owner. But its sedate, antiquated, brick exterior—unaltered since the presidency of Andrew Jackson—afforded hardly a hint of the conservative beauty that pervaded it.

Here the glitter of old chandeliers fell upon the suave outlines of colonial furniture upholstered with sage green and mulberry-colored fabrics, chimney pieces of mellow marble carved into graceful flourishes and bearing on their shelves quaint bric-a-brac, family portraits in frames that it would have been a sacrilege to furbish up—ladies dressed in the fashion of 1812, French and English gentlemen in antique uniforms, a few of these likenesses doubly precious because they were painted so naïvely. But this "early-American" effect was adulterated by objects that Miss Balbian had acquired on her travels, such as medieval chalices, coffers covered with vellum and encrusted with jewels, and a few authenticated paintings from that period when the men of Italy, at a breath of inspiration from the Athenian tomb, perceived, instead of the glamour of a celestial paradise, the gorgeousness of this world.

In this gracefully puritanical atmosphere, these latter treasures, imbued with a disturbing alien richness, were like thoughts that a woman, hedged round by innumerable obscure oppressions, might gather from afar and store away in her heart.

Lilla, in this environment, became a juvenile epicurean, precocious in aesthetic judgment, intolerant of everything that was not exquisite. Her opinions amused and touched her aunt, who, for a while, derived from that imitation a nearly maternal pride. Miss Althea Balbian redoubled her efforts to form Lilla according to her most exalted ideas; and, as a result, she implanted in that little charge still more complexities of impulse—a greater sensitiveness to the lures of mortal beauty, together with something of her own recoil from all the ultimate consequences of that sensitiveness.

In fine, the devoted woman was preparing Lilla unwittingly for an accentuation of the conflict that already had been prefigured in her parents.

The child was so fragile-looking, there was about her so strange an air of sensibility, that many persons who had known her father and mother shook their heads in pity. Some suggested that she ought to be reared in the country, to play hard all day "close to nature." But the play of other children exhausted her, as if she, too, possessed "only a limited amount of nervous energy." She had nervous

headaches and feverish spells from no apparent cause. When the weather was changing, or when a thunder storm impended, the governess found it hard to manage her. Then, suddenly, certain odors and sounds filled her with indistinct visions of felicity. At night, when there was music in the house, she crept from her bed to the staircase, and sat listening with burning cheeks and icy hands.

Next day there came over her an immense, hazy discontent with everything. And her tragic little face—her eyes, skin, and fluffy hair all harmonized in the most delicate shade of brown—resembled the face of some European *grande amoureuse* seen through the small end of an opera glass.

"Yes," said Miss Balbian at last to the charming, quiet ladies who sat in her library drinking tea from old china cups. "Lilla is a strange, I may say a startling, child." And allowing herself one of her rare public failures of expression—a look of uneasiness—she added, half swallowing her words, "I sometimes ask myself—"

CHAPTER III

Nearly every spring, Aunt Althea, craving "her beloved Europe," took Lilla abroad.

Escorted by an elderly courier who had the appearance of a gentleman in waiting at the Vatican, they moved with royal deliberation, patronizing luxurious hotels, celebrated landscapes, notable art collections. The governess was supplemented with the best local teachers of music and languages; but it was Aunt Althea, with her proud fastidiousness, her eclecticism at once virginal and ardent, who set the keynote for Lilla's education.

All the young girl's inherited repugnances were enhanced. All her sensibilities were aggravated. With the lapse of time and the expansion of her world, her impassionable nature vibrated still more extravagantly, at the most subtle stimuli, between the poles of happiness and pain—which two sensations sometimes seemed to her identical.

Now she was lovelier than her mother had ever been—a tall, fragile, pale brown creature whose carefully composed lips, whose deliberately slow grace, only half concealed that inner intensity of hers.

She had, indeed, the exceptional, agitating look—that softly fatal aspect—which is seen in those who are destined to extraordinary lives. It was as though strange, unprecipitated events were clinging round her slender body like an aura: the promises of unparalleled adventures in love, perhaps also in tragedy. Before her twentieth year she had given this presentiment to many men, who, with a thrill that may have been partly fear, longed to be the cause of those raptures, and to accept the perils.

In an alley of Constantine, in fierce sunshine that oppressed and stimulated her delicate tissues, she stood before an old Arab who, seated on the ground, told her fortune by strewing sand on a board.

"You will be loved by men," he said, after contemplating apathetically the curlicues of sand. "And will be the death of men," he added, closing his eyes as if bored; for out there, in the mountains beyond Constantine, love and death, as partners in the fates of fair women, were commonplace.

Before returning to America, Aunt Althea always managed a visit to Rome. On her first day there, the spinster drove out alone, returning at twilight with her eyelids swollen and red. She had been, she said, to the English cemetery; but she declared that nobody whom she had known was buried there.

They visited American ladies who had married into the Roman nobility. In those historic palaces the great rooms were cool, dim, and resonant, the women's voices died away in space between the tapestried walls and the ceilings frescoed with pagan deities. Through the tall doorway entered young men with medieval faces, in quest of a cup of tea.

To Lilla these descendants of medieval despots seemed curiously dwarfed by their surroundings.

But her eyes were apt to turn wistful when she passed the shabby cafés where famous artists had sat brooding over the masterpieces that she admired. Then she thought of Bohemian studios at dusk, and of geniuses aquiver, like dynamos, with the powers that had taken possession of them. She envied the women whose lives were united to theirs in an atmosphere where beauty was always being recreated, who basked in that radiance of art which love, perhaps, had inspired.

Of all the arts it was music that cast over Lilla the strongest spell.

During the winter season in New York, she haunted concert halls where celebrated musicians played their works. The new music, however, strident with the echoes of industrialism, dissonant with the tumult of great cities, repelled her. She turned instinctively toward the harmonious romanticism and idealism of a previous age. She felt that the compositions of Schumann and Schubert were the language that had always been imprisoned in her heart, that could never reach her lips, but that she now heard, by a miracle, freed and in its perfection.

When the concert was over, she could hardly prevent herself from joining the women who surged toward the author of those sounds, as if impelled by an inexorable force—or possibly by an idea that they must mingle their lives with the life of the stranger who could so interpret their souls, make clear to them their secrets, and give them, at least momentarily, a coherent glimpse of their ideals.

One afternoon, in the exit of a concert hall, Lilla met Brantome, a critic of music.

He was a robust-looking old Frenchman with white hair and the mustaches of a Viking, displaying a leonine countenance out of which gazed a pair of eyes that seemed to have been made tragical by some profound chagrin. In his youth, a student in Paris, he had written some scores of songs, half a dozen sonatas, and a symphony. These efforts, though technically brilliant, had soon passed into oblivion. After a long while, during which nobody had heard a sound from him, Brantome had popped up in the United States to begin his critical career. Now he was courted not only in artistic circles but also in the fashionable world, where one might sometimes see his haggard old face relentlessly revealed beneath fine chandeliers, ironical and weary, as if crushed beneath the combined weight of disillusionment and renown.

At sight of Lilla he stopped in the concert hall doorway; and, when he had peered at her closely, he rumbled in her ear:

"I see that this afternoon of bad music has not fooled you. You don't wear the look that I discovered on your face the other day, when they had been playing Schumann."

"Oh, but Schumann!" And with a nervous laugh she said, "If I had been Clara Wieck——"

"You would have married him just as she did, eh? Ah, well, maybe there will be other Robert Schumanns. In fact, two years ago I found a certain young man—but now he is dying."

He lost the smile that had come to him at this contact. With a shrug he passed on, leaving with her the thought of beauty enmeshed by death. She wondered who this young man was, who might have been another Robert Schumann, but now was dying.

CHAPTER IV

Of all her suitors the most persistent was Cornelius Rysbroek.

In their childhood he had drawn for her amusement Spanish galleons, the domes of Mogul palaces, and a fantastic damsel, that he called a bayadere, languishing on a balcony. His thin, sallow little face bent close to the printed page, he had read *Ivanhoe* to her. At parties, it was she to whom he had brought the choicest favors.

Departing to school, he had addressed her in melancholy verses—doggerel decorated with references to flowers turned to dust, setting suns that would never rise again, countless symbols of hopeless passion and impending tragedy.

But, as an anti-climax, he always showed up alive in vacation time.

During his college years he had apparently forgotten her, had made himself conspicuous by some highly pessimistic theories, and had tried the Byronic gesture. Then, after Commencement, meeting her unexpectedly, he had turned a yellowish white.

Now Cornelius Rysbroek had become a lean, neat hypochondriac, highly cultivated, with fine instincts and excruciating aversions, bored by his leisure, yet incapable of action, and inconstant in every aspiration except this love of his. Whenever she refused him he sailed away, after threatening to plunge into some wild, dramatic waste, but always compromising on the easiest, beaten path. He returned sadder and sallow than ever, having contracted in his imagination some new, obscure ailment, and with his old ailment, his longing for Lilla, still gnawing at his heart.

But Lilla, so fragile and moody, dreamed of physical strength and a triumphant will.

Where was he?

She was enervated by melancholy, scorched by impatience, then chilled by an indefinable foreboding, just as her father had been. Putting on a figured veil to blur her blush of shame, she slipped away to visit the soothsayers that fashionable women patronized. In a shadowy room hung with Oriental curtains, the shrewd crystal gazer informed her that all would soon be well. "A great love was in store for her."

She kept in her desk a magazine picture of Lawrence Teck, the explorer, whom she had never met, but whose likeness, singular amid innumerable presentments of the human face, had arrested her first glance and fascinated her mind.

His aquiline countenance, darkened and corrugated by fierce suns, expressed that virility which kept driving him back, for his contentment, into remote and dangerous places. But his salient features suggested also the patience and wisdom of those who have suffered hardship and derived extraordinary thoughts from solitude. It pleased her to note that his was the brow of a scholar—he had written learned volumes about the jungle peoples, was the most picturesque authority on the Islamic world since Burton, and his monographs on African diseases had added to his romantic reputation the luster of benevolence. She liked to picture him as finding in his travels and work the stimulation that less serious, aimless men might seek in love.

When she read his books, there unrolled before her the esoteric corners of the desert, the strange charm and depravity of little-known Oriental cities, the deadly richness of equatorial forests, peopled by human beasts whose claws were hammered steel, whose fangs were poisoned arrows, and who carried in their thick skulls the condensed miasma of their hiding places.

She seemed to see him passing through those physical dangers and corroding mental influences, a superior being of unalterable health and sanity, perhaps protected because of a grand destiny still unrevealed to him. She longed to participate in that destiny, or, at any rate, to be responsible somehow for it.

"Where are you? What are your thoughts?" she would whisper, staring at the likeness of this peculiarly congenial stranger.

Late at night, at that hour when bizarre fancies and actions may seem natural, she would ask him:

"Don't you know that I exist? Then I must make you know it."

So she tried to cast forth into space a flood of feeling strong enough to reach him—a projection of her identity, her appearance, and her infatuation. All her secret ardors that had never been so strongly focused upon a definite personality found their centering point in him, whose imagined nature seemed to be so emphatically what she needed to appease and complete her nature. She was like one of those antique sorceresses who would cast over distant hearts the spells that must inevitably recoil upon their makers.

But when she had remained for a long while motionless and tense, she rose wearily, with a low laugh of disillusionment and ridicule.

Little by little her thoughts of him were obscured by other thoughts, by weakly apposite conjectures that had different men as their objects. And when different men made love to her, once or twice, maybe at a conjunction of exquisite scenery, music, and impatience, of confused longings and eloquent persuasion, she was tempted to consent. But just in time she stilled that tremulous smile, and averted that dizzy look in the depths of which lurked a fatal sweetness.

Then, when life seemed to her unbearably monotonous, she went to a week-end party at the Brassfields' house in the country.

CHAPTER V

The Brassfields' country house was copied from an historic French chateau. In the drawing-room, the high walls, from which well-known portraits stood forth, were paneled with amber-hued wood overlaid with elaborate gilt traceries; they ended in a wide golden frieze that curved inward to inclose a ceiling painted with roguish goddesses after the manner of Watteau. Here and there, between chairs and sofas the arms of which seemed composed of half-melted ingots, appeared a baroque cabinet filled with small, precious objects. Or from a creamy pedestal the marble features of some ancient sybarite regarded without surprise this modern richness based upon the past.

Emerging from the dining room, the ladies crossed the large amber rug, like moving images made of multicolored light.

Below their negligible bodices hung draperies of brocade interwoven with metallic threads, of lace dyed the colors of exotic flowers, of tulle embroidered with iridescent beads. Parting into groups, they dotted the drawing-room with the gorgeousness of peacock blue and jade green, the joyousness of petunias and the melancholy of orchids, or the pale, intermelting tints of rainbows seen through the spangle of a shower.

Some, unfurling fans before their bosoms, sank down upon the chairs and sofas. Others stood beside the large chimney piece, talking to the men, and smoking cigarettes that were thrust into jeweled holders.

A few emerged through the French windows upon the terrace to enjoy the moonlit landscape, wherein Nature herself had been taught to show a charming artificiality.

An esplanade overlooked an aquatic garden, with three pools full of water flowers massed round statues. Below, in broad stages that fell away toward a wooded valley, lay other gardens, deriving a vague stateliness from their successive balustrades and sculptured fountains. The moonlight, while blanching the geometrical pattern of the paths, and frosting the rectangular flowerbeds, imparted to the whole surrounding, billowing panorama an appearance of unreality.

"Where's Lilla?" Fanny Brassfield inquired of a young man in the doorway of the drawing-room, in her clear, grating voice that seemed made to express an involuntary disdain of everything not comprised in her luxurious little world. She had just seen one of her most recent lions, old Brantome, on his way toward the music room amid a group of ladies; and this had recalled to her mind another celebrity, who, five minutes before, had arrived from the city after she had given up expecting him.

"Shall I find her?"

"Never mind, my surprise can wait."

Fanny Brassfield followed Brantome and his coterie into the music room, her attractive, bony features revealing a quizzical expression. In the glitter of the big chandelier her coiffure appeared extraordinarily blonde, her green eyes, especially frosty; and the eighteenth century ladies in the gilded frames seemed suddenly, despite their histories, insipid in comparison with this modern face, emancipated from a thousand traditional reactions.

As for Lilla, she was sitting in the dim library with Cornelius Rysbroek, who was harping on the old tune.

CHAPTER VI

She believed that she could discern in him already the first hints of middle age. His lifeless, brown hair was receding above his temples. His small mustaches, which ought to have made him debonair, seemed on his sallow face like the worthless disguise of a pessimist at the feast of life.

Her look of compassion struck him silent. He smiled in self-contempt, then uttered a sharp sigh, pressed his palm to his forehead, and produced a tiny silver box, from which he took a tablet.

"More antipyrene?" she demanded reproachfully.

"My sinus is pretty bad to-night. This salt air blowing in from the Sound——"

He declared that he was going away again. "His health made it necessary." He had hung round New York long enough, enduring an impossible climate because of an idiotic hope. He uttered the word "Arizona." He spoke of hot deserts, solitudes under the stars, mirages less mocking than his aspirations. As he contemplated her delicately fervent face, her tapering, graceful body, wrapped like something very precious in pale gold, his eyes glittered with tears.

"Dear Cornie——"

And once more she began the familiar rigmarole. Her lips shaped the immemorial complaint, "Why isn't our friendship enough—why must we always be clouding our old congeniality——" And so on. These inexorable words, combined with her look of pity and reproach—a look that seemed almost amorous on her fair face—gave him an impression of immense perfidiousness.

He turned bitter. He asked her where the ideal suitor could be loitering—the strange knight for whom she used to watch as a little girl, the fairytale prince from another kingdom, who was to sweep her off her feet by the force of his perfections, and carry her away.

As he spoke, there stole through the doorway the first notes of *Vienna Carnival*. In the music room old Brantome had been persuaded to play Schumann.

"I know, at least," said Cornelius, "that you haven't found him yet!"

In his voice there was a gloating that made her again turn toward him that unique face of hers, whose brownish pallor, in harmony with her large eyes and fluffy hair, appeared to reflect amid the shadows the radiance disseminated from her dress. In his unhappy eyes she now perceived something that had not been there before—a desperation, as though his heart had suffered too long from a sense of inferiority to the unknown and unrevealed antagonist, who was to win this treasure. For an instant, in fact, there was something weakly ferocious, not quite sane, in this visage that had been familiar to her since childhood. Then his habitual, well-bred, wooden look, as a door might shut on a glimpse of an inferno.

He muttered, in his throaty, queerly didactic voice:

"Well, one must be philosophical in this life. You'll teach me that, won't you?" He got up, patting

the pocket of his waistcoat, where he kept the little vial of oil of peppermint, which he always touched to his tongue when he threw aside his cigarette on his way to a dancing partner. "Are they at it?" he asked, cocking his ear toward the music of Schumann. "Or is it only that old chap hammering the piano?"

"Don't ask me to dance to-night," she returned, closing her eyes.

"I wasn't." With the parody of a merry smile, he explained, "You know I can't dance with you any more. You know you make my legs tremble like the devil."

With an exclamation intended for a laugh, looking unusually bored and vacuous, he went out of the room like a man in an earthquake sedately strolling away between reeling and crumbling walls.

CHAPTER VII

Lilla was approaching the music room doorway—round which some men were standing with the respectful looks of persons at the funeral of a stranger—when a laughing young woman intercepted her.

"Do come over here. Madame Zanidov is telling our fortunes."

Anna Petrovna Zanidov, one of the Russian aristocrats that the revolution had scattered through the world, was a thin, black-haired woman with a faintly Tartar cast of countenance, a dead-white complexion that made her seem denser than ordinary flesh, and somewhat the look of an idol before whose blank yet sophisticated eyes had been performed many extraordinary rites. Tonight her strangeness was made doubly emphatic by a gown of oxidized silver tissue painted over in dull colors with a barbaric design.

She was said to be a clairvoyant. Rumor had it that she had foreseen her husband's murder by Lenin's Mongolians, and that, since her arrival in America, she had predicted accurately some sensational events, including a nearly fatal accident in the polo field.

Now, turning her sharp, dead-white profile to right and left, encountering everywhere a frivolous eagerness, Madame Zanidov protested:

"Really, I ask you if this is the proper atmosphere!"

She explained that she regarded very seriously "this gift" of hers, which had astonished people even in her childhood. She agreed that it was inexplicable, unless by the theory that the future, if it did not already exist, was at least somehow prefigured. Yet she believed that this prearrangement of events was not so rigid as to exclude a certain amount of free will. In other words, one who had been forewarned of a special result, if a special course were pursued, might escape the result by pursuing another course. "For as you know," she added, looking round her at the women who were losing their smiles, "the impression that I receive is often far from amusing. How can one tell beforehand? So I consent to do this only because, if what I see is unpleasant, my warning may possibly help one to evade it."

A lady objected that prophecy frequently had just the opposite effect. She referred to the attractive power of anticipation. Then she cited instances where persons had made every effort to realize even the most unfortunate predictions, as if hypnotized by their dread into a feeling that the tragic outcome was inevitable. Of course, on the other hand, she admitted, a happy prediction might have a tonic effect, heartening one to pluck victory from apparent failure. Or else, just by setting in action the magnetic power of expectancy, it might even draw mysteriously into one's life a wealth or a fame that had seemed unattainable, a love that had appeared to be impossible.

When she had voiced this last opinion, the other ladies' faces were softened by a gentle acquiescence. Their necklaces flashed with the rising of their bosoms; their heads leaned forward in thought; and the mingled odors of their perfumes were like exhalations from the innermost recesses of their hearts.

By this time, apparently, the proper atmosphere had been established. Madame Zanidov consented to display her powers.

All the women drew their chairs closer.

She took the hand of a young girl whose features were alive with an invincible gay selfishness. Madame Zanidov hardly glanced at the other's palm. Closing her almond-shaped eyes, contracting her brows, she let an unnatural fixed smile settle upon her lips. And now, indeed, it seemed to them that some of the mystery of Asia had informed her rigid person, or was escaping, together with a thick, sweet scent, from the folds of her metallic and barbarically painted gown.

"Do not be afraid," she said, without opening her eyes.

Even the girl whose hand she held had ceased to smile.

There was a long silence, pervaded by the faint harmonies of *Vienna Carnival*.

"For you have nothing to fear," the Russian quietly announced at last. "All that you must pass through—how much confusion and twitter I am conscious of!—will hardly touch you. Few heartaches, few tears. Some day you will find yourself in a tawny land of harsh outlines: it is probably southern Spain. There you will meet a man as lithe as a panther, his shoulders covered with gold, driving his sword through the neck of a bull. You are speaking to him at night. He kisses your hands. But that, too, will soon end in laughter. You will marry three times, but never be a widow."

She opened her eyes, to gaze thoughtfully at Lilla.

They asked Madame Zanidov if she really saw those things. She replied that her perceptions were at times exactly like pictures. For example, she had seen the matador's lunge, as a splendid plasticity of violet silk and tinsel, and then the bright blood gushing from the neck of the bull.

In subdued voices they began to discuss "the possession of human beings by occult forces." One spoke of astounding passages set down through automatic writing. Another mentioned psychometry. "But psychometrists got impressions only from the past!" Whereupon they stared at the Russian. Their eyes, which had been lightly touched with a black pencil, were no longer sophisticated. Their rouged lips were relaxed by that superstitious awe which, even in cultivated societies, is ever waiting to invade the feminine mind.

Madame Zanidov was still looking at Lilla.

"Yes," some one proposed. "Try her."

"She doesn't wish it," Madame Zanidov remarked.

But after a moment of hesitation Lilla held out her hand. Once more everybody became silent and intent. The music of Schumann softly intruded into this stillness.

"Ah," the Russian murmured, "here is something different."

With her eyelids pressed together, she began:

"You are sitting alone. You are writing letters, which will pass through many hands of different colors. One would think that those hands would grow warm from touching your letters. Now you are not writing any more letters. You are wearing a black dress." Madame Zanidov leaned forward as if striving with her closed eyes to pierce a sudden opacity. "This is very odd," she declared. "I can see no more pictures. For there is a darkness which grows larger and larger, which obscures everything. So now I must discover what this darkness means. Please be patient for a few moments."

Some one whispered:

"It's getting quite uncanny,"

Lilla's senses reached out to clench themselves upon the normality of her surroundings. But beneath that normality, that familiar solidity, her innate mysticism, her instinctive habit of foreboding, seemed to perceive a basis invisible yet similar—a solution, so to speak, from which material things and events were continually being evolved, the fluid containing all the elements of the crystalization. And this foreigner, with her idol-like face and meager, rigid body, her aspect of long acquaintance with the very essence of materiality, became the ageless oracle, the rewarder of humanity's incorrigible credulity. So, like the bejeweled princesses in the Mesopotamian temples, the Latin ladies who had crept trembling into the Aventine caves, the Renaissance beauties who, in the huts of witches, had turned whiter than their ruffs, Lilla remained motionless, her gaze fixed apprehensively on the clairvoyant.

The latter said:

"It will soon be plainer, for the moon is rising. No, what a nuisance! It is still very dark, because the moonlight is shut out by great masses of foliage, great tangles of vines. Such a place! Gigantic thickets, through which wild beasts are prowling, and above them the trunks of huge trees. Wait, I have found a path. It leads to a clearing in the midst of this forest. Here I can see much better. There are human beings here, and a feeling of sadness."

At a general stir, one of the ladies suggested nervously:

"Perhaps you'd better——"

But Madame Zanidov was saying:

"The people in the clearing are black savages. They sit round a body that is stretched on the ground and covered with a cloth. Is it the savages who are so sad? I think not. I cannot describe the one who lies in the midst of them. The cloth is drawn up to cover even his face. But I feel that it is some one

who has loved you. He is dead. That is to say, he will be dead when the scene that I am describing is realized; but now he is alive——"

Lilla, raising her eyes, saw in the doorway, with Fanny Brassfield, a tall man, a stranger, whose countenance was aquiline and swarthy. It was Lawrence Teck, the explorer.

CHAPTER VIII

In the music room some musicians were playing a waltz; but Lilla and Lawrence Teck were walking on the terrace.

She said to herself, "This is a dream"; for she had come to believe that only in dreams did one realize, even in faint counterpart, one's deepest desires. She stood still. The world—this new world drenched in an unprecedented quality of moonlight—gradually became distinct. She gave him, through that veil of silvery beams, a long look of verification.

As in his picture he seemed at once rugged and fine, resolute and gentle. He was very quiet, like one who has willed to be so; but a certain shyness remained in him, and presently announced itself to her. Whereupon, remembering that she was beautiful, and that her beauty had a way of troubling men, Lilla felt her own timidity transmuted into joy.

"Are your jungles better than this?" she asked.

"The charm of my jungles overlies a welter of stupid cruelty and deadly waste. Would it surprise you to know that I should like to see all the world as nobly ordered as this landscape?"

She did not grasp the meaning of the words, being too deeply occupied with seizing upon those syllables, those living tones, and dropping them one by one into the treasury of her heart.

Glancing down at the aquatic garden, he remarked:

"These three basins would please my Mohammedan friends, who like to see their flowers inverted in still water, like a mirage come true."

"Yes, no doubt they have their ideals."

"And often dream of them in very pleasant places."

He described certain gardens of the East. He made her see nests of color unexpectedly blooming in the midst of deserts, behind walls of sundried mud overgrown with Persian roses, and with airy pavilions mirrored in pools that were seldom darkened by a cloud. Under date palms the white-robed Arabs sat smoking. From time to time black slaves brought them coffee flavored with ambergris. After sundown, at the hour called "maghrib," when the sky was turning green, having performed their ceremonial ablutions, they prayed.

"For what?"

"Behind the formal words? Who knows? For whatever they desired most. Probably for something that nobody would suspect."

"And the women?" she ventured, looking at him sidewise.

In those remote walled towns they still remained invisible. Their minds, restricted to puerilities, had never grown up. Their bodies were so lax that their short weekly promenade to the cemetery exhausted them. Seated on cushions, they spent their time listening to cuckoo clocks and music boxes, smelling perfumes, putting their jewelry away in caskets, then bedizening themselves all over again. Their servants, who had known in childhood the hurly burly of caravanserais and slave markets, told them of a world where everybody was possessed by a thousand devils of ingenuity and wit. And those scented ladies with feeble flesh, hollow eyes, and the brains of parrots, after listening for a while in vague regret, all at once became bored. Whereupon they fell to playing parchesi and eating sweetmeats.

In such sheltered and languid lives Lilla seemed to perceive a similarity to her own life. Or, at least, she felt that her life, if he knew it in detail, would seem to him almost as trivial.

"Poor souls," she said. "But one surely finds others out there," she persisted, unfurling her large fan of yellow plumes, and looking at it intently. "White women, for example, the women of the empire builders? At such meetings, in those far-off places, romance must be almost inevitable. Each finds in the other an overwhelming congeniality? The loneliness round about exerts a tremendous persuasion?"

"Oh, yes," he assented, with a smile. "Especially if the lady smokes a pipe."

He told her of an Englishwoman whom he had met in the Masai veldt, hunting for maneless lions—an amazon in breeches and boots, at the head of her own safari. Week after week she had led her dark-skinned retainers through the wilds, cheerily doctoring them in their sicknesses, herself never ailing or weary. At the charge of a lion she had withheld her fire till the last possible moment. By night, the safari encamped, she had sat before her tent in a folding chair, one knee cocked over the other, a pipe between her teeth, listening to the gossip of ragged wanderers who had been attracted by the firelight and the smell of burning fat.

"I find such women incomprehensible," Lilla declared, with a profound animosity to that huntress whose body was so strong, whose nerves were so sound, whose courage had been proved in the face of charging lions, who took life without a twinge and doubtless gloated over the blood that she had shed.

Lawrence Teck, after a moment's struggle with himself, blurted out:

"I assure you that when we fellows dream of women it's of a different sort."

"Oh, of course. Of the one that you've left behind, I suppose."

Sometimes, he assented presently; in which case the one at home would be immensely enriched by that wide separation. But it often happened that such an exile, when no specially congenial woman had given him her heart, constructed from his imagination an ideal, a vision capable of brightening the wilderness with the most exquisite charms. Or else he might find an unattainable ideal ready-made. Thus it was that uncouth sailors, on long voyages, treasured the photographs of unknown actresses in fancy costume, as a religious devotee might treasure an ikon. Or thus a soldier in some Congo fort, while gradually succumbing to the malefic spell of the encircling forests, yearned toward the portrait of a princess that he had clipped from an old illustrated magazine—toward a divinity whom he could never know, but whom he adored because her nature and life were so different from his.

"How romantic men are!" she exclaimed, turning away her head.

He seemed abashed; but he returned:

"And are women never tempted to renounce that famous practicality of theirs?"

She walked on along the terrace. The moonlight intensified her ethereal aspect; and nothing could have been more emphatic than the contrast between her seeming fragility and his apparent strength.

At a recollection she walked more and more slowly, her pace according with the faltering of her heart beats. But it was in an almost indifferent tone that she inquired:

"You are really going back to Africa day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, everything's settled."

She paused, staring across the gardens, watching the slow withdrawal from that scene of its peculiar charm.

"Why are you returning?"

He hesitated. Well, he had reason to believe, he said, that not far north of the Zambesi there was an unmapped, ruined city similar to the stone city called Zimbabwe, which adventurers from Phoenicia were supposed to have built four thousand years ago, as a mining town of the fabled Land of Ophir. Who knew what ancient idols, what Himyarite inscriptions, what trinkets of gold, might not be found there?

"How can such a matter be important enough to make you risk your life amid deadly fevers and insects, venomous reptiles, wild beasts and wilder men?"

In that respect the expedition would be tame. The journey into the interior would consist of undramatic drudgeries and discomforts, of association with a primitive folk whom he had never failed to make his friends, of precautions that would confound the reptiles, the fevers, and the disease-bearing insects. As for the wild beasts, they asked nothing better than to be left alone.

"Oh, yes," she assented, trailing her fan along the balustrade, "a hero must be modest on such points. Yet it seems to me an abnormal vanity that drives one into those places, just in order that one may say, 'It's I who have found a new pile of ruins, a few scraps of gold, in a jungle.'"

After a moment's reflection, he confessed:

"I gave you my secondary reason, because I thought you might find it more interesting than my chief one."

It was true, he said, that he hoped to find a new Zimbabwe there; but his principal task would be to make a geological survey of some territory believed to be very rich in certain minerals. He was going for a group of capitalists who, if he brought back an encouraging report, would obtain large concessions for exploiting the land. It was a gamble; the territory in question was virtually unexplored. That region, moreover, was peopled by a tribe opposed to exploitation, and, for that matter, even to visits from their white-skinned nominal rulers. But he had always been successful in dealing with

savages; so, since this was to be as much a diplomatic mission as a geological survey, he had seemed the one for the task.

From this explanation she derived the idea that he was not a rich man, that perhaps until recently he had never thought of money as important, but that now, for some reason, he had determined that his fortune must be increased.

The waltz had ended. The dancers were appearing on the terrace. Some, descending the staircases between the pools, wandered away through the gardens. Here and there a match flared up against unnaturally tinted foliage. Farther on, a spangled dress shimmered beside a fountain, then, accompanied by a dark shadow, disappeared into a charmille. A clock in the valley struck eleven, its last vibrations mingling with a laugh that rose, through the moonbeams, from a marble kiosk enveloped in flowers. And as the breeze, heavy with the fragrance of many blossoms, caressed her face, Lilla felt that the gardens must be full of hidden persons each of whom had at last found the amorous complement.

At the end of the esplanade, in the light of the French windows, Cornelius Rysbroek's face appeared, then drifted away.

"What is that fellow's name?" asked Lawrence Teck. "Just now he wanted me to take him along to Africa. He seemed quite unhappy, especially when I had to tell him no. Indeed, he gave me a rather curious impression of misery and recklessness. What is it? An unfortunate love affair?"

"So it's that," she vouchsafed, staring at him intently, "which starts men off to the wilds?"

"Sometimes it's that which brings them back from the wilds. I could give you an instance——"

They, too, were now descending the steps between the pools.

The leafy alleys, silvered by the moon, and redolent of flowers that had been made magical by the alchemy of night, surrounded them. They came to a spot where a circular wall of foliage, rising behind stone benches, hemmed in a fountain, above which a marble antique warrior was lifting in his arms a marble girl, who struggled against that seizure with a convulsive energy, while her upturned face wore a look of happiness. Lawrence Teck made the comment:

"It appears that a rather primitive Greek gentleman has found a nymph bathing in a pool. If I remember, mortals who tried to capture nymphs were liable to die."

"Yes," she assented, staring at the upturned face of the captive. "He should not have tried."

"But no doubt it's hard for them to be reasonable at such times, especially when the person that they try to catch seems so strange, yet so overwhelmingly congenial—the embodied dream."

"Then she should have prevented him."

"Perhaps she tried to, with the usual success when it's a question of love in opposition to fear."

Lilla turned aside, drawing a cloud of golden tulle around her slender shoulders. "Does that acuteness also come to one in the jungle?" She seated herself upon the nearest stone bench. "What is that story of yours?"

"A story of one of those sentimental exiles and the picture of his ideal."

The man, he said, had found the picture in a tattered magazine in the Afrika Hotel at Zanzibar. Of all the thousands of fair faces that he had seen depicted or in the flesh, it was this face whose peculiar beauty clutched suddenly at his pulse. But it was not so much the physical beauty that exerted the spell; nor was it, in this instance, the attractiveness of the incomprehensible. For the man divined from his contemplation of those features the nature of the woman, all her complexities, and even her emotional fragilities. There came to him the well-known conviction, "It's she that I've always been seeking." At dawn, smothering under his mosquito net, with the din of Arab and Hindu, Masai and Swahili voices drifting in through his shutters, his first waking thought was of her.

He cut out the picture and kept it in his notebook.

It was there, against his breast, for many months. It traveled into still stranger places. It passed, through Gallaland and Abyssinia, into the country of the Blue Nile spearmen, across Darfur and Wadai, where the Emir's men rode out in the helmets and chain mail that their ancestors had copied from the Crusaders. It crossed the Sahara, skirting the strongholds of the Senussia Brotherhood, penetrating the wastes patrolled by the Tuaregs, ferocious camel riders whose mouths were always muffled in black bandages. It went north to the steppes of the Ziban, from which the tribe of the Ouled Nail scattered their feather-crowned dancing girls from Ceuta to Suez. And in the Atlas it entered the hill castles of Kabyles, whose unveiled, fierce-eyed, red-haired women, drenched with half a dozen perfumes, and clattering with silver, coral, turquoise and gold, were swifter than snakes with their knives.

At last it was yellow and crinkled, that picture of the fair unknown, which had become for him, in consequence of so many vivid reveries, like a living companion.

There were days when he forgot her. Then suddenly, under those desert constellations, he

remembered her with a thrill. Or else, before the tent of some nomad sheikh, all at once she fluttered from the notebook to the silken carpet, on which girls with little brown feet had just been making their cuirasses of gold coins leap to the music of flageolets and drums.

And sometimes, though he had never before been superstitious, he felt that this picture was a sort of amulet. For twice when he was in danger, and there seemed to be small hope of his survival, there had come to him the fortifying thought, "Not yet, because I haven't found her in reality."

"Just a picture!" Lilla uttered, thinking of another picture that had been hardly less potent.

Yes, but when he returned home, after a dozen efforts and discouragements one day, merely by chance, he saw her alive, breathing. She whirled past in a limousine. She disappeared into the haze of a city street in summer. Whereupon he thought, "I was not mistaken; it's inevitable." He accepted the fatalism of his Arab friends, who believe that every man's destiny is fixed.

"He found her again?"

"Finally. There were difficulties."

"And they were happy ever after?"

He did not reply.

She looked over this magical garden toward the future, which now appeared like one of those deserts, but bereft of all enchantment, and covered with clouds that were not positive enough to rain. Then, gazing at the marble warrior that had seized the marble nymph, she said:

"I suppose it was you?"

"Yes," he assented, and pressed her hand to his lips.

CHAPTER IX

When she had reached her room she stood dazzled by the rays of the declining moon, and stifled by the sweetness of the night. The clock in the valley struck one, as if marking the end of a time that had been interminable in its tediousness and bleakness. In the mirror she saw her pale brown eyes, skin and tresses invested with a new allurements, a new ardor.

His face sprang out before her—against the moonlit wall, in the glazing of the pictures, on the dial of the clock. She saw his gray eyes surrounded by the fine wrinkles of those who have peered across glaring sands, and his black eyebrows united above his aquiline nose. The qualities that made him her antithesis redoubled his worth; and the prestige of romance clung round his head like a nimbus.

As she moved to and fro, the moonbeams followed her and embraced her; they glorified her slender figure whose reflections she saw with a new pride. The pale rays passed through her bosom, like a current from the fabled regions of felicity. They renewed in her breast that agitation as if all her fibers were emerging from inertia into the fullness of life.

She lay on her bed wide eyed, as if floating in a tepid sea, buoyed up by happiness and wonder.

Then she sat upright, stricken with terror. She had seen a clearing in a jungle, and black savages seated round a body covered over with a cloth. For a moment she thought that she had seen Madame Zanidov also, trailing her barbaric gown away through a shaft of moonlight.

CHAPTER X

It was mid-afternoon when Lilla emerged from her room.

A servant informed her that "everybody" was motoring or playing golf. She entered the library, lustrous with its rows of books and its deep-toned paintings hung against wooden panels. Between half-drawn window curtains passed rays of sunshine that came to rest upon vases of flowers arranged in porcelain bowls; but the corners of the room were steeped in shadows. A man who had been sitting on a couch amid these shadows rose to his feet.

She sought the gloom beyond the fireplace, in order that her changed face might not betray her. But even here her paleness was emphasized, and her eyes, with faint purple streaks below them, took

on a look of deeper anxiety. Her features began to quiver as if her soul were revealing itself beneath a transparent mask.

"What has happened?"

She managed to reply:

"A great mistake. Because that picture seemed congenial to you in those lonely places you thought that the original must be the same? You were wrong. Physically and temperamentally we belong to different worlds. You couldn't rest in mine, and I couldn't enter yours. If you knew me," she added, in a hushed voice, "you'd find me contemptible, in all my weaknesses." She lowered her head, then, raising her eyes, which were full of fear, besought him, "Tear it out of your heart! Destroy it!"

"There, it's done. How easy it was to obey you!"

And they stood face to face in a pallor that was like a scintillation of white-hot metal, both knowing that their lips, though they uttered first a thousand similar phrases, would presently be united.

Then he came close, catching in his strong grasp her writhing hands. But she stopped him with a look like a flashing sword—a look as poignant as though they had been lovers for years and now must love no longer. And so, in fact, they had been, heart drawn to heart by a strange likeness of accidental or of fatal events, one longing groping through space toward another longing. Apart, just by aid of their imaginations, they had progressed already from indefinite to precise emotions, from vague to fixed visions, each attaining in thought a consummation that mocked this present struggle. And this profound mutual intimacy, an accomplished fact in the realm of mind, was suddenly projected into the physical atmosphere, so that the glances of these two, who had just now met each other, clashed in an almost terrible intimacy, as though the question were not "Never," but "Never again."

Wrenching her hands away, she made a despairing gesture.

"Tear it out," she repeated. "It's only by doing so that you can please me."

"Will you help me to kill it? Will you lend a hand by making your beauty hideous, your nature repulsive? Come and take a drive with me. Just an hour or two. How long do you need to destroy it?"

"Ah," she breathed, closing her eyes in pain.

In a broad-brimmed hat that matched her muslin gown she went down the steps to his car. The high, gray walls of the house disappeared behind a rush of trees; the conical turret roofs of slate sank quickly away.

From the terrace Cornelius Rysbroek stared at the distant gateway through which they had vanished.

The car rushed through the countryside. The orderly fields stretched away toward gentle slopes on which cows were grazing. Here and there a village abruptly spread out its roofs, which rotated on the axis of a spire. All the windows gave back the light of late afternoon; and far off, against a hollow between two hills, like wine in a cup, there was a ruddy flash of water. It was the Sound; and beyond the Sound lay the sea.

A cloud covered the setting sun.

"So you pretend to begrudge me this perfected feeling, this verification, that I'll carry back with me!"

He told her that over there he would build a perfect simulacrum of her out of his thoughts, as an enchanter might form at will in the twinkling of an eye the likeness of some one who was far away. "You shall even move and speak," he predicted, "and I'll make your glances and your words whatever I want them to be. Look out for yourself! That is sorcery. I shall have taken a part of you away from yourself, across the ocean, to Africa where the forests are full of magicians. Over here you'll no longer be complete. You'll turn your eyes southeast with a sense of missing something from your heart."

He gazed ahead at the road that the car was devouring with an endless purr of triumph. He pursued his fancy, while the car pursued the glimmer of the Sound, which was escaping amid the first thin veils of the twilight.

He promised that she, to whom everything uncouth and primitive was repugnant, would smile beside him in those equatorial tangles, or, at any rate, that she would do so in his dream of her. In the camp surrounded by a hedge of thorns, in the firelight flickering on the shoulder blades and teeth of the negroes, the wraith of her living self would sit at his side, radiant in the dress that she had worn last night. "Real as you'll seem to me," he said, "I sha'n't have to worry about the striped mosquitoes stinging you on the shoulders; and when we others go plodding along, no helmet or terai need hide that hair of yours. Since you'll be made of my thoughts, you'll be invulnerable. You'll catch up your little train to run across a field of ferns in pursuit of some small, inquisitive wild beast. When the tribes make dances for us, they won't know that a beautiful white lady, in a golden décolleté gown, is seated before them, as happy as if that hullabaloo were a ballet by Stravinsky."

In the twilight, by a road hemmed in with sumac, they came to a small, rustic restaurant, which

perched on a cliff above the waters of the Sound. An old waiter led them between empty tables to a veranda overlooking the waves. He seated them by the railing, along which trailed a honeysuckle vine.

They had come for tea or for dinner?

"Dinner!" exclaimed Lawrence. "Here, take this, and carry your sane and practical face away. Wait, you might bring us some tea." He reached across the table to feel her hand, which was as cold as ice. "I've frozen you!"

"No," she returned, almost inaudibly.

The odor of the honeysuckle was mingled with the smell of the sea. The old waiter came and departed like a shade. They were alone on the veranda, above the waves over which the rising moon had just thrown a silver net.

But it was a beam of light from the doorway that illuminated the angles of his face, at which she looked with a sensation of faintness. She bent her neck; her hat brim concealed her eyes.

By this time to-morrow!

"Let me hear your voice," he pleaded. "At least I'll fill my mind with those tones; and when I'm alone I can put them together into the words, 'I love you.'"

As if conjured up by this utterance, a breeze swept over them, full of the fragrance of honeysuckle and the acidity of the sea, like the immense, soft breath with which nature blows upon the kindled human heart, fanning it into a sudden conflagration. And the rustling of the vines, together with the murmur of the water, expanded into a sigh which seemed to issue from the multitude of lovers who somewhere—everywhere—at that moment, were swaying toward the irresistible embrace; and from the innumerable flowers of the earth, in the act of relinquishing the sweetness beloved by bees; and, indeed, from that whole spread of mortal consciousness which nature, moved by a supreme necessity, has subjected to this world-wide tyranny.

She lifted her head as if striving to rise above that smothering flood, and in the moonlight her face was revealed to him—her eyes humid, her lips twisted into an unprecedented shape, her whole aspect, in its startling maturity, like that of the immortal goddess whose genius and nature had suddenly possessed this flesh and blood.

Rising, she turned away in a movement of denial that came too late. He followed her to the end of the veranda; and there at last—or, as it seemed to them, again—he took her in his arms. For an instant her averted face imitated the marble nymph's face, her slender and flexible body the nymph's struggling body, before she became limp at his kiss.

In the doorway of the dining room she paused to look back at the veranda. She wanted to remember every arabesque that the vines were tracing in silhouette against the moonlit sea; but she could not see anything distinctly. As she left the restaurant some one presented her with a little bunch of flowers.

It was her wedding bouquet.

They were married in a village rectory. The minister, peering over his horn-rimmed spectacles, stood before a mantelpiece on which a black marble clock was flanked by clusters of wax fruit under glass.

Lilla borrowed a cloak from the minister's wife, and Lawrence drove straight to New York.

CHAPTER XI

She appeared in the doorway of the living room wearing a white burnoose, her pale brown hair caught up in a loose knot, her feet thrust into yellow Moorish slippers much too large for her. In the thin morning sunlight Lawrence, dressed for his journey, was locking a metal trunk. Lilla sat down and fixed her eyes on the clock.

The furniture of the living room, gathered from various parts of the Mohammedan world, was carved and inlaid. In the corners long-barreled muskets, with stocks of mother of pearl, flanked cabinets full of brittle copies of the Koran, witch doctors' switches, and outlandish fetishes. Above these objects there dangled from the molding the cagelike silver head armor of the Wadai cavalry horses, the tassels of Algerian marriage palanquins, oval shields of bullock-hide and bucklers of hammered brass, crude drums and harps from Uganda. On the four walls, against pieces of reddish bark cloth, gleamed savage weapons arranged in circular trophies—the war spears of the Wanandi, the swords of the Masai, the bows and poisoned arrows of the Wakamba, besides jeweled yataghans, scimitars with gilded hilts, and damascened pistols. Over the bookcases—which were crammed full of heavy volumes, portfolios,

and maps—appeared framed photographs; among the likenesses of Europeans in duck tunics one saw the visages of Egyptians, Persians, and Arabs, or some ghastly black apparition daubed with white paint and crowned with a shako of squirrel fur and plumes.

In the air there was a faint odor of skins, dried herbs, sandalwood, and camphor. But on the center table, in a large African gourd that had been polished till it looked like porcelain, stood the little bouquet that some one had presented to her at the restaurant.

These flowers, because neither he nor she had thought to give them water, were already faded.

"Have you telephoned to the Brassfields?"

"Yes," she said, with a wan smile, "and caused quite a sensation."

A small, wiry, middle-aged man, with an honest, lantern-jawed face, entered the living room bearing a breakfast tray. After one glance, keeping his eyes cast down, he bowed respectfully.

He was Parr, Lawrence Teck's valet in America and right-hand man in Africa.

With her head bent forward, she stared at some petals that had fallen from the gourd. Her neck rose from the white burnoose in a curve of the palest amber; her delicate lips were parted; her loosened tresses were filled with the feeble sunshine. She seemed to symbolize quiet. But when the telephone bell rang she started violently.

It was a call from Long Island, where Aunt Althea Balbian was summering. The servants had learned of Lilla's whereabouts from the Brassfields. Aunt Althea had fallen seriously ill in the night.

Parr showed his downcast eyelids and lantern jaws in the doorway.

"A maid is here from madam's house downtown with a steamer trunk and three suitcases."

"Tell her to take them back," Lilla said in a muffled voice.

She had planned to go as far as London with Lawrence.

She went to a bookcase, knelt down, and scanned the titles of the books.

"I shall read these," she murmured. "I shall take them home with me, stack by stack, and read them all. At night I'll read the ones that are worn from your hands, the dog-eared ones full of pencil marks. Show me those that you care for most. Have you any little book that's gone with you everywhere, that's shabby from your constant use? I want to keep it in my handbag in the daytime and under my pillow at night."

He turned away to the window. She sat on her heels before the bookcase, the white folds of the burnoose flowing out round her, her fragile hands in her lap, her soft palms upturned, her fluffy hair trailing down to frame her sad face.

She continued:

"Don't forget to leave me the key. There will always be flowers here; but the moment they fade fresh ones will take their place. What chair do you like to sit in? On winter nights I'll come here, and draw your favorite chair toward the fire, and sit opposite. I won't let these cruel weapons, these hideous painted faces, frighten me. I'll tell myself that nothing can prevent us from being together again. Yes," she declared, in a deadened voice, "my thoughts are going to form armor round you. Just wait! When you're alone out there, and everything's silent, you'll wonder what it is that makes the air round you electric. It will be my thoughts of you."

The clock struck the hour. She rose; but at the doorway she paused, drooping and tremulous, so that he could take her in his arms again. Her head sank back; her curling lashes veiled her eyes, and a sob, swelling her throat, escaped through her quivering lips. Her knees bent, and with a look of anguish she cried distractedly:

"Good-by! Good-by!"

She believed that her heart had stopped beating.

She was in the bedroom, lying on the couch spread over with a leopard skin. He was sitting beside her. His face expressed alarm; for she shivered convulsively, turning her head from side to side, and biting her lips. He urged her to have courage.

"Courage! When I shall never see you again?"

"What an idea!"

She touched his dark cheek with her fingers on which the nails were like gems. Her eyes, extraordinarily enlarged, and swimming in a mournful tenderness, regarded his face, as if striving to impress it forever upon her mind.

"Give it up," she pleaded once more. "Don't scorn my intuition."

"It's necessary," he said. "More so now than ever."

"Money! As if there were no other way! And even if there weren't——"

Parr knocked on the door.

"Shall I call the taxi, sir?"

"Yes."

Lying motionless, staring at the ceiling, she faltered:

"All right. I'll dress."

But she could hardly drag herself to her feet.

As she pinned on her hat she longed for a veil, such a heavily figured veil as she had put on when setting out to the fortune teller's, who had said, "A great love is in store for you." "How dreadfully I look! This is the picture of me that he must take away with him." She entered the living room as Parr and the taxi driver were carrying out the valises. She took a flower from the gourd. A petal fell off; and the taxi driver, brushing past her, ground it into the rug.

In the outer corridor, which she did not remember having passed through last night, she held out her hand. Lawrence gave her the key; she slipped it down the neck of her muslin frock, and it struck a chill through her bosom.

When the ship had carried him away she returned uptown and took a train for Long Island.

CHAPTER XII

Aunt Althea lay in a four-post bed near a window through which she might see the sunshine resting on the small Italian garden. Her colorless face was stamped with a look of almost infantile acquiescence, though it was only three days since she had sat out there in the garden, thinking:

"When Lilla comes back I'll ask her whether she wouldn't like a little run over to Rome, before the season sets in."

The sick woman fell asleep. Her hair appeared grayer, her skin more nearly transparent, than ordinarily. All her various ardors had not slipped away from her without leaving on her countenance the marks of their transmutation, a peculiar nobility that owed half its fineness to unacknowledged suffering.

In the night the nurse decided to wake the physician, who was dozing in one of the guest rooms. Aunt Althea had conquered time, had regained her "beloved Europe." Somewhere in the New York house there was a photograph of her, taken in her twenty-fifth year. She, too, it seemed, had once been charming, full of young grace and eager expectancy. And now she was in her twenty-fifth year again, and driving through Rome to the English cemetery. She reached it. She met some one there, to whom she spoke in Italian. It was a rendezvous of lovers. And Lilla heard the sigh:

"Don't go. Don't smile at my intuition——"

Later, after seeming to listen intently, Aunt Althea cried:

"What are they calling? All massacred at Adowa!" She uttered a moan, "I knew it!"

To the doctor's surprise she lived through the following day. By evening everybody had become hopeful of her recovery. Aunt Althea, turning her faded, aristocratic head on the pillow, said:

"You must go and rest, Lilla. I shall be all right now. How badly you look! How I must have worried you! They shouldn't have spoiled your party. You see it wasn't worth while."

She passed away at dawn.

It was a morning of unusual brightness. A high wind caught up and scattered broadcast the petals from the Italian garden, as though that spot had served its only purpose. Now and then a swift cloud cast a shadow over the landscape, then passed on, leaving everything as brilliant as before. The boughs of the trees tapped urgently against the windowpanes, calling attention to the sparkling clarity of space. And Lilla, sitting alone in her room, wondered, "Will she meet him out there? Does fate finally relent? Or are those moments that she had with him—so few, while others are allowed so many!—supposed to be enough happiness for her?"

CHAPTER XIII

For a while Lilla remained in the house on Long Island.

She sat in the pergola holding on her lap a closed book, between the pages of which she kept Lawrence's cablegrams and letters from London. Toward sunset she rose and went down across the meadow to the brook, where some willows leaned over the water. As the twilight gathered, a smell of wood smoke made her think of camp fires; and casting a look around her at the suave landscape she tried to picture the jungle.

Then, when she recalled their brief hours together, a filmy curtain appeared to ascend before her eyes; and that relationship, which because of her profound, psychic agitation had been almost dreamlike while in progress, assumed a perfect clarity, a new value. And now, with the dissipation of that haze cast over all her senses by his nearness, she perceived him, himself, far more distinctly than when he had been with her. "Ah, what was I thinking of to let him go!" She felt that another woman, not cursed with her ineptitude in that crisis, would have held him back.

"But you were cruel enough not to give up going of your own accord," she sighed in the twilight. And, turning wearily back toward the house, she reflected that if she had been fatally weak he had been fatally strong, and that, after all, those two antithetical defects were strangely similar.

When she was most gloomy, Fanny Brassfield came to visit her for a few days.

That vigorous blonde woman, ruddy from golf and thin from horseback riding, with calm nerves and an endless fund of gossip, brought a vital thrill into the Long Island house. Yet to Lilla this very vigor was oppressive instead of tonic; and resentment came over her as she scrutinized her friend's satirical face, which seemed to typify all the women who progressed successfully through life, as if their natures, victoriously adamant, had bestowed upon them this brilliant hardness of complexion, this sophisticated, frosty, conquering glance. Lucky women, who were so emphatically of the same essence as the phenomena round them, who accepted life with the simplicity of natural creatures, who never saw, beneath the pageantry of these appearances, a peeping horror that cast one down from joy to despair! Even death seemed natural to them, apparently, so long as they themselves escaped its touch.

"One must resign oneself to all these things," said Fanny, in her clear, loud voice. "One must learn to rise above them. These periods of mourning are really a mistake. All this sitting still, dressed in black! One takes medicine when one's ill. A dose of pleasure ought to be the prescription when one's sad."

She added that physical exercise was also very important.

In a striped woolen sports suit, a felt hat turned over one ear and a walking stick in her hand, Fanny Brassfield presented herself at Lilla's bedside while the garden was still full of mist. She prescribed, on this occasion, a walk before breakfast.

They trudged through bypaths where the bushes were gemmed with dew. From a wooded hilltop they saw, gliding along the highway, the cars of men who were bound for their safe occupations in the city.

Lilla regained the house exhausted, pale from fatigue, while Fanny Brassfield seemed bursting with energy.

In the evening time began to hang rather heavily for Fanny. She persuaded Lilla to play the piano for her. Then she glanced over the books in which the paragraphs were shortest, ran through a few magazines, kicked off her slippers, put her feet on a stool, lighted a cigarette, and fell back upon gossip. Madame Zanidov was now visiting in Maine. Cornelius Rysbroek had gone to Mexico.

"Mexico! Aren't things rather unsettled there?"

"Perhaps he's gone where things are unsettled because everything is too much settled here," replied Fanny, with her satirical smile.

"But Cornie!"

"Oh," said Fanny, luxuriously stretching herself like a cat that needs exercise, "if one of these timid souls is hit hard enough, there's no telling what he'll do."

CHAPTER XIV

Before the end of summer Lilla returned to the house on lower Fifth Avenue.

In the hall paved with black and white tiles, the chasteness of the ivory-colored wainscot set off two stately consoles, on which lamps with cylindrical shades of painted parchment were reflected in antique mirrors. The drawing-room furniture, from the eighteenth century, displayed its discreet elegance against the sage green walls and the formal folds of the mulberry-colored curtains; while over the chimney piece, which was ornamented with three vases of the Renaissance in silver gilt, a painting by Bronzino focused the gaze upon a triumph of romance over formality. This painting, in this room, was like a gesture of Aunt Althea's real self.

"How well she kept her secret," Lilla thought "She was rather heroic, it seems."

And she felt as surprised a sadness as though she were the first who had not quite appreciated the departed.

"The departed!"

The prophecy of Madame Zanidov—"that incredible balderdash!"—even woke her in the night.

She discovered the date of Lawrence's birth, then went to a woman with birdlike eyes, who was seated behind a table on which stood some little Hindu idols and a vase of gilded lotus buds. The astrologer, when she had made some marks on a sheet of paper, and had added up some figures, confessed that "these next few months were going to be a critical time for him." "You see, here are Saturn and Uranus—"

Emerging from the sanctum, Lilla felt the pavement move beneath her feet.

Presently she sought out the teachers of New Thought, whose faces were as serene as though they had found a talisman by which death itself might be vanquished. They calmed her with benignant smiles, then informed her that fear was as potent in bringing about disaster as optimism was in preventing it. In those consultation rooms, where the walls were dotted—rather unnecessarily, it seemed to Lilla—with mottoes exhorting her to love, they gave her the recipe in gentle voices that were nearly lyrical. But gradually she got the idea that they were speaking to her in a foreign language. Drowsiness assailed her, as though a malignant power, determined that she should not gain this peace, had cast over her a spell of mental lethargy.

Nevertheless, she persisted. In the bookshops the customers turned to regard this tall beauty clad in black, who, with a mournful eagerness, leaned over the counters devoted to "inspirational literature."

One rainy afternoon she threw those books aside and went to church.

Here was an awesomeness appropriate to a mortal conception of God—a distant glitter of candles beyond colossal pillars, a fragrance of stale incense, a silence in which the shadowy crimson of banners, suspended high in the nave, was like a soft blaring of celestial trumpets. Exaltation took hold of her as she recalled the miracles of orthodox faith and the eternal promise of compassion.

She prayed for a long while, lost in the sweetness of the incense, her heart quivering from the memory of her few hours of love.

Whenever she received a letter from him she tore open the envelope with one movement, and pressed against her face those crackling sheets of paper that seemed to exhale the odor of a far-off land. He had written it in the wilds, before his tent, while a naked black messenger stood waiting. The letter sealed, the messenger had stuck it into a split wand, and straightway had set off at a trot toward the coast.

Now she wanted to know precisely what his surroundings looked like. When she had pored over the map she collected all the books about that region.

She was surprised to find it impregnated with romance.

It was the "Eldorado" of remote antiquity. Thither, in the dawn of recorded history, had gone the Phoenician galleys, full of hook-nosed men in purple and brass, their beards scented with spikenard. From the mining towns that they built in the jungle, surrounded by cyclopean walls and adorned with grotesque stone images, came the stores of gold with which the Sidonians enriched King Solomon. To-day all those workings were apparently exhausted. The Zimbabwe—the cities of stone—had crumbled; the jungle had closed in; and in that wilderness only a heap of rubble, or the choked mouth of a pit, remained here and there to mark the source of the metal that had gilded the temple at Jerusalem, and the Semitic shrines to Baal and Astoreth.

But a new letter told her that he had crossed the Zambesi.

He had gone into a land almost wholly unexplored by its present claimants, full of fever-breeding marshes, barren mountain gorges, and great forests. The inhabitants were an unconquered race of warriors called the Mambava, fiercer than the lions and leopards about them, hostile to strangers, and given to uncanny customs. They worshipped among other things—perhaps in consequence of the old

Phoenician occupation—the moon. At certain periods of the year their forests thundered with the music of drums; their towns were deserted except for the women and children. Then the stranger who had ventured into their country might see, from his hiding place, hordes of black men moving to a secret rendezvous, their painted faces framed in monkey hair, their limbs covered with amulets, their shields rising in time to an interminable chanting in a minor key.

Sometimes, in the corridor outside the door of Lawrence's rooms, she encountered a small, dapper young man with an inquisitive face, who lived on the floor above. He usually carried under his arm a leather portfolio. Nothing could have been more interested than his look when he passed this sad-eyed woman in mourning, whose identity and story he had learned from the janitor.

When she had shut the living-room door behind her, for a moment she closed her eyes in order that she might not see the weapons on the walls. Then she kindled the fire. The blazing logs sent over her a wave of heat; but she shivered while listening to the sound of sleet on the glass.

"He might be here with me. We might have felt together the security and peace of this warm room, and laughed at the storm outside."

One evening she ripped from their frames the photographs of savages smeared with white paint and crowned with fur and feathers. She threw them into the fire. As the flames consumed them, she leaned, forward like those who try to annihilate their enemies by destroying their likenesses.

For a long while she sat beside the empty chair, shading her eyes from the blaze with a translucent hand. But suddenly she stood up, tense and quaking. Her dilated eyes were fixed upon a point in space, from which an overwhelming impression had rushed in upon her—a flood of distant emotion, a sort of voiceless cry, in a flash traversing half the earth and unerringly reaching her.

Little by little her nerves and muscles relaxed. Moving as though her limbs were weighted with lead, after carefully drawing the fire screen in front of the glowing embers, she put on her black toque, her long coat of black fur and her black gloves.

As she crossed the sidewalk to her car, an eddy of wind raised up before her, head high, a whirl of snowflakes that resembled a wraith for one moment, before it was whipped away into the darkness.

PART TWO

CHAPTER XV

A month after that stormy night when Lilla had felt the impact of some far-off gush of feeling, the newspapers published a despatch reporting the death of Lawrence Teck at the hands of savages. Four months passed, however, before Lilla received a letter from Parr, the valet.

It had happened in the country of the Mambava. That tribe, despite their well-known animosity to strangers, had not been hostile to Lawrence. Indeed, he had won the friendship of their king. Yet it was in the king's stronghold that the tragedy had happened.

There had been a beer dance, a disorderly festival ending in a clash between the Mambava warriors and Lawrence's camp police. Almost without warning the rifles had cracked, the spears had begun to fly. Lawrence, throwing himself between the parties, had been among the first to fall. Then a frenzy had seized the savages; a panic, the intruders. It had been a massacre—a headlong flight amid the Mambava forests, through which Parr, himself badly wounded, and half the time unconscious, had been dragged by five Mohammedan survivors. They had gained an outpost fort where, ever since, Parr had lain hovering between life and death, not only crippled by his wounds, but also stricken with the black-water fever. Then, at last, he had gathered strength enough to scrawl these lines.

CHAPTER XVI

Her friends were surprised that she "took it as well as she did." Considering her emotional legacy, they had expected a collapse. On the contrary she remained, as it seemed, almost passionless. She did not show even that desire for sympathy which is characteristic of hysterical natures.

Fanny Brassfield noticed presently, however, that Lilla could no longer look at negroes without

turning pale, that her antipathy to certain colors, sounds, and perfumes had increased, and that sometimes she appeared to be listening to a voice inaudible to others.

It was the voice of her thoughts, which she heard, now and then, just as if some one were whispering in her ear.

She became subject to reveries in which there were frequent lapses from all mental function. Then, of a sudden, she was filled with a longing for movement.

She went abroad alone, and settled herself in a villa on the French Riviera.

Every morning there appeared on the terrace of a neighboring villa a young Frenchwoman in a white straw hat and a white dress, carrying an ebony cane, and followed by a brown spaniel. In the evening the stranger might be seen pacing behind the marble urns in a gown of gold and silver lace, or perhaps in a black dress spotted with large medallions of pearl and turquoise. A tall man walked by her side; and when their silhouettes stood out against the luminous sea there came to Lilla, with the interminable odor of roses, a soft laugh of happiness.

The sound floated across a gulf as wide as that which separates one world from another.

As for Lilla, her world lay in the past; and all this semitropical luxuriance of nature, enriched and complicated by an insatiable mankind, was lost in such mistiness as had risen round her in childhood—when her world had seemed to lie in the future. Sometimes those past events, from her continual rehearsal of them, attained recreation; the precious scenes surrounded her visibly and almost tangibly; and the dark garden of the villa became the other garden, the threshold of love. Then she realized that this was one more delusion due to her abnormal state of mind. In her terror she reached out through the shadows to grasp at something that might help her to regain contact with reality. She clutched a rose, and as she crushed its sweetness to her face its thorn pierced her lip. She burst into a fit of crying and laughing at this reassurance—this proof that there existed, after all, a material world, of beauty inextricably mingled with despair.

But loneliness remained.

She expected no abatement of this loneliness; for he was gone after showing her that it was he, of a worldful of men, for whom she had been waiting. And now, more and more, her objective mind was filled with hitherto unsuspected memories of him, a thousand fragmentary recollections that she fitted together into an image more vivid than the man himself had been. This image, gilded by layer after layer of pathetic thoughts, enlarged by the continuous enhancement of his value, gradually assumed an heroic magnitude, and became more splendid than a statue in a temple. So now it was no longer a man that she contemplated in her reveries, but a sort of god whose stubbornness had destroyed her.

In those nightmares of hers, however, he was still a man, subject to mortal tragedy. Waking with a cry, she discerned, in the act of fading away against the curtains, the dead-white, wedge-shaped face of Anna Zanidov.

One day she closed the villa and went swiftly to Lausanne.

She entered a bright consulting room where there rose to meet her, from behind a desk, a calm-looking man with a bushy red and white beard. His gaze took in, in a flash, her widow's weeds, her tall, slim person, her delicate, pale brown face, her features composed and yet a trifle wild, her whole effect of elegance and singularity.

"I feel as if I am going mad," she blurted out, by way of greeting.

The famous physician smoothed his beard reflectively.

"There is a story, perhaps?"

And when she had told him everything, he remarked, "I will make out for you a series of appointments."

"The cause will remain," she returned.

"But I shall change your thoughts about the cause," he said paternally.

"No!" she exclaimed, in a voice vibrant with apprehension. For she would have gone on risking this madness that she feared, rather than let him efface from her conscious thoughts, or even dim, one recollection of Lawrence.

He understood. Casting down his eyes, he reflected:

"Apparently this charming person has never been told how extreme an example she is of our poor civilisées. For the sake of a dead man she is willing, after all, to commit slow suicide. If she continues to nurse this grief which is indissoluble from her love, with her predispositions she will go the usual way, probably ending in a psychic collapse. Ah, yes, if she had not come to me she would just have drifted on and on into the devil knows what. As it is, I don't fancy that I could make her quite unemotional; but that grief—there's no reason why she should go through life under that additional burden! She is exquisite, young, sure of many happy years with some one else, if she is cured of this preoccupation

with that fellow who is gone. Shall I ask permission to try to do her that favor?"

The celebrated specialist, raising his eyes, said benevolently to Lilla:

"At least, madam, you have no objection to my stopping those nightmares of yours?"

Every day, for three weeks, she returned to the consultation room, sat down in a deep leather chair, fixed her eyes on a bright metal ball, and fell asleep. The famous physician found her, as he had expected, extremely impressionable. On waking, she had no objective recollection of what had been said to her.

But the dreams ceased to torment her.

With a strange, almost unprecedented feeling of peace she traveled down to Lake Como. Here she dwelt in a house smothered in flowers, on a promontory that was almost an island.

In the morning she walked in the garden, drenched in sunshine, enveloped in the silence of the lake, beyond which she saw, far away, other villas nestling at the bases of the mountains. A sensation of humility came to her. Amid that great panorama of blue and gold she seemed to perceive subtle traces of a beneficent divinity. The sunshine veiled the hawks that were soaring through the sky in quest of weaker birds; the waters of the lake concealed the fishes that were devouring one another; and when, with a timid and pleading naïveté, she paused before a rosebush, she did not see, behind those petals, the spiders spinning their traps.

As she returned toward the house, there stole over her a pleasant weakness, a childlike and tremulous trust; and she felt the soft air more keenly, smelled more delicate fragrances, heard a multitude of infinitesimal sounds that had not reached her ears a moment ago.

She sat in a high-ceiled, white-walled room with French windows opening on a terrace where *olea fragans* blossoms expanded round the base of a statue by Canova. At last a feeling of incompleteness penetrated her languor. She rose to pace the mosaic floor on which appeared a design of mermaids and tritons.

"What shall I do now? I must fill my life with something. I must find some way to occupy my mind."

She thought of mastering another language; for like many persons of similar temperament she found the learning of foreign tongues a simple matter. But what language? Already she knew French, Italian, and German. Russian, then?

She recoiled from that thought, associated as it was with Anna Zanidov.

Sitting down at the piano, she played Chopin.

Her interpretation of the piece was good, but not eloquent. The spirit that she had heard certain musicians put into it was lacking. She remembered how differently even old Brantome, the expatriated French critic, had expressed these phrases. She wondered why, with her immense passion for music, she had never been able to translate its profoundest spirit.

And she recalled an old longing of hers to compose some musical masterpiece. For that purpose she had faithfully studied harmony, counterpoint, fugue, and musical form, had steeped herself in the works of the masters from Palestrina to Stravinsky. Yet her own creative efforts had ended in platitudes. Was it true that women, supposed to be more emotional than men, were incapable of employing successfully the most intense medium for the revelation of emotion?

"What am I good for? Ah, what shall I do with my life?"

Late in the afternoon a boatman rowed her out on the lake. At twilight the mauve shadows on the cliffs combined with the pallor of the Alps to form round her a setting full of poetry and pathos. She thought how perfectly these things might once have enclosed her in the scenery of love—yet now, for some reason, they were incapable of composing with a proper vividness the scenery of grief.

She returned to the villa to find visitors, women whom she had known in girlhood, who had married members of the Italian nobility, and now were sojourning in the neighborhood. They brought men with them, and sometimes stayed to dinner.

One night, as she leaned against the balustrade of the terrace, watching the strings of lights across the lake, a young Roman, tall, dark and aquiline, handsome and strong, laid his hand upon hers.

"It is a world made for happiness," he breathed.

The others, in the white-walled room now mellow from lamplight, were clustered round the piano, and one of them was singing a song by Tosti. Without drawing away her hand, Lilla returned:

"Happiness. Yes, tell me what it consists in."

"In the glory of life and love. In the splendors of this world and our acceptance of them—we who are this world's strange, sensitive culmination. Not to question, but to feel, with these feelings of ours that a thousand generations have made so fine, so complex. To be natural in the heart of nature."

She smiled mournfully:

"You realists! And are these things that you celebrate reality? They fade and die——"

"But while they live they live," he cried low, with an accent of austere passion, and seized her in his arms.

For a moment she did not move. She let herself feel that contact, that strength and fervor, with a nearly analytical attentiveness, with, a melancholy curiosity. But of a sudden she pushed him from her with a surprising strength, her heart beating wildly. She stared at him in amazement, then entered the house.

A fortnight later she returned to New York.

Winter was imminent; but few of her friends had yet appeared in town. One day on Fifth Avenue, however, she met old Brantome, the critic, who invited her to an afternoon of music at his apartment.

CHAPTER XVII

In Brantome's living room the book shelves rose to the ceiling; between them the spaces on the walls were covered with the mementoes of a long life. On the tables stood bowls of flowers, stacks of musical scores, trays of wineglasses, cigarette boxes that had once been jewel cases, half-empty teacups, and the gold purses or jet handbags of women who reclined in the deep chairs with their faces turned toward the piano.

Men leaned smoking in the heavily curtained embrasures of the windows, their foreheads lowered, their eyebrows casting over their eyes the shadows as if of a profound fatigue. Beside the hall door loomed the white mane of Brantome, who turned, at an inflow of artificial light, to greet the small Italian woman that had recently become a prima donna.

And presently this song bird warbled for her comrades of the arts, as she would have done in no other company. The air shook from her agile cadenzas. A last, long trill, high and pure, died away vibrating in the vases of iridescent glass.

Then some one persuaded Brantome to play a piece of Schumann's. And once more Lilla heard *Vienna Carnival*.

When he had finished playing, Brantome sat down beside her.

"So it is as magical as ever, a bit of music?" he inquired, in his rumbling, hoarse voice.

"You were playing that at the moment when I first saw my husband," she said.

He contemplated her with his haggard old eyes. Patting her hand, he declared:

"All these emotions that you, a beautiful young woman, have felt, I believe that I, an ugly, worn-out old man, have felt, also. I, too, have felt in my time that the world was at an end. I have suffered from the same inability to return into life. Well, will you think me cruel—shall I appear to you as the thief of an inestimable treasure—if I tell you something? In time, sooner or later, one recovers. I don't mean that one forgets. It is always there; and a chance sound or perfume brings it back to one. But at last it returns so gently! One feels then, instead of pain, almost a gentle, melancholy pleasure. Then you will learn that there may be certain subtle joys in grief."

She lowered her gaze, flinching inwardly, as one sometimes does when credited with a feeling that one no longer fully deserves. A dismal perplexity came to her, a little pang of treason, as she asked him:

"How can I hasten that day?"

He suggested:

"You might perhaps find some engrossing interest?"

Near the piano a group were discussing women's failures in music. One heard the names of Chaminade, Augusta Holmes, Ethel Smyth. Why had there been no female Beethovens, Liszts, or even Chopins? The reason, asserted a middle-aged man, was that women's emotions were too thoroughly instinctive to be projected in the form of first-class music, which was, in fine, emotion analyzed, compressed within the limits of fixed rules, expressed by series of arbitrary signs. In the midst of his conclusion, however, he lost his self-satisfied smile: he had caught sight of Lilla, who was looking at him blankly as though he had slammed a transparent door in her face.

She heard Brantome benevolently murmuring the platitude:

"It is often in making others forget their sorrows that one diminishes one's own, and in doing good to others that one finds good for oneself."

She showed him a bitter smile.

"Yes, charity. The usual prescription. I have already tried it." She added, "Of course those poor people in their poverty and illnesses merely appeared to me as a means for my own relief. In helping them I didn't think of their troubles, but of forgetting my own. Sometimes when I've written a check I almost expect it to buy me a less gloomy day. At such moments I should be absurd if I weren't contemptible."

"Bah! you are unjust to yourself."

It was true. Lilla, who had suffered so much from her exceptional temperament, could not bear to see others suffer; and in the grip of her own weaknesses she had always felt compassion for the weak.

"But I ought not to come here," she said.

She explained that in this place she "felt her worthlessness." It would be better, she thought, to remain in the Brassfield state of mind: thus one might find an anodyne for this sense of insignificance. For, to those others, of course, wealth and social position were the important things in life, magnificently making up for the lack of other qualities. If they had artistic enthusiasms, it was because they regarded the arts as did the Roman conquerors—as elements created for no other reason than to enhance their triumphs. Debussy, she suggested, had been born to give them a cause for displaying their jewels at the opera, just as Titian had existed in order that their acquisition of a painting by his hand might be cabled round the world. In that region of inverted values one took on the egotism of the fabled frog in the well, who laughed to scorn the frog that came to tell him of the ocean.

"But the well is so prettily gilded," Lilla remarked. "And it's lined with so many nice little mirrors in Louis XVI frames, that you can hardly blame the frog if he imagines that his importance, like his reflections, extends to the ends of the earth, in that multiplied glitter of gilt."

Brantome began to laugh, then turned serious.

"You must be desperate," he commented.

"That is your fault. I've always had a longing for what I find in these rooms; but that longing isn't backed up by any capacity. When one of these friends of yours has suffered a loss, his art still remains. And maybe it becomes a richer art because of his loss."

She sighed, her pale brown cheek resting against her black-gloved hand, her black fur collar framing her neck on which the strand of pearls was less lustrous than the teeth between her parted lips.

His leonine old visage grew soft as he looked at her, and under his white mustaches of a Viking there appeared a sad smile, as if he were thinking that things might have been different with him, had she, with this beauty and these predilections, been young when he had been young.

"Oh, no, you must not stop coming here," he protested gently. "It's only right that these poor fellows should have their glimpses of a composite of all the beautiful muses—who, as you'll remember, were not themselves practitioners in the arts, but the inspirers of artists. Isn't there, for women, besides the joys of personal accomplishment, another satisfaction, which one might call vicarious?"

She gave him again her bitter, listless smile.

"You believe that stuff about women's inspiration?"

"But why not, good heavens! When it is a fact of life——"

He bade her consider the great music written by men. Almost invariably one found in its depths a longing for synthesis with some ideal beauty, produced by thoughts of some idealized woman. Or else, by woman in the abstract—that obsession which, ever since the days of Dante and the troubadours, had attained a nearly religious quality, against whose pressure even the modern materialist struggled in vain. Yes, ever since that fatal twelfth century it was woman, the goddess, the Beatrice-form beckoning on the staircase of Paradise, who attracted upward the dazzled gaze of man, and who seemed, by an unearthly smile—with which man himself had possibly endowed her—to promise a mystical salvation and a sort of celestial bliss.

"But at times, as I say," he concluded, with a shrug, "some lucky artist is suddenly confronted by all that in bodily form—by a Beatrice in a sable coat from Fifth Avenue and a little black hat from Paris."

But in her silvery voice there was a cadence of irony, when she demanded:

"Whom shall I inspire? Show me the one by whose aid I can pretend that the woman is responsible for the masterpieces, as no doubt Vittoria Colonna sometimes pretended to herself in the case of Michael Angelo. But remember that it must be an affair like that one, romantically platonic—à la *manière de Provence*."

Brantome nodded benignantly. But old pangs had revived in his heart.

How well he understood this restlessness of hers, this sense of impotency, this secret rancor at contemplation of congenial forms of success! He, by some minute fault, some tiny slip of fate, had long ago been doomed to these same sensations. In the morning of youth, when gazing toward the future, he had seen the world at his feet, unaware of that little flaw in the foundations of his Castle in Spain, unwarned of the trick that destiny was going to play on him. All these years it had been here in the bottom of his heart, the sensation of inferiority, the gnawing chagrin. He had masked it well: one discerned it only in some rare look when he was off his guard. And now and then, for a while, he even vanquished it, when some fresh voice rose in the world of music, and he championed the cause of that new genius so generously, hotly, and triumphantly that the consequent renown seemed nearly to be his own, since he had helped by his enthusiasm to establish it.

"Yes, certainly, *à la manière de Provence*—since music is so very impersonal an art," he muttered, with an absentminded, haggard smile.

But Lilla was watching a man and woman who sat in a shadowy alcove, and who, as some one began to play a nocturne, let their fingers twine together.

CHAPTER XVIII

One night, at the end of the winter, she astonished everybody by appearing with Fanny Brassfield in a box at the opera, wearing a black velvet dress that made her, in that great horseshoe blooming with flowerlike gowns, the objective of all eyes.

"There is hope!" said one young man waggishly to another. "Cornie Rysbroek ought to see this."

But Cornelius Rysbroek was traveling far away.

As for Lawrence, he was slipping farther and farther into the past. There were times when without the aid of his picture Lilla could no longer visualize his face. Their moment of love became blurred in her memory. At times, remorsefully, as if struggling against a lethargy mysteriously imposed upon her natural instincts, she strove to revive her grief in its full strength; and then, for an instant, her recollections became as poignant as though he had been with her only yesterday. But that perception could not always be evoked at will; and ordinarily Lilla was aware only of a faint echo from a distant region of pathos and delight—an echo that reached her, through a host of other sounds, like the intrinsic spirit of an ultra-modern symphony, so wrapped up in dissonances as to be nearly unintelligible.

"Where is he?" she wondered. "Are those right who would say that he has ceased to exist except in memory?"

At this thought she wept, not for him so much as for the blurring of her remembrance of him. And sometimes, when she had not thought of him all day, she was awakened in the night by her own cry:

"Give me back my love! Give me back my grief!"

Rising from her bed, she pored over the books on spiritualism that still formed a long row on the shelf of her writing desk. She envied the women who were reported to have received, through automatic writing, messages from the dead. She sat down, in the silence of the night, to hold over the clean sheet of paper the perpendicular pencil. With her head bowed forward, her pose an epitome of patience, she fixed her eyes upon the pencil point, which slowly made meaningless curlicues.

But suddenly, when she was expecting nothing, there passed through her a tingling warmth such as that which must pervade the earth at spring-time. She stared round the room with the thought, "His spirit is here!"

And she uttered, very distinctly, in the hope that the words might penetrate his world from hers:

"I love you as much as ever!"

Those moments became rare. At last they ceased to occur.

"He has passed so far into the beyond that he can no longer return to me."

As if it had been awaiting this acknowledgment, a thicker curtain descended between Lilla and the past.

And now she was like some medieval chatelaine who, emerging from a dark and lonely castle, views all the gewgaws that a far-wandering peddler has spread out for her in the sun.

There were the art galleries filled with statues in inchoate or tortured forms, or with paintings that

seemed to Lilla to have been conceived by madmen, yet in which certain persons declared that they could discern a sanity beyond the understanding of the age. And there were the concert halls given over to the very newest music, from which Lilla emerged with her nerves exacerbated.

Then the prosceniums of the theaters framed pageants of Oriental sensuousness—scenes of hallucinatory seductiveness and splendor, through which, to a blare of startling music, bounded swarms of half-naked bodies jingling with jewels.

Or, abruptly, the softness of oboes and cellos, the fragranciness of musk, the gleam of purple light on torsoes moist from exertion, a presentment of love as understood by ancient Eastern despots—a perverse and gorgeous ideal resuscitated to challenge modern thought. Or perhaps, with a sudden rush of darkness and return of light, before scenery that tore at the nerves like a discord of trumpets, a dancer—a heathen god—leaped high into the air, with muscles gilded as if to add an overwhelming value to mere human flesh.

Later, the chandeliers of ballrooms, multiplied by those Louis XVI mirrors that Lilla had derided, cast their glitter upon the bright dresses of a new design, the coiffures that had been invented yesterday, the jewels, maybe souvenirs of old fervors, that had been ruthlessly reset. In glass galleries banked with azaleas, where the waltz music was like an echo from a still more desirable world, looks melted into embraces, or, at least, a whisper promised the kiss that caution there denied. On all sides love was going forward: men and women were dancing toward the pain of happiness or the strange pleasures of tragedy. And even in the brief silence the air seemed to ring from a concerted laugh of triumph over life.

Yet all these activities were informed with a feverish haste, a sort of delirious greediness and apprehension, as though one must feel very quickly everything that humanity's experiments had made the senses capable of feeling.

Lilla stood watching this whirlpool.

Sometimes she thought of opening the Long Island house and shutting herself up there, of collecting Chinese porcelains, of studying a new language or religion.

"Ah, if I had some real object!"

One day she put on her hat intending to drive uptown and spend an hour in Lawrence's old rooms; for nothing was changed there, except that nowadays the curtains were always drawn, and the hearth was always cold. But this time she purposed to light the fire, and pretend—

Instead, she returned to Brantome's. Some one had just stopped playing. On the dim divans, men and women sat pensively holding teacups on their knees. The firelight appeared to give life to the many rows of books, as though all the fine emotions stored between those covers were consuming the leather that was intricately tooled with gold. Together with the wood smoke, and the scents of tobacco and tea, there stole through the quiet room a redolence not of flowers or of women's perfumes, but, as it were, the essence of the mementoes on the walls and cabinets—those souvenirs of old friendships and past attachments, or maybe of unconfessed infatuations and thwarted longings.

"I knew you'd come back," said Brantome, looking at Lilla out of his massive, ruined face.

He made her sit down beside him on a divan apart from the rest. She looked like a lady of cavalier days, he told her, in her tricorne hat of maroon velvet, with a brown plume trailing down to the shoulder from which was slipping her maroon-colored cloak edged with fur. He assured her that she had never looked so lovely.

At these words she felt despondency instead of pleasure.

Across the room, half in shadow, with a ray of lamplight falling on his hands, a young man sat sunken in a wheel chair. He was frail, obviously an invalid; yet in the gloom of the alcove where he was sitting his complexion seemed bronzed, as if from a life in the sun. His sensitive face, disfigured by his sufferings and his thoughts, leaned forward; his eyes were fixed on the keyboard of the piano.

"What!" Brantome exclaimed, "you don't know David Verne?"

She thought that she had heard some of his music, but could not recall the impression it had made on her.

"The impression produced by Verne's work isn't usually vague."

"Has he so much talent?"

"I was confident," said Brantome, "that he would be the great composer of this age."

"And now?"

"It's a question whether he'll live through the spring."

He told her David Verne's story.

At the height of his promise, in consequence, it was said by some, of a certain mental shock, the young composer had fallen victim to a rare, insidious disease, arising apparently from an organic derangement, small in itself but deadly in its secondary effects. The chief characteristics of this malady were a general muscular prostration growing ever more profound, and a slowly increasing feebleness of vital action. It was an illness for which medical science had provided no cure; the physicians could prescribe only such drugs as arsenic and strychnia, to postpone as long as possible the climax of that fatal debility. The patient was already afflicted with an immense exhaustion, incapacitated from any but the slightest of muscular efforts, unable to carry on the simplest occupation. Yet despite his almost continuous attacks of headache he could think—of the collapse of his hopes, of the approaching end.

In the beginning David Verne had rebelled against this fate with all the force of one who feels that he is in the world for an unparalleled purpose—who refuses to believe that any physical affliction is meant to thwart the unfoldment of his genius. All the splendid raptures pressing toward expression, the conviction of unique capacity and great prolificness, reinforced his determination to be well again. Brantome declared that in those early days it had been like the combat of a hero against malefic gods—a "sort of Greek tragedy."

"Well," said Brantome, in a tone of stifled fury, glaring at Lilla with his eyes of an old conquered Viking, "have you seen these pigmies brandishing their fists at thunderbolts?"

Disqualified long ago from walking, to-day David Verne could hardly raise his hands to lay them limply upon the keyboard of a piano.

His mind had suffered as sad a deterioration as his body. Formerly fine, as befitted the source of fine achievements, it was now deformed by bitterness. The last of those bright qualities, which in other days had endeared him to his friends, were dying now, or perhaps were already dead. In fact, Brantome confessed, it was doubly painful to receive him here; one had to see the wreck not only of a young physique, but also of an invaluable spirit.

Lilla sat frozen. At last she uttered:

"Ah! this world of ours!"

And she had a vision of a universal monster evolving exquisite forms of beauty only to destroy them fiendishly.

"Yes," Brantome assented. He, too, for all his experience with life, looking crushed anew. Indeed, in his old countenance there was a look of defeat as dismal as though the ruin of that young man's hopes had involved one more precious aspiration of his own. After a pause he exclaimed, "I haven't suggested that you, who have enough unhappy recollections, meet the poor fellow——"

"What was the shock that caused it?"

The old Frenchman made a hopeless gesture, and returned:

"I don't say it was that. It's only certain persons who say the thing may sometime be produced that way. Who knows? Too sensitive!—but if he hadn't been we shouldn't have had the music. These poor chaps, always balanced between joy and sorrow by a hair!" And he ground out between his teeth, "One of those Beatrices of ours. As if she had come to a harp, and had made all its strings vibrate just for the pleasure of hearing their quality, and then had gone on content——"

Lilla rose, drew her cloak around her, and departed with an appalling sensation of pity and resentment.

CHAPTER XIX

One afternoon, returning to her house on lower Fifth Avenue, as she entered the hall paved with black and white tiles she saw a shabby little man trying to rise from a settee between two consoles, by aid of a pair of crutches. For an instant she had a hazy idea that he ought to be holding a breakfast tray in his hands. Then, with a sickening leap of her heart, she realized that this was Parr, who had been Lawrence Teck's valet.

He had thought she would want to receive from him, promptly on his return, a first-hand report on that African tragedy.

"But where have you been all this time?"

He had been a long while recovering from the wound that had crippled him, and from the black-water fever. Then he had found himself penniless, dependent on the charity of traders and petty government officials in the port town lying just above the equator. He had "drifted about," a reproach, perhaps, to a certain human callousness engendered by the tropics, till finally an old friend of

Lawrence Teck's had appeared from Mozambique, found him sitting in tatters on the steps of a grogshop, and paid his passage home.

"You should have let me know," she said remorsefully.

He hung his head.

She led him into the drawing-room, and seated him in one of the mulberry chairs. He had become an old man. His honest, lantern-jawed face was gray and drawn.

And then there had always been the idea in his head that he ought to have fallen with his master.

"I couldn't help myself, ma'am," he said in a broken voice. "Before I hardly knew what was up he was done for, and I had this spear wound in me, and our gun boys was dragging me off amongst them, shooting to right and left. I didn't rightly know what was going on any more than if I'd got mauled by a pack of lions. Once when I kind of come to myself I tried to make them go back; but they told me they'd seen the Mambava finishing Mr. Teck as he lay on the ground——"

She gave a start and a moan. He recoiled in contrition.

At last, when she had bade him continue:

"Besides, they was after us all the way. Sometimes they even showed up in our path instead of behind us, waving their shields and shouting for a parley. But we'd had enough of their treachery; and our boys let them have it. Night and day it was dodge and run. Then we got out of the Mambava forests, and they carried me the rest of the way in a hammock made of vines and poles. Even then they never dared to light a fire, because we could always hear the Mambava behind us, telephoning from one village to another with their drums. But I couldn't hope to make you feel it, ma'am, even what I took in myself when I wasn't out of my head. It was just bad. Of course, the worst of it was that Mr. Teck was gone."

He began to cry weakly, exclaiming:

"I'd been with him everywhere!"

He was living with relatives. He hoped to get a job as a watchman. This idea was repugnant to her. The shattered, tremulous, little man was dignified by his grief, the intensity of which, after all this time, filled her with self-contempt. Then she thought, "But now, by his aid, I shall regain that dear grief!" She said:

"You must let me arrange to have your pay go on. That's what Mr. Teck would have wished."

She took his address, told a servant to call a taxicab, and went down the front steps with Parr, holding him by his bony arm as he lowered his crutches. Overwhelmed by this condescension, he stammered:

"I was afraid to come here, ma'am."

She replied:

"We need each other."

Next day she sought him out.

She found him near Stuyvesant Square, in a shabby room overlooking a back yard in which an ailanthus tree spread its limbs above some clothes lines. She leaned forward in a raveled chair, with her veil tucked up so that she could see him better, her gloved hands clasped tightly in her lap, her eyes intent. When he had recovered from her simplicity, Parr prepared to tell her what she had come to hear.

But there were so many tales about the hero to choose from!

"Anything," she exclaimed. "Make me hear what he used to say, know what he used to think. Make me see him there. Make him live!"

She meant, "Make him vivid again in my heart, where, against all my efforts, his face has faded away."

Parr held his crutches against his shoulder as if they were the harp of a minstrel who has come from afar to chant the epic of some already mythical character. His faded coat was wrinkled round the neck; his collar was split at the folds; and a faint smell of iodoform mingled with Lilla's perfume, which a Viennese artist in odors had concocted especially to "match her temperament."

"One time in Nyasaland——"

"Not the jungles!" she protested, flinching back.

"The desert, then?" he ventured.

He showed Lawrence to her in the desert that is called Erg, the waste of shifting sand; and in the desert called Chebka, a wilderness of boulders; and in the desert called Hamedan, the bleak plateaux where there are no springs of water; and in the desert called Gaci, the oases, rich with date palms, pomegranates, and oleanders. The caravan routes unrolled before her, at sunset. The hills turned to ashes of rose; the sand dunes to heliotrope; and against the sky appeared a caravan of many thousands of camels, bearing on their humps, impoverished from hard travel, the traffic that passes between the great oases—the rugs and the oil, the sacks of dates and boiled locusts, and, in the closed palanquins, the women destined to new slaveries. A great calm descended at dusk; the tents of dingy brown hair surrounded the sheik's pavilion, which was topped with a plume. The air was filled with odors of camels, of cous-cous, of sagebrush. The camp fires of desert grass flared in the night wind.

He was always well received by the caravan chiefs, the sheiks of the oases, the heads of the desert monasteries—drowsy towns with arcaded streets and tunnels of mud, into whose holy precincts came no echoes of war. He had the knack of endearing himself to fierce men, by something in his character at the same time inflexible and kindly, by a sympathy that embraced that other religion, or at least its intrinsic spirit, so that he could repeat the Fatihah with good grace before the tombs of saints. Even the Tuaregs, the untamed bandits whose faces were always muffled in black, received him into their tents of red dyed leather, where he joked with their wives and daughters, the "little queens," who were accustomed to ride alone, fifty miles on their trotting camels, to visit a sweetheart.

"But my picture was with him," thought Lilla. "I was with him there, just as he, through his picture, though I had never seen him, was with me. In our longings, that crossed in space, we were already united. Even then our actual meeting was predestined—like our parting."

Once he had encountered a band of Shaambah Arabs, out, like knights-errant, in quest of any adventure. They had fought him all afternoon in a desert spotted with gold and purple lilies, the burnouses flitting in a wide ring as the horses raced through the heat. Then suddenly they had vanished. The lukewarm water flavored with goatskin and tar, the draughts of sour camel's milk, had tasted good after that scrimmage, like a combat in chivalry.

What was it that had driven him into such places, when there had been a great, rich world of safety? Some fatal desire for regions where beauty sported more obviously than here the signs of its origins, or death the mask of beauty?

"Yes, there is a fatality in all our preferences. Is that what the Arabs mean when they say that our destinies are written on our foreheads?"

"What is their word for fate?" she inquired of Parr.

"Mektoub."

"Mektoub!" And presently, "Do you speak Arabic?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; but Mr. Teck did, as well as any of 'em."

"Tell me more," she said.

So he took her to the oases. As one drew near, there floated from the minaret a thin cry, "Allah is great! Allah is great! Allah is great!" In the house of the sheik, sitting among the hawk-nosed horsemen, they dipped their right hands into couscous flavored with cinnamon, ate honey cakes and nougat. In the doorways, beyond the range of the lamp, there was a soft clashing of bangles, a craning of veiled heads. Then in the cool of the night they walked to the café, where cobwebs hung from the palmwood rafters, and the raised hearth glowed. Here were the men drinking coffee infused with rose water, pepper, or mint, smoking tobacco and hasheesh. And here were the dancing women—"The Pearl," "Lips of Pomegranate," "The Star"—their foreheads bearing the tattoo marks of their tribes, their cheeks and chins smeared with saffron, their fingernails tinted with henna, their bodies moving convulsively under rose-colored satin dresses.

But Lilla was no longer listening.

Dusk had covered the windowpanes; the shabby furniture had turned nebulous. In these shadows Parr heard the words, meditatively pronounced:

"I think I should like to learn Arabic."

"You, ma'am!"

He gaped at her vague, pearly face, as if she had suggested some enormity. It was an ugly language, all bubbling and snorting. And a very hard one to learn!

"A hard one? Good. Can you find me a teacher somewhere?"

The door opened to frame a careworn woman in a gingham dress, who said shyly to Lilla:

"Oh, excuse me, ma'am. I thought——" And to Parr, "I'll keep your supper warm."

With her sleek bandeaux of lusterless brown hair, and her thick, straight eyebrows meeting above her nose, she looked like some model for a fifteenth century Italian painter, who had suddenly faded

and now was exiled from the studio to the region of pots and pans. She was Parr's niece.

As Lilla departed down the black staircase redolent of boiled cabbage, she reflected that these surroundings were going to contaminate the sad pleasure that she planned to obtain through Parr. Her instinctive epicureanism demanded that the scene of these evocations should not be sordid.

Besides, it was intolerable that Parr, of whom Lawrence had been fond, should not be better housed.

So Lilla moved Parr and his astounded relatives to a pretty little dwelling in Greenwich Village, with waxed floors, chintz hangings at the windows, and Delia Robbia plaques in the sitting room. After seeing them installed, she said to herself:

"Poor things! How abominable I am!"

At any rate, there was nothing abominable in her having sent Parr to a surgeon who, though he doubted that the patient would ever be quite well again, guaranteed to abolish the crutches.

On the day that Parr was to go to the hospital, Lilla entered the Greenwich Village house to find a stranger sitting under the Delia Robbia plaques. He rose with a graceful dignity, bowed, and stood gazing down at her out of dark, lustrous eyes.

Parr explained that this stranger was prepared to give lessons in Arabic.

He was in his early twenties, though one did not immediately appreciate his youth because of a very delicate black beard that softened, without concealing, the lines of his chin. His features appeared to have been chiseled with great precision out of some pale, tan-colored marble; his nose was long and straight; his full eyelids gave him a slightly languorous look; but his lips, as sharply defined as a gem of carnelian, seemed somehow to be ascetic as well as sensual—virile as well as effete. Tall and spare, with small hands, he wore an outrageously inappropriate, ill-fitting sack suit. To Lilla it was as if some romantic young character from the tales of Scheherazade had been degraded for his gallantries in this hideous attire.

His name was Hamoud-bin-Said. He was an Omân Arab from Zanzibar.

Parr had found him in a Turkish café in Washington Street, oppressed by the weight of successive misfortunes, and by that sense of fatality which benumbs the Arab of vitiated stock. For little by little the soft, moist airs of Zanzibar had corroded the spirit of the Omân Arabs, who had sailed thither, in the old days, from their own rugged land, in great fierceness and ruthlessness, unconquered by men, and incapable of foreseeing that some day they would be vanquished by perfumed breezes. As for Hamoud-bin-Said, he was typical of his kind to-day in that humid paradise, where want of energy, and lack of discipline or any well-defined purpose, affected even the young.

"As you see him, ma'am, he's down on his luck. But I think he has seen——"

The young Arab remained impassive, erect, as handsome as a faintly tinted statue of Pride, yet pathetic in his salt-and-pepper suit. And Lilla, despite his costume and his errand, divined in him a certain subtle relationship to herself, received an impression of "aristocratic" feeling perhaps derived from a consciousness of superior birth and fortune. Parr need not have told her—especially in so audible a stage whisper—that the stranger had "seen better days."

"You speak English?" she inquired.

The Arab's limpid eyes were slowly infused with light. His clear-cut carnelian lips started apart; but he did not answer until the last vibrations of her voice had died away, like the echo of a silver bell in a landscape that one had believed to be empty of human life. In a low, grave, muffled tone, he said:

"A little. Enough, perhaps, madam, I hope."

And after a moment, though his face did not change, he gave a sharp sigh, somehow the last thing that one had expected from him.

All at once as she stared at him she had a feeling of unreality. Why were they three standing here? A whim, transformed into a command by a vision of a Saharan coffee house, had materialized this abjectly clothed young human exotic in the midst of the blue-and-white Delia Robbias! But she had a feeling that she had stood here before with him, or else had dreamed of this, perhaps, in one of those psychopathological moments that have a prophetic quality. This sensation of recurrence—or else, this impression of the unavoidable—gave her a twinge of awe. Was everything, even a baggy young teacher of Arabic, foreordained? "Am I," she thought, with a sort of comic despair, "doomed by fate, as well as by my own foolishness, to learn a language like the snarling of camels? Or is it that his old Allah has picked me out to tide him along for a while?" She wanted to laugh aloud, at the restlessness, superstition, weakness, and folly that had composed her life, and had now produced this egregious interview. And in the midst of this emotion she was touched by his statuesque face, with its glimmering suggestion of gentility cast down, of pride lost in a dread that she might not find him worth her charity.

"I shall expect you on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at eleven o'clock."

He bowed in silence. She felt his relief that was mingled with a sense of abasement; and she

wondered what he had been, that he should suffer from the prospect of turning an honest penny.

CHAPTER XX

She received a note from Brantome, informing her that if she went to a certain orchestral concert she would hear a piece that David Verne had written at the height of his promise.

To Lilla it was a new voice in the world of music, ultra-modern, yet incorrigibly melodic, giving utterance to immemorial emotions with great nobility. Those passages of almost intolerable aspiration were underlaid with dissonant harmonies, as if hell itself had poured all its allurements into tone, to engulf the theme that was struggling to soar upward. It became a terrific combat, in which beauty was to be recognized in sublimated form, striving to end its likeness to another beauty, seductive in a different, monstrous way, yet all too similar. It was a battle translated into sound, so enlarged and enriched by the imagination of the composer that a universe, instead of one soul, seemed to be involved in it.

Suddenly in the midst of a piercing blare of brass there was a moment of chaos; then the theme, as if soaring free, lost itself in extraordinary altitudes, borne up by a whirl of violin notes. A crash of cymbals ended everything.

When she roused herself at last, Lilla perceived that the concert hall was empty except for the ushers who were turning up the seats.

CHAPTER XXI

Hamoud-bin-Said suggested that she master first the most difficult consonants—"ha," to be pronounced with the force at the back of the palate, "dâd" and "tâ," emphasized by pressing the tongue far back, and the strong guttural "en." These were sounds that had no association with any in English, French, German, or Italian. Lilla was filled with dismay.

"But this poor young man lost from the *Arabian Nights* must live," she reflected, eyeing the salt-and-pepper suit with secret horror.

He was extremely neat, however; and his small right hand, with which he turned the pages of the textbook, was as well cared for as hers. He brought with him into the library an almost imperceptible scent of burnt aloes. His grave composure sometimes made her forget his youth.

Now and then, the lesson finished, she detained him in talk, out of curiosity.

From his father he had inherited a house in Zanzibar, a mansion, indeed, of coralline limestone fitted with doors of palmwood elegantly carved. At the same time he had fallen heir to a grove of clove trees; in short, he had been wealthy. There had been no end of hospitality in his home. In the large, white rooms strewn with Persian carpets, where there were no pictures, but a variety of clocks, the slaves were always bringing in to visitors an excess of refreshment—stews of mutton, fine soups, cakes, sherbets, Turkish delight. The world had been a good place, full of friends.

And there was no spot as fair as Zanzibar! The hills, crowned with palms, embraced a sea as deeply blue as lapis-lazuli. The clove trees were covered with pink blossoms whose fragrance entered the city. It was a place of brilliant sunshine and purple shadows, of gray walls over which peacocks hung their tails, of mysterious stairways, and latticed windows behind which ladies sat peering through their embroidered face screens resembling semicircular candle shades; and there was always a marvelous clamor in the streets, and silence in the patios full of flowers. At dusk, one still saw, sometimes, the daughters of the rich hurrying through the alleys, muffled up, escorted by slaves with lanterns, going to call on their women friends, leaving behind them a trail of perfumes.

"It was in Zanzibar," thought Lilla, "that Lawrence found my picture."

And gazing as if indifferently at a vaseful of roses, she asked, with a feeling of suffocation:

"Why did you leave there?"

He did not reply. When she turned her eyes toward him he appeared to be listening almost drowsily to something that she could not hear, or else, since his sensitive-looking nostrils were dilated, to be relishing some sweet odor—perhaps the smell of the roses. She received an impression of deliberate, yet somnolent, sensuous enjoyment; and she recalled having seen long ago, in a doorway in Tunis, this

same expression on the face of a beggar who had just been smoking hasheesh.

He gave a start, and looked like a man who in his sleep has fallen off a roof. But immediately, lowering his full eyelids, he became the handsome statue, or perhaps the delicately bearded effigy, in tan-colored wax, of a young caliph who had incurred the hatred of the jinn.

It was simple. He had squandered his fortune. It had sifted through his fingers like sand, the price of one clove tree after another, till the whole grove was gone. Then the Hindu money lenders had got the ancestral house. The friends had departed to make merry elsewhere; the gazelle-eyed girls with short, silk dresses and frilled pantalettes had turned cold; and, in the market, little boys had sung songs about the ruined young man. Burning with resentment and shame, he had sailed away in a dhow—it had landed him at Beira—believing that he would hate Zanzibar forever.

When he began to starve, he joined the safari of a Muscat trader, traveled up-country, returned to the coast sick with fever. Late one night, while walking below the sea wall, yearning for Zanzibar, he saw a man running, from time to time throwing something into the sea, and another man running silently in pursuit with a knife in his hand. He waded along the shore, and presently found in the surf a bag of gold-dust. Next morning he slipped aboard a north-bound coaster. Instead of calling at Zanzibar, this time it went clear to Suez!

In Suez a fortune-telling dervish, perhaps because he had just seen an American pass by, told Hamoud-bin-Said that his wanderings would take him to America. Hamoud accepted the words of the holy man as a second-hand pronouncement of God. At that time there was even a ship at Suez bound for New York.

"It was my destiny," he averred, sitting motionless in his atrocious suit, so young yet so full of bizarre recollections, impassive at the inevitable thought that this "destiny" of his might be preparing events stranger still than those which he had endured.

CHAPTER XXII

A pallid, black-haired woman with pendent earrings—a woman who rather resembled Anna Zanidov—was playing a sea-piece by MacDowell in the light of a tall lamp. The hall door swung open; the unsympathetic face and square shoulders of David Verne's attendant appeared above the back of the wheel chair. The invalid, looking up at Brantome, murmured:

"Let him put me in the alcove, where it's dark enough for your friends to forget that I'm here. And don't bother about me."

"What!" Brantome protested. "I'm not even to bring a beautiful lady to talk to you?"

"It's rather late for talks with beautiful ladies," David Verne replied in his weak, dull voice. "Besides, it's music that I've chosen to torment myself with this afternoon. Where is she?" And when Brantome had nodded toward Lilla. "Ah, she was here once before."

Lilla wore a brown coat frock heavily trimmed with fur; her brown velvet hat, very wide across the forehead, was brightened by a rosette of silver ribbon. The black pearls in the lobes of her ears, just visible below her fluffy brown hair, completed the harmony of her costume with her person, while bestowing upon her face a maturity in contrast with the invalid's youthfulness—which all his sufferings and despairs had not eclipsed.

When she had sat down beside him, he regarded her with a sort of suppressed aversion.

The attendant, a bullet-headed fellow with Scandinavian cheek-bones, leaned down, looking flagrantly solicitous, and inquired in unctuous tones if there was "anything else at present." At this question David Verne appeared to be overwhelmed with a dreary contempt. He did not trouble himself to reply; and the attendant went away, walking cautiously on the sides of his feet, the back of his head somehow suggesting that he was gritting his teeth.

Lilla surprised herself by saying:

"Why do you have that man?"

"I don't know. He is appallingly stupid." He paused, with an effect of still more profound exhaustion, then breathed, "He hates me, no doubt because I resent his stupidity. I resent stupidity," he repeated, giving her a glance of weak alarm, as if wondering, "Are you stupid, too?" He seemed reassured by his scrutiny of her. A coldness began to melt out of his eyes.

Then he looked astonished, rather like a child that is unexpectedly led up before a Christmas tree.

Now she had analyzed the most touching impression that David Verne produced—an impression as

of a child who has come into the world with a heart full of blitheness and trust, only to be mistreated. A child, but an extremely precocious one, with a child's round chin, but with a brow of genius; with eyes accustomed to visions, but with lips almost too delicate to belong to a man. Another incongruity was presented in his complexion—bronzed as though by the sun, mockingly bestowing on him one of the aspects of health.

When he listened to music suddenly he became adult. There appeared in his face a glimpse of a masculine, severely critical soul, a nature to be satisfied with little less than perfection. And no doubt it was this habit of stern analysis, involuntarily carried over from art into life, that had helped to make him "impatient of stupidity."

The black-haired woman at the piano was attempting Beethoven.

"Talk to me," said David Verne. "I don't wish to hear this."

He added that Beethoven was intolerable on the piano—a composer who had never had a thought that was not orchestral.

"Like myself," he vouchsafed, with that smile of a mistreated child. "I, too, thought orchestrally. There was no group of instruments rich enough to suit my ambitions, just as the scale was too poor for what I wished to express. A tone speech inadequate to describe what I had to describe—do you know what I'm talking about?"

"Yes."

"Never mind. It is all over."

He sat in the wheel chair in so collapsed a pose that he seemed subjected to some exceptional pull of gravitation. His bronzed hands, on the chair arms, appeared to be welded to the brown wood; his head, resting against the chair back, never turned. But his troubled eyes, stealing round in their sockets, surprised on Lilla's countenance a look as if all her compassions had been united to find the fading young genius as their congenial object.

It was hard to talk to him, since every topic must lead to some interest that he was relinquishing. His doom, hanging over them like a black cloud, stifled all those gleams of enthusiasm which normally would have illumined such a conversation. But presently he forgot himself in watching her moving lips, in gazing at her hair, her throat, her hands, in letting his eyes embrace, with reluctance, all her singularity which was made doubly exquisite by the fastidiousness of her costume. While he was inhaling her perfume, he listened with a blank look to the silvery cadence of her voice.

At last he asked her:

"Do you come here often?"

"Oh, no."

"Why not?" He stared at the abandoned piano. "Why not every week?" And, in a soft, impulsive rush of words, blurred by haste, and maybe by intention, "I have so few weeks left."

CHAPTER XXIII

As week followed week, it was evident that David Verne watched her and listened to her as he watched and listened to no other person, with an attention as though there were something unique in her most trivial utterance, and with a sadness as though she symbolized all the allurements of life, from which he must presently depart. And at last it became evident that he had found in this relationship a charm more piercing than if their association could have had a different outcome. For him, no doubt, their hours together were at last suffused with the mournful glory that concludes a sunset—more valuable, to the romantically imaginative soul, than the flaming vigor of mid-day. To have found her, to realize that she must remain as an angel hovering high over an inferno, to perceive that he must pass from this radiance into the shades, filled him with a gloomy ecstasy and a pathetic gratitude.

A time came when his armor of misanthropy crumbled away; and in the shadowy alcove of Brantome's living room he confessed to her.

He told her that she had covered the page on which *Finis* was already written with a glow of gold, as though, at the last moment, a shutter opening on a paradise had swung ajar.

He declared that she could not imagine the blackness that had surrounded him at her first appearance. His heart had been cased in ice; he had hated every one. Then she had come holding beauty in one hand and tenderness in the other. Although he believed in nothing but a mechanistic universe, he had thought of those figures, half woman and half goddess, that descend from another

plane, in the old mystical tales, to lure one back to faith with a celestial smile. He protested that he was not far from regaining that deep-rooted belief of his race, of which Brantome had spoken—the idea that woman might be angelic.

He even said:

"Suppose your kindness were the reflection of something still more lovely, which we cannot see with these eyes?"

He went on to other, similar rhapsodies, such phrases as bubble from the lips of those who, in the extremity of despair, exhausted by their sufferings, become, with a sigh of relief, like little children. Amid the shadows of the alcove his eyes shone; and even his body, helpless in the wheel chair, quivered as if with new life.

"If you had appeared sooner! The music I might have written! But then, everything would be different. There would have been no reason for your pity."

On the hearth the log that was nearly consumed fell with a shower of sparks, shot forth one last flame, which brightened the room that had become for a moment a whole world. The light flashed over the many rows of books, which made Lilla imagine a vast human audience, all aglow from a final blaze of genius.

She leaned toward him, staring into his eyes as one who would summon from a sepulchre something more precious than love.

He understood her, and assented:

"Yes, what a victory, eh? Even on the threshold of death! And even though the inspiration was the embodiment of pity only! But men before me—though not so far gone, perhaps—have transmitted to the world the songs that rose in their hearts as a result of unconsummated, even unrequited, love. Who knows? That, too, may come just in time. I may write one more song."

Before her mind's eye there sprang out the full picture of her part in such a triumph.

Was it not she who would virtually be the creative force? Had he not become, in these last days of his, a shattered instrument that she, alone, could make musical again? And her long-thwarted aspirations coalesced into this desire, in which, it may be, her compassion was disorganized by egotism, her compunctions swallowed up in ruthlessness.

"You will do it!" she cried softly, leaning closer still, holding his hand more tightly, blinding him by the glorification of her smile.

Hardly knowing what she was saying, finding at the tip of her tongue all the arguments that had failed to help her in her griefs, she spoke of the prodigies accomplished by will, the triumphs of faith over fate, the miracles of love.

"Of love?" he repeated.

The log on the hearth was ashes. But that morning there had drifted through the city a message from the country—of a new spring, which would not be like nature's previous unfoldments, yet could not, for all its subtle differences, be denied. Was it something like that in Lilla, or only a tender duplicity born of this new ruthlessness of hers, that made her press his limp hand against her kindling cheek?

CHAPTER XXIV

It was a romance as nearly incorporeal as mortal romance may be, almost as though one of the participants had already passed beyond the sensuous world.

If Brantome was not at home they had the place to themselves. The fire no longer burned on the hearth; but the sunshine of the lengthening days conquered the shadows that had lingered here all winter. And now the wheel chair was rolled to the open window, so that David might see, beyond the trees of the square and above the cornices of the tall houses, the inexhaustible improvisations of nature in the western sky.

"You have changed everything," he affirmed, drinking in her beauty, her elegance that was always presented to him in some new guise, her invariable manifestation of tenderness. "How did it happen? You, so intensely in the midst of life, so lovely, who might so easily find elsewhere——"

She did not tell him that it was the almost phantasmal quality of their communion that made it possible.

Yet now and then, for a moment, she forgot his infirmity. He became the young hero of an idyllic scene such as those that seem attractive enough in adolescence. But unlike those heroes he spoke only of the moment, since it was only the moment of which he could be sure. "You are here!" his eyes said to her, as she entered the room. "I have this hour at least. Nothing else matters." Then, by aid of the sunset, the warm breeze in his face, the flowers on the table, the fragrance of her perfume and the smoothness of her hand, he tried to drown himself in a sea of sensation, like one who listens, in a glamour of stained glass and a cloud of incense, to the protracted sweetness of an organ playing the *Nunc Dimittis*.

Sometimes he would say:

"When I am gone you will be as fair as ever. That is good. The ancients who entered their temples to worship the goddess must have redoubled their love with the thought that the beauty of her marble person would survive them."

Or perhaps:

"Yes, you will still be young. And presently—no, I shall pretend that you will never turn to another."

He thought her ensuing look of sadness was a reproach to him; but she was reproaching herself.

But here was a miracle. The invalid had ceased to decline in health. And that declension, which formerly had been uninterrupted, seemed stopped just by the hand that she had held out to him on that first full day of spring—by the slender hand that had owed its beauty to its apparent uselessness.

Then he told her that he had begun to jot down, in feeble signs, some scraps of music.

That evening, as she drove home, the city seemed hung with banners. "Ah, fate!" she cried, clenching her fists, and uttering a savage laugh of defiance. She entered her house radiant, erect, shining with triumph. In the black-and-white hall, at the entrance to the drawing-room, a man stood before her, tanned, lean from physical hardships, strange-looking and yet familiar. Instead of a small mustache intended to be debonaire, he had a heavy one; his shoulders were wider and straighter than formerly; he advanced with a quick, swinging step.

"Cornie Rysbroek!"

She laid her palms, on the new shoulders of this friend of her childhood, and flooded him with her victorious smile.

"What have you done to yourself?" she laughed, rather wildly. "Where do you come from? India?"

"I went on to China."

He had traveled up the Yangtze River, had crossed Tse-Chouan, had reached the borders of Thibet. Her happy look continued to embrace him; but she hardly heard what he said. She did not perceive that he had undertaken that journey in imitation of the other—perhaps in the hope of finding in those distant, hard places the secret of Lawrence Teck's attractiveness. And, in fact, he looked stronger in spirit as well as in body. The hypochondriac, the timid dilettante, seemed to have slunk away; in his place stood a man who had forced himself, against all his natural instincts, to endure extremes of cold and heat, dirt and famine, hardship and danger. Even now his face was calm; but he could not keep his eyes from shining at her.

"You'll stay to dinner, Cornie. Just us."

From the doorway she came rushing back to throw her arms round him, and cry like a delighted child:

"Dear old Cornie! I'm so happy!"

CHAPTER XXV

As for David Verne, despite the extraordinary prostration in which Lilla had found him, it seemed that he had not passed beyond the vivifying powers of love, which sometimes appear to change the body, as well as the mind, into a new organism for a while. Week after week, to the bewilderment—one might almost say the consternation—of the physician, he refused to imitate the customary progress of that disease which had been diagnosed as his. And while he acknowledged that this phenomenon must presently end, David knew that for the moment, at any rate, love had proved stronger than death.

To prolong these hours in the transfigured world of sense! To steal from oblivion one more summer of which she would be the warmth, the fragrance, the unprecedented beauty!

In appearing to him she had embodied all that seductiveness which he had formerly perceived at

random, fragmentarily and vaguely, in a change of light on the sea, in a spread of landscape, in the grace of animals or the refinements of art, or in those streams of consciousness that flow as the senses are touched by some reminiscent odor, apparition, or sound. She was the whole, dear, fading world compressed into one shape, as the goddesses of ancient times personified blindingly a host of precious elements that had previously been diffuse. And since she was so, he determined, with all this new mental energy evoked by love, to cling to her another day, another week or season, like a drowning man who, as he sinks, clutches at a flower hanging over the water, with the thought, "In this flower, whose petals hold as much wonder as the whole universe, there is surely strength enough to sustain me till I have filled my throat with one more draught of life?"

Inevitably all this fervor and pathos, gratitude and adoration, were transmuted into a consciousness of music. He felt ever more strongly the artist's need of expression. Since he had never previously known such exaltation—or, indeed, such dejection—the music that he finally produced, his physical weakness notwithstanding, was music such as he had never written before.

At Brantome's, when that piece was to be played for the first time, he sat in his wheel chair suffocated by sudden doubts, as if on trial for his life. Lilla sat beside him, her hand on his. No one else was there except Brantome, who bent over the manuscript his haggard old face, revealing nearly as much agitation as did David.

At last, raising his head, the critic murmured:

"You think this is going to be easy for me? Reflect on what I must do. To satisfy you I must take the rigidity out of all these ink marks, restore to this score the emotions that you felt in writing it."

David responded:

"The emotions that I felt in writing it are not there; for the idea always loses its original form the moment it is seized by the pen. That is the first loss. The second comes now. You cannot help it. It is the old misfortune, the inability to transmit what one feels, the isolation of the human soul. But nobody could play as well as you what's left of those thoughts of mine."

The bullet-headed attendant appeared beside the wheel chair, a bottle of medicine and a glass of water in his hands. With that pretentious solicitude of his, he uttered:

"It is time——"

David Verne gave a shudder.

"Ah! At this moment! Will you get out of the room?" And when the attendant had gone, "Is he, can he be, so stupid? I really think he does these things on purpose."

Brantome poised his hands above the keyboard, leaned forward to peer at a legend scrawled faintly in the corner of the page, then, turning round on the piano bench, cast at Lilla:

"Rose-covered Cypresses."

"What?" she exclaimed, with a start.

"He has called it that."

The old Frenchman began to play.

Not a song after all, but a piano concerto, it described in tone that goal of all human longings, the conquest of tragedy.

But this music, although gradually made replete with victory, was not to end in major chords of triumph. The sadness that seemed, at the beginning, unassuageable, continued to the end, but—and herein lay the victory—became ever more exquisite. For this was the utterance of a man who having had his life transformed by love must soon leave that love behind him; this glory that had descended upon his sadness was such a glory as fills the sky for a little while before the inrush of dusk. At the conclusion, it was as if in the gorgeousness of a sunset the roses covering the cypresses had become a mist of rare hues, behind which those trees emblematic of mourning almost lost their significance. At last, however, one felt that the light was fading, that the somber silhouettes of the cypresses were more visible than their poetic embellishment. And finally, with the darkness, a breeze seemed to bring a long sigh from those elegiac branches, together with a perfume of the roses that had become unapparent, wet with dew as if with innumerable tears.

After a long silence, Brantome lifted his burly, old body from the piano bench, came to stand before David, then abruptly turned away.

"It is all your promises fulfilled," he said, as he went out of the room without looking back. But it was Lilla whose arm he touched in passing.

David Verne sat gazing before him, his sunken eyes shining in his face of a sick, young Apollo in bronze. But soon, turning his eyes toward Lilla:

"All you!"

She gathered his hands against her bosom with a movement that imparted to him the life so violently pounding in her heart—the pride and the hope, perhaps even a little of the defiance and belief. She gave him a look that pierced the caverns of his brain, where his faith in death resided blackly, with a white-hot faith in life.

"Have you forgotten," she breathed, "that a little while ago you, and every one else, would have called this impossible?"

"Too much!" he whispered, peering at her with a dreadful longing across the chasm that lay between her will and his terror of extinction.

"No! You shall see!"

She felt that this must be the object of her life-long wishes and antipathies—that her sense of the preciousness of mortal life and beauty, and her hunger for participation in the development of both, were instincts intended to make her indomitable now. Suddenly she had one of those rare moments when the wall is so strengthened by a feeling of worthy purpose that it becomes tremendous, and everything opposed to it seems as good as vanquished. It was with an accent of accomplished victory that she repeated:

"You shall see!"

And now, indeed, the drowning man clutched at the flower that epitomized the dear world.

"Lilla! Never let go of my hands! Yes, it's true; while I hold them I hold fast to life; but if you let go of them, in that moment I'll go tumbling down into the pit. Do you realize that by this time I should probably be already gone, if you hadn't appeared? I am a dead man who lives, who even does this work, because of the hold of these slender hands of yours."

In that clutch of his, all at once so strong despite his feebleness, Lilla found no sinister portent. She was thinking:

"Death conquered me once; but now I shall conquer death."

CHAPTER XXVI

Next day, when a maid announced that Hamoud-bin-Said was waiting in the library, Lilla felt that the time had come to "stop that nonsense." Her desire to learn Arabic now seemed to her an absurd caprice; and once more she had reason to wonder at her swift passage from one enthusiasm to another, her intense preoccupation with things that suddenly became insufferable. She entered the library dressed and hatted for the street, pulling on her gloves; and while occupied with her glove buttons said calmly, in her enchanting voice:

"I'm going to be very busy for a while. I suppose I ought to have given you a little notice; so I'm writing you a check for two-weeks' lessons."

Hamoud stood before her, tall and spare, in a new, black alpaca suit as incongruous-looking as the old one. He made no response at once; and there was no change in his perfectly chiseled, tan features; but for all his impassiveness he managed remarkably to convey the impression that an immense calamity had befallen him. His full eyelids remained lowered, as if he were considering his whole unfortunate destiny; and a sort of loneliness, produced no doubt by his strangeness in this room, hovered round his shapely head that was covered with straight, black locks.

Lilla felt a twinge of compunction, as she reflected:

"Who in this town except myself would ever take Arabic lessons! Poor young caliph! Now he must work or starve."

She added, aloud:

"In fact, you've been such a good teacher that I ought—well, haven't I made great progress?"

He raised his eyes, and a bitter smile appeared on his gemlike lips. He replied in Arabic:

"It is a difficult language, madam. Perhaps you understand what I am saying now because I am speaking very simply and slowly. But you yourself can speak only the most ordinary phrases; and I doubt if any one but I could understand you. However, why should you trouble to learn this language of mine? It always seemed folly to me. It is just a part of this life, which has little meaning except to thoughtless persons, and in which, to the wise, all events are like the shadows of passing birds."

Her pride was affronted; and yet it was not as if an inferior had rebuked her. He picked up his hat, a frightful confection of tan and yellow straw, and the textbook out of which she had learned—in

heaven's name, why?—the facts that "el" and "al" are assimilated before dentals, and that "elli" is omitted after general substantives. Hamoud-bin-Said inclined his handsome head, while concluding:

"You will soon forget all you have learned from me, and I shall have received your money for nothing." His impassiveness was deranged by a look of chagrin, as he blurted out harshly: "I regret that the money also has flown away, or I should insist——"

He held his head high, as if trying to rise above his feeling of degradation.

Lilla stood looking at him thoughtfully from under the edge of a verdigris-colored turban that matched the high collar of her walking suit. She was reluctant to let him drift away to some obscure, wretched fate, to which his native apathy would surely direct him. She perceived in him again a certain relationship to herself, a relationship due not only to his past good fortune, but also to something in his character—perhaps some likeness of enthusiasm, or even some identical kind of ardor, or else some weakness that had ruined him but had not yet ruined her. So it was with a blush that she suggested:

"See here, an invalid friend of mine is dissatisfied with the man who takes care of him——"

When she had made herself clear, his face turned brick-red, and for an instant his eyes were terrible. One would have said that some ancestor uncontaminated by Zanzibar, some true Arab of Omân, stood there in his place, flaming with outraged dignity. He cast back at her one more burning look before he stalked from the house.

The following week, when she had forgotten him, she found him, at twilight, in the black-and-white hall.

He looked exhausted, as if he had tramped innumerable miles; and his face was as pale as death. He bowed humbly, muttering:

"Madam, if you will forgive, I am now ready to be the servant of that sick man."

CHAPTER XXVII

Sometimes she tried to stand off as a spectator of her emotionalism, to examine these new feelings. Were they more egotistical than compassionate, more defiant than gentle? Among them, at any rate, there was gratitude. She had found an object in life, had splendidly emerged from her old sensations of incompleteness and inferiority. No longer that morbid humility struggling in vain to transform itself into a violent self-assertion. Not since she had become the virtual creatrix of beauty, even the giver of life!

And David, because she owed so much to him, became every day more precious. All this new dignity and worth that now enveloped her, these self-satisfactions of a Euterpe and a Beatrice, depended on his survival, would increase, even if he maintained just that strange equilibrium between life and death, but would die the instant he died. So for Lilla he took on such importance that everything else in life turned insignificant: old ardors were all consumed in this new ardor at once conquering and maternal, vainglorious and passionately grateful.

Even that wound in her heart from which a corporeal love had been torn out by the roots, was healed at last, as it seemed, by these new forms of pride and tenderness that could culminate in no material union.

She returned less and less often to the little house in Greenwich Village, where Parr, escaped from his crutches, sat in a chintz-covered chair, a cane between his knees, his white head lowered, still dreaming of "those good days."

"You're better, aren't you? What does the doctor say now? Is there anything you need here?"

Her eyes, avoiding his look of humble devotion, roamed over the walls, as if she were considering the advisability of more Delia Robbia plaques. The niece, with her sleek brown bandeaux and fifteenth century profile, passed noiselessly through the hall; and presently a smell of cooking entered the sitting room.

"As late as that?"

Lilla drove uptown, heaped her arms with flowers, entered the rooms to which Lawrence Teck had led her on the night of their marriage.

The characteristic odor of the place—the odor of skins and sandalwood, camphor and dried grasses—nearly stifled her. In the gloom she saw the savage weapons gleaming. Then the shadow of clustered tomtoms against the bedroom door made her heart stand still. As if to exorcise a ghost that she no longer dared to meet, still clutching the mass of tributary blossoms to her breast, she tore the window

curtains apart. The sunset struck in like a sword blade relentlessly cleaving through the veils of time. Dust lay over everything. On the center table, in the polished gourd, a bouquet of winter roses stood rigid, brown, like the lips of mummies, dry enough to crumble at a touch.

Standing there in her modish suit so cunningly devised to emphasize her charms, with the flowers slipping from her arms to the dusty rug, she wept at the vagueness of her recollections, the fading away of grief, to which she had once dedicated herself "for life."

"Why do I keep this place up? It's dreadful that everything should be just the same here——"

She meant, "While I am so changed."

She went downstairs intending to tell the janitor to give the rooms a cleaning; but she found him—a fat, undersized old fellow in a skullcap—talking to a young man who had a leather portfolio stuck under his arm. As her eyes were red, and her voice no doubt still unsteady, she averted her head, and passed quickly out to her car.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Though a genius—at any rate according to Brantome—it was now David Verne, instead of Lilla, who suffered from the feeling of inferiority. To hold her, he had only his music, and perhaps his bodily feebleness that excited her compassion. Yet this feebleness, profound, insurmountable, was what caused his torments of jealousy.

The question was, how long would she be content with this wan sort of love?

And what did he know of her life during all the hours when she was invisible to him? What homage, what persuasions, must she, with her peculiar loveliness, not be object of, out there in the world full of gaiety and vitality, where strength was always offering itself to beauty? It would be only natural, he thought, if one of those men should win her heart away, and she, out of pity, should pretend that nothing had happened.

For that matter, perhaps even now——

At last she understood why, when she entered the room, he sometimes transfixed her with that poignant, questioning look. Then his appearance was the same as on the day of their first meeting, as though, at that dread, he had lost all the ground that she had helped him to gain.

"Oh, what folly!" she cried, aghast more at the change in him than at this injustice. "If you knew how seldom I see any one these days, except you!"

He remained lost in the fatal contemplation of the idea, his body sunk even deeper in the wheel chair.

"And what's more there never has been anybody else, except one——"

A gleam issued from the eyes of the poor wretch who, while hovering so nicely between life and death, was still, just because he could see her, hear her voice, and touch her hand, superior to the dead.

"I am not jealous of him," he affirmed, though not quite convincingly; since a man may be nearly as jealous of a departed rival as of a present one. "But every fellow that you know, who walks toward you in his wholeness and vigor, is my superior. Ah, my music; don't speak of it! What does all that amount to against those natural qualities, which I can never regain?"

His frail, handsome, bronzed, young face expressed a puerile helplessness. And it was with a maternal pity that she reassured him, using words such as mothers find for children frightened by the dark.

"Forgive me, Lilla. But what do you expect? You are my life."

She reflected that beneath his weakness there was a strength perhaps greater than the strength of the strong; and now, at last, she thought of the clutch of the drowning.

Then, instead of meeting her always at Brantome's, he had himself wheeled to her house. Two or three times a week, as the summer advanced, he dined there, in the cream-colored room where Balbians and Dellivers of Andrew Jackson's day—and even a dandy by Benjamin West in a sky-blue satin coat—looked down from above the mahogany sideboards that were laden with Colonial glassware and old Lowenstoff. The windows were open to the mews; the candle flames flickered in a tepid breeze. They could hear the faint crash of a band that was playing a Strauss waltz in Washington Square.

She had not opened the Long Island house. As for David, he had a house of his own in a corner of

Westchester County, inherited from his parents, who had been well-to-do. He told her about his family and his childhood—his feeling of strangeness amid persons who had thought him very queer, and had tried by every means to make him conform to their ideals of thought. "I was a sort of black sheep," he declared, "because some necessity compelled me to be myself. I could never get over my skepticism about a thousand things that seemed plain to those good folks——"

The candles flickered before his hypersensitive face. The band in the Square continued to play Strauss's *Rosen aus dem Süden*, with its old suggestions of agile grace, united movement, young men and maidens joyously dancing away toward kisses and laughter. The servants brought in the fresh course. Lilla cut up David's food, then held the fork to his lips; for the man who had scrawled that concerto could not lift his hands high enough to feed himself. He faltered:

"Your dinner will get cold."

"All the better, on such a hot night."

"Yes," he sighed, "you ought not to be here in this oven of a city."

"Oh, I!" she retorted, with moisture in her eyes.

In the drawing-room Hamoud-bin-Said paced to and fro, sometimes standing before the picture by Bronzino, and seeming to stare clear through it. He was serene, as water is serene that has been lashed by tempests, and that holds in the depths of its placidity secrets that none can discern. He was always near nowadays, on the fringe of their lives, just beyond the radius of their preoccupations, the silent witness of this strange love affair, in the humble station that Allah, for some inscrutable reason, had decreed for him.

CHAPTER XXIX

One night when she was expecting David to dinner, she turned round, from arranging some flowers in a vase in the drawing-room, to see Cornelius Rysbroek in the doorway. He had come, he declared, to "take her out somewhere, give her a breath of fresh air, and make her listen to reason."

"But I'm dining here, Cornie."

"Alone?"

"No."

Nevertheless, he sat down with a dogged look.

"What's to be the end of this?" he demanded. "I suppose you know what a lot of chatter this nonsense of yours has stirred up? They're even saying that you're engaged to him. It's perfectly monstrous."

It was his old tone of voice, throaty, quaintly didactic, precise from spite and yet muffled by rage; but it was not the same face. It was, instead, the face of a desperate, possibly dangerous man, who had brooded over this monomania in the gorges of the great Chinese river, in the filthy yamens of barbarous mountain towns, in the forts of hill-robbers who practiced extraordinary cruelties. He had fought his way through rapids whose very names were ominous—"The King of Hell's Slide," the "Last Look at Home," the "Place Where the Soul Itself Is Lost." He had sat with the free people of Nosuland, the enemies of the Chinese, eating from bowls of camphorwood raw sheep's heart minced with pepper, sometimes expecting permission to go free, sometimes sure of being tortured with the split bamboo. At last they had sent him back with gifts. Then, rushing home to her, he had been led by her greeting to believe that his miseries were ended.

What a mockery of hope! On those journeys of his, roused from his acquiescence in ill-health and failure, moved by a savage determination, he had accomplished the impossible, in body and character had exceeded his limitations. He had taken as his pattern the rival whom she had preferred. He had built up in himself the counterfeits of those qualities by which Lawrence Teck had won her. Yet now he must see her devoting herself to a man who was the antithesis of all that she had previously preferred.

It was unendurable! But how was he to escape it? By hating her? Yes, surely she was worthy of his hatred, heartless, cruel, the cause of all these innumerable torments from which he sometimes got a moment of madness.

"What do I see in you?" he said between his teeth.

She had on a copper-colored gown hung over her slender shoulders by two straps. Maybe because its hue was a deeper shade of the same color as her hair, her eyes, and even her pale-brown skin, the costume seemed part of her. He could see nothing about her that was not exquisite—no detail from

which to build up a remedial distaste. So he ground out at her:

"Your nature? What rot!—as if that ever attracted me, with its false pretenses of heart, its instabilities and downright treacheries. What else do you offer? This that I see? What we human fools call beauty? What is beauty?"

She sat down in despair, observing that even his jaws, under his heavy mustache, looked more salient. It was almost laughable, she thought; but she was far from laughing. Every moment she expected to hear the doorbell.

He continued ferociously:

"In the beginning these arms and legs of yours were nothing but appliances for hanging from trees and running away from wild beasts. Your body was merely a convenient case for a machine that kept your life ticking along. How does one get the idea that all this is good-looking? Ages ago men decided to think so for reasons that have nothing to do with esthetics; they passed the hoax on, and in time these physical features got themselves surrounded with a perfect fog of sentimental and romantic balderdash. Take your face. Your nose is bridged in that so-called ravishing way in order to let a stream of air into your lungs. Your eyebrows—how many sonnets have been written on eyebrows!—are there, in the first place, to keep the perspiration from running into your eyes. Your lips are merely a binding against the friction of food. How grotesque to find such expedients beautiful! No doubt in other planets there are creatures that you'd call monsters; and they'd call you hideous. In fact, there can't be any such thing as beauty."

"No doubt you're right, Cornie dear," she responded, looking down at her beautiful hands.

"And what's it all for?" he ejaculated, in a stupefied kind of horror. "All this sordid consolidation of flesh and blood, this disgusting hallucination of attractiveness? All for—"

"I know," she assented. "More Lillas, ad infinitum. Isn't it tiresome?"

He jumped up, with a groan:

"I could kill you!"

"Too late. You ought to have done it when we were children together."

"Yes, too late, too late."

He wandered round the room, slapping one fist into the other, glaring at the walls, from which old-time ladies simpered rapidly at him. His brain seemed to be whirling round in his skull; his vision became blurred; and he had a dreadful apprehension of losing contact with normality. But normality, too—what was it? Normality was being natural! He came toward her; she rose and recoiled; but he caught hold of her arms above the elbows, and held her fast when she swayed back from him with a long shimmer of her copper-colored gown.

"You're hurting me, Cornie. And there's the bell," she muttered, her heart going dead.

He released her with the gesture of a man who hurls an enemy over a precipice. He gasped:

"One of these days!"

And with a livid smile he left the room as David Verne appeared in the doorway, in his wheel chair, propelled by Hamoud.

But David, too, was nearly unrecognizable.

"What is it?" she ejaculated, and turned to catch her reflection in a mirror. She saw herself in a curious aspect also, white and a little wild. One of her shoulder straps had slipped down across her arm.

"What a dress!" she said.

David carefully pronounced the words:

"That was Rysbroek, wasn't it?"

"Yes; I've known him since we were kiddies."

"I remember your saying so."

"He brought me bad news," she added, to imply, "That's it."

"Ah, I'm sorry."

There was no life in his voice.

In the dining room the servants moved noiselessly, as though fearful of disturbing the long silences. A sickly breeze stirred the curtains of apricot velvet. The brass band in Washington Square was playing

selections from Verdi; the long-drawn wails of the horns crept in through the windows like snatches of a dirge. She was reduced to speaking of the sultry air. A thunderstorm was brewing?

"The air will be clearer," he assented.

He ate nothing. When Hamoud had wheeled him back to the drawing-room, he asked:

"Do you mind if I go? A splitting headache. This weather."

"You shouldn't have stayed in town, you see," she returned automatically.

"Maybe I'll go up to Westchester for a week or so." His dull eyes rested upon the picture that she made as she stood uneasily before him, with an appearance of guilt, her figure like a shaft of flame springing upward from the hearth, her brown head aureoled by the tempestuous canvas of Bronzino. "Besides," he concluded, "keeping you here all this while a prisoner——"

"How can you be so unkind?"

"At least I'm not ungrateful."

He made a sign to Hamoud, who stole forward to take his post behind the wheel chair; and the two faces regarded her with the same brave, secret look, the same queer impassiveness that was like a deafening cry. Her nerves began to fail her. With an unaccountable feeling of perfidy she straightened his cravat, while murmuring:

"I'll see you first, of course, dear?"

"Of course."

But he neither saw her nor telephoned before his departure; nor did he write to her from the house in Westchester County. On the third day she went to Brantome, who said:

"I was coming to see you."

Fixing her with his tragical old eyes, he informed her that he had received a long-distance call from David Verne's physician, who had telephoned from the house in Westchester County. In three days David seemed to have lost all that he had gained in these months. For some reason he was letting go of life.

"Why is that? Is it because he is letting go of you?"

The Frenchman's leonine countenance took on a hostile expression. He persisted:

"Eh? Is it you who have done this?"

And Lilla understood that to this old devotee of the arts she had ceased to be anything except a means to an end.

He seemed contemptible to her with his red-rimmed, fiery eyes, his Viking mustaches that had turned truculent, his whole aspect of animosity at this last collapse of hope. And of a sudden she divined the true basis of those hopes of his—the longing for at least some vicarious creation, the desire to escape, in part, his own sense of defeat by aiding, and, therefore, sharing, the triumphs of another. He put himself in her path: he would not let her go. He was preparing to hurl at her, who knew what reproaches.

"Oh, get out of my way!" she cried at last, in a breaking voice. She pushed him aside so sharply that he tottered back on his heels. She rushed out of the room, downstairs, into her car.

The limousine sped northward into the country.

She watched the placid fields, the wooded hill-tops, the lanes that wound away between walls of sumac. She thought of another unexpected ride toward another crisis of life. Her heart was beating wildly; her breathing was labored; her hands twitched open and shut. She took the mirror from its rack, and saw her pupils extraordinarily dilated, so that her eyes appeared black.

The car left the highway, to enter a park of well-grown trees. She caught sight of the low, simple mass of the house; its walls of gray plaster rising between two clumps of evergreens, beyond a garden laid out in grassy stages, where flagstone paths wound away between beds of heliotrope. On the terrace, under an awning of striped canvas, stood a man in a dark-blue robe that opened down the front to reveal a white under robe confined with a scarlet sash. He had a close-fitting skullcap on his head, of white, embroidered linen. He was Hamoud-bin-Said.

She passed him without a second glance, and found herself face to face with the physician, who was just starting back to town.

Dr. Fallows began to talk to her judicially and suavely, with a tone of regret, but possibly with an undertone of contentment: for this case, after having immensely bewildered him for a time, was now, at last, imitating all the proper symptoms again. The patient's recent improvement had been due, no

doubt, to one of those rallies that may interrupt the progress of many diseases—though in a case of this sort, whether due to a functional or a pathological cause, Dr. Fallows had never seen nor heard of an arrest—much less a diminution—of the general weakness.

But now the relapse was complete.

She was aware of a lot of fluted wainscoting around her, and, beyond Dr. Fallows' head, a Tudor staircase in silhouette against a large bay window of many leaded panes. Some of these panes, of stained glass in heraldic patterns, gleamed against a passing cloud like rubies, emeralds, and sapphires that had lost their fire. Dr. Fallows still blocked her way—almost another Brantome!—engrossed in his pessimistic peroration, his visage of an urbane, successful man full of complicated satisfactions and regrets. Behind him the staircase was suddenly bathed in sunshine; all the panes of stained glass became sparkling and rich; and a sheaf of prismatic rays stretched down, through the gloom of the hall, toward Lilla's upturned face.

She sped up the staircase.

All that she saw was the four-post bedstead canopied with cretonne, the face on the pillow. At her approach, a thrill passed through the air pervaded by the stagnation of his spirit. He opened his eyes.

"You! I thought I had unchained you."

She knelt down beside him, and asked:

"What have I done to deserve this?"

He managed to respond:

"You deserve more, perhaps—a worldful of blessings. But this release is all that I have to give you."

"Do you think I care for that man? I even hate him now, if it's he who has brought you to this."

He looked like a soul that sees an angel hovering on the threshold of hell, promising salvation.

"Oh, if I could believe you!"

And all the propulsions that had brought this moment to pass now forced from her lips:

"I am here to prove it in a way that you can never doubt."

That day, at twilight, she standing beside his bed, they were married.

CHAPTER XXX

Beyond seas, deserts, and snow-capped mountain peaks, in the equatorial forests where the Mambava spearmen dwelt unconquered, the black king, Muene-Motapa, sat in the royal house listening to a story teller.

The king sat on an ebony stool, in a haze of wood smoke, muffled in a cape of monkey skin embroidered with steel beads; for while it was summer in America it was winter in his land. Behind him, in a wide semicircle against the wattled walls, sat his black councilors, war captains, and wives, their eyeballs and teeth agleam in the light cast up by the embers. On the other side of the fire, the story teller discoursed from between two warriors who leaned their heads pensively against the upright shafts of their stabbing spears.

At the story teller's gestures—since gestures were needed to explain these wonders—chains clanked on his wrists. The chains had been fastened upon his arms and legs long ago, when he had begun to struggle back to health, surviving wounds that even his hardy captors had expected to prove fatal. When he fell silent, the councilors, captains, and women patted their mouths to express their astonishment, and the king declared:

"A good tale, Bangana. Do you know still another?"

So Lawrence Teck resumed his entertainment.

CHAPTER XXXI

The house in Westchester County was a pleasant surprise to Lilla. When she had gotten rid of some furniture and bric-a-brac whose style or color irritated her, she found herself in a sympathetic atmosphere, surrounded, as always, by a harmonious and sophisticated richness.

In the wainscotted hall, which the stained glass of the bay-window on the staircase landing dappled every day with a prismatic light, a marble Renaissance mantelpiece supported a mounted knight of the fifteenth century in stone, a champion who brandished his sword, and raised his sightless eyes, in an invariable gesture of defiance. Across the hall from him, a wide doorway opened on the living room, illuminated from tall windows set with quaint faces in color, and having at its far end a fine old Flemish tapestry of faded greens and browns, behind a long table on which stood a bust of a Florentine noblewoman in polychrome. High sprays of flowers sprang up, here and there, above sofas and chairs upholstered in antiquated damask, and seemed to bring into this spacious room walled with fluted wood the gayety of the garden, which appeared, behind the leaded windowpanes, a riot of golden marguerites, Chilean lilies, Chinese larkspur, phlox, asters, and poppy mallows.

Next, beyond folding doors, stood David's study, a pianoforte between the mullioned windows, a large carved center table covered with portfolios and books, the paneled walls hung with framed sheets of music written and autographed by famous composers.

Upstairs, however, in her own apartment, Lilla had produced an eighteenth century air. The walls of her sitting room and bedroom were remolded in chaste panels of French gray; the new rugs and the canopied window curtains were the palest orange. Her desk, the most vivid object in her sitting room, pleased her especially—a high Venetian desk of green and gold lacquer with pigeon holes and writing shelf of gold and red. She thought of the letters that must have been written there by women with dark eyes and powdered coiffures.

Then she sighed. A look of wonder and depression was reflected by a mirror framed in gilt; and she turned to stare at a vase in which stood a bouquet of Louis XVI flowers, a soft blending of mauve, faint yellow, rose, and pale blue, all fashioned out of tin.

"Tin flowers! Great heavens, what was I thinking of?"

She had only now realized the mockery of them. She rang for a maid, and said:

"Throw this thing out."

CHAPTER XXXII

In September David began to write his tone poem, *Marco Polo*.

It was not Marco Polo alone, but every man of extraordinary aspirations, who took that long journey, through semimythical deserts, into the realm of the Great Khan, and there for many years lived a life unrelated to the lives of his boyhood companions.

In far-off Cambulac the Venetian adventurer steeped himself in sights, odors, and sounds that were the antithesis of those which he had known, till at last he took on the strangeness of his surroundings. Yet in the course of time, though covered with wealth and honors, and habituated to bizarre delights, he began, with the perversity of human nature, to long for the land of his birth. With a sense of necessity and foreboding he tore himself loose from the paradise of Cambulac, traversed the deserts again, regained his own house. None knew him, for he was old, savory with antipodal spices, outlandishly garbed; and even his countenance had become like those Oriental faces amid which he had found unheard-of griefs and joys. In Venice, his birthplace, instead of a greeting that might ease his nostalgia, he encountered disbelief in his identity, and ridicule of his tales. He could not make them credulous of that delicious Cambulac where he had dwelt like a god: his tidings of unearthly felicities—free to all who would make that journey—fell upon brutish ears. The very children came to laugh him to scorn. So finally, stunned by this ingratitude, cut to the heart by the gibes of these Venetian wretches to whom he had brought such fine news, he sank into a stupor, and wondered, as he sat alone in his shame, whether indeed he had been a great and dazzled man in Cambulac—which, perhaps, after all, had no existence in reality!

The idea mapped out, there began for David Verne the period of complex mental tension, of intense concentration, during which an interruption might scatter forever a sequence of valuable thought. Lilla, knowing how great this mental and emotional strain must be, wondered that he was strong enough to bear it.

But the desire to be to Lilla, despite his infirmity, something that no other man could be, made him prodigious. As the tone poem expanded from this inspiration, he gained still greater impetus from the mere tonic of success. Toward the end of October, his asthenia had diminished enough to allow him to play the piano weakly in three octaves.

Dr. Fallows, on one of his visits a witness of this achievement, went out thunderstruck to his car,

muttering to himself:

"It is impossible!"

He looked sternly across the sunny garden, where the last of the summer flowers—giant daisies above beds of tufted pansies—were triumphantly flaunting themselves. He had never heard, and he doubted if any one else had ever heard, of a similar case—the checking and diminishing of such a prostration. But, knitting his brows, he pondered on the still chaotic state of the whole data concerning the "endocrine chain," and on the fallibility of previous unequivocal pronouncements in the science of medicine. He had a slight feeling of deflation, followed by a glow of curiosity; and he returned into the house to change his orders about the medicine.

He had been prescribing a solution of arsenic, the dose increasing little by little toward the point of tolerance. Now, for the purpose of experiment, he ordered that the dose was to remain the same. And in order to impress his instructions upon the mind of Hamoud-bin-Said, he said to the Arab severely:

"Remember, not one drop more!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

"Lilla! Lilla!"

She appeared in the doorway of the study like a muse that David had summoned by an infallible conjuration.

His day's work was over. He showed her what he had done. She leaned down beside the wheel chair to scan the pages; her fluffy, brown hair filled with the afternoon sunshine. And David, in the exhaustion following his labor, dreamily immersed his senses in the sight of her pale-brown cheek so close to his, in the persistent strangeness of her perfume, in the singular cadences of her voice that were always inspiring new harmonies, and in the caress of her cool, fragile hands that had drawn him back from death.

"Is it good?"

What he meant was, "Is it good enough to keep you from regrets?"

She understood, pitied him the more, redoubled her tenderness. And this wan idyll of theirs, as nearly incorporeal as though she were indeed an ethereal visitor, took on a new pathos which was accentuated by the withering of the flowers in the garden, the first hints of the rigor of winter.

He marveled at her self-immolation in this lonely house. He wondered how long such a state of things could last. Then, summoning back his new courage, he continued his combat against the unknown rivals, who, perhaps, had not yet revealed themselves to her, or else had thus far sent to her only ambiguous and subtle heralds of their coming—a breeze flavored with the past and promising an imitation of old transports, a cry of departing birds like a reassurance of the inevitable return, not only of the spring, but also of natural love.

"What are you reading now?" he would ask her apprehensively; for so many books were replete with accounts of a different sort of union.

Or, when she had gone to walk through the grounds at sunset, he, chained to his wheel chair, watched her departing figure with a sensation of dread, asking himself what thoughts would come to her out there, under the immense compulsion of the scarlet clouds.

His fears, for lack of any other definite object, often veered toward her memories.

She rejoined him at dusk, languid from that brief promenade, like those Eastern women whom Lawrence Teck had once described to her, or like one who is enervated by a fever stealthily creeping round one at the moment of tropical twilight. He saw her eyes misty with shadows which disappeared as she came forward into the lamplight.

"Yes, she had been thinking of him."

He suspected that she thought of "him" also in the night.

"Don't go yet," he would plead, when she came to his bed, into which Hamoud-bin-Said had tucked him like a child. So she sat down; and the ray of the night lamp fell across her sensitive lips that had felt the kisses of "the other." David's thin, romantic, bronzed face, with its queer comminglement of adolescence and genius, was fortunately in the shadows cast by the curtains of the bed canopy.

"Ah, how dull it must be for you! If we had some visitors? Brantome——"

"No," she said.

"And yet it was through him——"

"What! haven't you seen through him yet?" she returned in a jealous tone. And presently, with an accent of fear, as if her intuition had discerned some serious, unrevealed event of which Brantome was going to be the cause, "I wish we could have met some other place."

"You dislike him now?"

She responded:

"It was he, you know, who told me of that other woman, the one before me, who had you when you were well."

She rose, laid a kiss upon his forehead, and went away to her rooms across the corridor, leaving with him her perfume.

CHAPTER XXXIV

In New York there were two opinions concerning the change in Cornelius Rysbroek.

From his travels, it seemed, he had acquired a certain temperamental as well as physical hardness. He wore habitually a calm, ironical look, as though, having found life out, he considered it a phenomenon worthy only of scorn. He was seen everywhere, fastidiously attired, self-possessed, taciturn, listening to the chatter of his friends with sardonic attention, now and then throwing in a blighting comment. It was curious that these infrequent remarks of his, even though they had not remotely referred to her, always ended by bringing the conversation round to Lilla. Thereupon he fell silent, smoked one cigarette after another, and wore a look of indifference and boredom. At last he would rise, apparently fatigued by all that trivial gossip, and wander away.

In solitude he became another man. He would pace the floor for hours, sometimes all night; and then one might have heard some very peculiar rigmaroles declaimed aloud, or even shouted out—phrases so jumbled that they were hardly rational, cries interrupted by groans or smothered by the grinding of his teeth. Now and then his valet, on pushing back the window curtains in the morning, discovered a mirror smashed, or a book torn to tatters. There was something shocking in the calm set of Cornelius Rysbroek's jaws, the languid contempt of his eyes, as he remarked to the valet, that "there had been a little accident last night."

Once he burned his right hand severely. He had hurled a picture of Lilla into the fire, then, to rescue it, had plunged his arm to the elbow into the flames.

He often drove his car into Westchester County, round and round a wide network of roads in the center of which lay the house of David Verne. Suddenly he entered the highway that passed the tall gateposts of the detestable place. He drove faster and faster. The gateposts were near at hand. He bent over the wheel, and, without raising his eyes, sent the car roaring by, as if escaping through a forest in conflagration. His visage was covered with sweat; his pupils were full of red lights. He no longer saw the road, or was conscious of driving. Miles beyond, he became aware that he was calling out maledictions: and strangers, passing at a decent speed, had a vision of a dapper, ghastly wretch who appeared to be fleeing on the wings of the wind from the clutch of insanity.

CHAPTER XXXV

Fanny Brassfield, whose country house was not far away, sometimes dropped in to see Lilla.

"Hello, David," she said, sitting down beside the tea table, and crossing her knees. "How's old Marco Polo to-day?"

Her bony cheeks were rosy from the cold wind; her green eyes glittered with health; and her whole countenance, under a tilted, putty-colored toque, expressed her full satisfaction with what she had found in life. She had no nerves, no remorse nor thwarted ambitions. Because of her wealth, unscrupulousness, and small imagination, her one constant craving—for novel experiences—was easily satisfied. A long cigarette holder between her thin lips, one putty-colored lisle stocking showing to the knee, she exhaled, together with an odor of Florentine orris-root, a ruthless vigor and appetency for pleasure. Lilla thought with envy of all this woman had never imagined nor felt, all that she had been

able to enjoy without self-questioning.

How simple life was for some people!

"I'm giving a little party. No doubt it's useless to ask you——"

Fanny Brassfield interrupted herself to stare at Hamoud-bin-Said, who had entered the room without a sound.

He had on a long, dark-blue joho, or robe, embellished down its open front with a tracery of gold. Underneath he wore the kanzu, the under robe of fine white cotton, embroidered round the neck with a bit of red needlework, and reaching to his boots of soft, black leather. Bound his waist was a blue-and-gold sash, from which protruded the silver hilt of his J-shaped Zanzibar dagger. His head was covered, as always in the house, with a white embroidered skullcap. In one small hand he held a Venetian goblet, in the other a bottle of medicine.

It was the hour for Dr. Fallows' prescription.

"Really," Fanny Brassfield exclaimed, in her high-pitched, insolent voice, "I must get myself one of these—what is he again? Zanzibari?"

Hamoud, towering there in the attire of an Omân gentleman—which she took for a specially effective livery—contemplated the great Mrs. Brassfield. His full eyelids were dreamily lowered over his lustrous eyes. His long, straight nose seemed narrower than usual, perhaps from disdain. But his clear-cut carnelian mouth, vivid between his faint mustache and his delicate beard, did not change expression, although he was calling the great Mrs. Brassfield a female beneath the contempt of a Muscat slaver, the progeny of camels and alley dogs, and other names besides. As if regretfully he turned away to David Verne, measured out the solution of arsenic, and presented the goblet, a tapering treasure covered with gilt and crimson protuberances, an antique that had stood before men in the wave-lapped palaces of Venice, brimming with Greek wine, or maybe with Renaissance poison.

David Verne himself raised the goblet.

"Dr. Fallows has really done wonders, hasn't he?"

"Wonders," Lilla echoed with a smile.

In the hall, as she was leaving, Fanny Brassfield said to Lilla:

"By the way, Anna Zanidov is in town. She was asking after you."

Without moving, Lilla murmured slowly:

"Ah, she wants to tell my fortune again, perhaps?"

"She stopped doing that. It got too uncanny. You know yourself that everything she ever predicted came to pass. Including three deaths; that is, two besides——"

"One must believe that she sees it," Lilla assented, and, frozen by her thoughts, shuddered violently. "Yes, too uncanny! She did well to give it up."

"Especially as people were getting to be afraid of her," said Fanny Brassfield, while passing through the front doorway.

CHAPTER XXXVI

While David worked behind the closed doors of the study, Lilla, sitting down in a damask-covered chair, tried to concentrate her mind on the new books from New York.

She skimmed the novels to the point where the lovers had their first embrace, then turned to poems by women, which were pervaded with a melancholy derived perhaps from disillusionment. As a corrective she read the books on world politics, economics, esthetic philosophy. In these last she found, eloquently expressed, the most characteristic argument of the times—a persuasion to that self-abandonment which follows materialism and moral skepticism, an announcement that happiness lay in a religion of the senses, in becoming, indeed, "divinely animal."

As she laid down the book, there returned to her the words that a young Roman had poured into her ears one night on Lake Como:

"The splendors of this world and our acceptance of them. Not to question, but to feel, with these feelings of ours that a thousand generations have made so complex."

Of a sudden New York rose before her, bathed in the glitter from its lights, ringing with music and laughter. She saw the multitudes of pleasure seekers streaming hither and thither, immersing themselves in startling hues and sounds, in abnormal spectacles and freshly discovered impulses, which the priests of this new-old cult provided for them benignly in ever more exacerbating forms and combinations. There, possibly, amid those emotions gradually approaching a Dionysiac frenzy, was the logical Mecca of her long pilgrimage, the end of all this hunger for sensuous reactions—for the pleasures that came from strange fragrances and harmonies, from contacts with precious fabrics and the patina of perfect porcelains, from the perception of matchless color in painted canvas and gems, or from the grace that was fluent in the moving bodies of human beings and beasts?

She rose, turning away from those books, and from the room full of objects whose textures were finer and more lasting than flesh. Crossing the hall, she entered the fernery, where palms rose against the stone arches of the windows, and hanging baskets overflowed with long tendrils above a wicker couch that was covered with red cushions. It was the last refuge of the flowers. Beyond the leaded panes some snowflakes were floating down upon the flagstone paths of the garden.

Her gaze was attracted to some potted roses languishing in a corner.

She recalled having read somewhere, "The color is in us, not in the rose." She fell to wondering about the miracle of sight, in fact of all the senses, through which one derived from vibrations a seeming impression of surrounding things, and called this impression reality.

Of what nature were those vibrations? Did they truly explain the objects from which they issued? Suppose the senses caught only the least of them, or misinterpreted them? In that case one might be surrounded by things wholly different from what one believed them to be, awesome things which might be either exquisite or frightful. She stood horrified by this thought. The familiar world seemed to be dissolving in a mist, just as in her childhood: and through the mist she perceived immense, vague apparitions, at once monstrous and beautiful.

"Ah! why must these things come to me? What crime have I ever committed?"

The huge, invisible cat was resuming its play with the mouse.

"Yes," she thought, "the capacity for pleasure is balanced by the capacity for suffering. The more subtle our happy sensations, the more piercing our painful ones. Yet the thrill from pleasure is gradually deadened by repetition, and finally, with the passage of time, the senses no longer feel it; but all the while that pleasure is diminishing, pain increases. After all, what a tragical farce! Is there nothing else, nothing better?"

Lilla began again to shrink from life, to mistrust it.

She suffered from trivial, groundless fears, which she magnified, then abruptly forgot. Growing thinner, she found herself enervated as in the days of her mourning for Lawrence Teck, and all the while something at once indefinite and priceless seemed to be lost to her. In the midst of her sadness she would have fleeting perceptions of blue water, felucca sails, a town on the edge of a lake—maybe Lausanne—a room where she sat obediently asleep in a deep leather chair.

Now and again she woke in the morning with dim impressions of having dreamed a dream of inexpressible grandeur, of supernatural joy, in some place that she could not remember, and with some person whose face she could not recall. But as soon as she was wide awake all recollections of the dream passed away. She found herself burdened with the same unaccountable distress that she had taken to bed with her last night.

"All this preoccupation with myself! It must end to-day."

She determined to lose herself in David, to live and think and feel for him alone.

CHAPTER XXXVII

In the forests of the Mambava, in groves of banana trees, the peaked, thatched roofs of Muene-Motapa's stronghold rose in concentric circles round the royal houses.

Here, all day long, one heard the bleating of goats and fat-tailed sheep, the coo and whirr of pigeons, the thump of wooden mortars in which the women, their nude bodies covered with intricate designs of scars, were grinding millet. At times these noises were pierced by the clatter of little hammers, with which the smiths were beating into spear blades the lumps of iron smelted in rude furnaces from ferriferous quartz. It was an hereditary art. Who had taught it to them? Perhaps the hook-nosed voyagers from the Phoenician coast, who had bequeathed to them also a nebulous religious awe of fire, of the sun, and also of the moon, personified in legend by a pale, ardent, supernatural woman of surpassing beauty.

In their low verandas the warriors reclined at full length, their bangles of copper jingling as they reached out their hands toward the calabashes full of palm wine, or the smoking gourds charged with hemp. At the gate of the king's stockade the guards sat with their stabbing spears across their knees, surrounded by wolflike dogs and naked children with distended abdomens.

It was in the royal enclosure that Lawrence Teck had endured his captivity.

Beside him, waking and sleeping, there remained two guards, so that in Muene-Motapa's capital there was a lucid riddle, "What is it that casts three shadows?" Those two prehistoric warriors were aware of an incomprehensible great value locked up in the captive's mind; yet at his first false movement they would have slaughtered him, destroying cheerfully, like many others before them, what they could never hope to understand. However, they were kind to him, holding palm leaves over his head when he crossed the courtyards in the blaze of the sun, cooling his wrists when he fell ill with fever, and at night, if they spoke to each other across his body, keeping their voices low so as not to break his sleep. King Muene-Motapa had said to them long ago:

"If he escapes, you shall be beaten to death with sticks; but if he tells me that you have not treated him respectfully, soldier ants shall eat you alive."

For despite his chains, Lawrence Teck was the chosen friend of the king.

Muene-Motapa had been fond of him even before the drunken riot in which he got his wounds. This friendship had then become a proprietary emotion, a compound of affection, remorse, the fear of revenge, and even a sort of proselytizing zeal mixed up with self-interest. Muene-Motapa hoped that in time his prisoner would renounce all desire for the white world, embrace the beliefs and habits of the Mambava, become a subtle counselor in diplomacy as well as in wars of conquest. In short, those tales of the lands beyond these forests—the wiles of Islam, the methods by which the Europeans were eating up Africa—had revived in the king the incoherent and grandiose dreams of his youth. In this captive, whom he would some day make his brother, co-priest, and fellow general, he had found the knowledge to supplement his force, and make himself invincible.

So, night after night he repeated the same plea, sitting in the royal pavilion, across the fire from the white man whose guards had been sent out of doors.

Muene-Motapa was tall, muscular, bold of gesture and fierce of face. His word was life and death. Day and night he was surrounded by chiefs, councilors, wizards, and royal ladies who roared with laughter when he smiled, gnashed their teeth when he frowned, accompanied his every comment with moans of admiration and a soft snapping of their fingers. They were round him now, aligned against the wattled walls, behind the film of wood smoke; breathlessly awaiting the sound of his deep voice.

He began, in a chanting tone, to rehearse the past glories of the blacks. He spoke of that great ancestor of his, that other Muene-Motapa, whose kingdom had extended from the country of the Bushmen to the Indian Ocean, and from Nyasaland to Delagoa Bay. Then the white men had come.

"The flies destroyed the horses. The fevers burned up the men. Those who survived, my forefathers pierced with their spears. Have I shown you the trophies, Bangana, the hats of steel, the corselets of steel, the guns that one fires by lighting a string? My forefathers gave those things to their children for toys, and grass grew through the bones of those white men. But there came more, and more, and more, swarming over all the land, till now my country alone is free from them. Shall that be? Have I eaten rabbits? Am I some village headman? When I stamp my foot seven thousand spearmen spring from the ground. I am Muene-Motapa!"

In the crimson glow from the ashes the chieftains, the councilors, and the wizards raised their faces which were convulsed with rage. The wattled walls hurled back a deafening chorus of war cries.

The king drank from a gourdful of cashew-brandy, wiped his lips, and shouted:

"Consent, Bangana! Consent, Mfondolo, who might be my brother lion, pouncing upon army after army, as the lion pounces upon the antelope. I have shown you the Zimbabwe, the stone cities of the ancients. With slaves we will dig the gold out of the quartz reefs, buy guns from the Arabs, and drive these little yellow-skinned white men back into the sea. We two will rule over the land of my ancestors, the kingdom of the first Muene-Motapa. Through your mouth we will treat with the English, the Arabs, and all the world as equals. I will not kill you, because you will be my mind. Besides, I love you."

At a wave of his hand, behind the veils of smoke the women of the royal household rose and departed, their symmetrically scarred torsoes shining with oil, so that they resembled statues of polished bronze. They were slender, graceful, informed with the gentleness of those reared in the shadow of royalty, showing profiles that suggested the faces chiseled on Semitic monuments. Fringes of bark cloth hung down from their yellow girdles to their knees; over their breasts dangled strings of pearls and amber beads from Bazaruto; each wore on the middle of her forehead a charm intended to make her fortunate in marriage. They left behind them an odor of cheap German perfumes, which Mohammedan traders had brought to the edge of these forests.

When they had passed beyond earshot—for the mention of sacred things was not to be thought of while women sat within hearing—the king continued:

"What more can I do to show you that I love you, Bangana? I have initiated you into the mysteries

of my people. You know the ceremonies of the dead, of those who become of age. I have shown you where the fire is kept from which, once a year, all the fires in my kingdom are rekindled. I have told you which mountains and streams are holy. I have admitted you even into the secret of my own divinity. Nay, I have done still more. I have let you see my people dance for the Lady of the Moon."

There was a silence.

Lawrence Teck remained as before, his bearded face bowed down; but a slight tremor of horror passed through his shoulders under the sun-blackened skin.

The Dances of the Moon! Yes, he had seen them, one time when he was weak from fever and despair. All the frightfulness of Africa had then been made manifest to him at last, as if the very soul of destruction had condensed itself out of the vapors, venoms and invisible menaces of these primeval forests, to assume, for one night, a horde of nearly human shapes. But he shuddered not at his memory of that spectacle, but at its effect on him—an effect that he had denied with a passionate, clanking gesture of his chained arms, yet that had remained in the depths of his brain like a serpent, which had always slept till then, and had ever since been gnawing at his thoughts.

He recalled the deafening thunder of the drums, the glare and the blood, the moon peering down through the branches like the face of a perverse divinity pale from pride, and the thought that had come to him there, in his sickness and lonely hopelessness—that while some in a fit of decrepitude and despair might turn to God, others might turn to the oblivion promised by evil.

Raising his head, he called out in a voice as strong as the king's:

"Still dreaming, Muene-Motapa? Awake, and let me go!"

The king leaped to his feet, to pace the earthen floor. His kilt of leopards' paws swayed from side to side; his amulets jingled; his shaven head glistened amid the shadows, like an ebony ball. His court bowed their naked bodies, muttering:

"Father of elephants! He shall stamp on this man, and his foot shall shake the whole earth!"

Muene-Motapa bitterly asked his captive:

"Is there not always rich meat, and beer and brandy in season? I have also hundreds of women who are young, as slender as palm trees, with teeth like milk. I will buy women from the Arabs, with red or tawny skin and straight hair like waterfalls. I will send men to steal the women of Mozambique—white women with hair brighter than firelight. Why do you not marry my little sisters, my brother? They pine away for you. Or is it wealth? I know the little bible that you carry in that pouch! When you look into it, you remember all the quartz reefs in the gorges of the mountains beyond my forests, with their veins of gold and of gray and yellow copper; and the river sands full of gold; and the places where you have seen the iron that draws iron, and the tin, and the black grease. But I have already told you that you shall be rich. What is the matter with you, Bangana? Are you deaf?"

He squatted down before Lawrence Teck, and thrust forward his angry face; and his pendent, pear-shaped earrings of jasper, which some Phoenician adventurer had worn perhaps four thousand years ago, quivered as he shouted with all his might:

"Are you deaf, I say? Shall I open your ears with a spear point?"

He stared in stupefaction at Lawrence Teck's stony countenance, then suddenly burst into sobs.

"See how I love him!" he moaned, "and yet he hates me; and I shall never be great."

The prisoner thought to himself, "Now, if ever, is the time." He laid his hands on the shoulders of the king with a movement at once commanding and compassionate. All the courtiers stopped weeping to gasp in consternation at this sacrilege; one or two stood up; and in the shadows a blade of steel returned the crimson gleam of the embers.

Lawrence Teck said gently, as if talking to a child:

"Alas! my brother, I should lead you only to some death unbecoming a king. You were happy before you made me your captive; these chains have tormented you as much as me. Strike them off, and let me go. Forget me, and free yourself from vain thoughts."

"I should not forget you, Bangana," the king responded in a small, thin tone, as though the virile resonance of his voice had passed away with all his naïve and grandiose hopes. "All those tales! To whom shall I listen now at night? Besides, it has been good to see you here every day; for you alone in these forests have really understood my heart—and have stabbed it to death with your wisdom."

He pondered dismally, while the councilors and chieftains wept out his unexpressed grief, so that the whole pavilion was filled with their full-throated sobbing.

"Will you ever return, Bangana?"

"Why not? To persuade you to peace instead of war. To make treaties for the passage of my workmen through your forests to the new mines, and to give your people work if they will accept it."

The king closed his eyes.

"All that again! What are these white man's promises? Have they made the other tribes happy in their slavery? No, my face will be glad when you return to see me; but never ask me to let the white foot wedge itself in the door of my country. There would only be a great battle without you to help me in it. I and my race, if we cannot be mighty, at least will die free men."

He rose from his heels, and in a strangling voice called out to the guards, who came headlong, stooping, through the low entrance of the pavilion, with bared teeth and darting spears.

"Strike off the chains from my brother!" shouted Muene-Motapa, as one should say, "Slay my dreams!"

Then he stalked away, to sit alone in darkness. Next day, with an escort of Mambava warriors, Lawrence Teck set out for the coast.

At the bidding of the king, to do honor to the white man who was leaving them, they had put on their gala paint, and their plumed headgear bound under their chins with fur lappets. Their bangles made a cheerful clatter as they marched along the dim trails between the enormous trees. They carried food for two weeks.

Emerging from the forests, they saw the lowlands steaming in the heat; for while it was winter in America, here it was summer.

They traversed plateaux that were dotted with islets of jungle, plains covered with flowers and drenched with torrential rains, misty marshes that suggested landscapes of the Paleozoic Age. They saw sodden herds of zebras, the tracks of leopards, acacia trees uprooted by elephants. In a glade filled with blossoms of every color they came upon a family of lions, one of which they headed off and deftly killed with their spears.

The plumes of the warriors bobbed along in single file; at sunset the spear blades seemed still wet with blood. They raised their long shields, adorned with crude geometrical designs, and sang for the white man a rambling song of parting.

"But he will return some day to bask in the countenance of Muene-Motapa."

They all took up the refrain:

"To bask in the countenance of Muene-Motapa!"

Their voices rose strongly, full of exultation. On a branch above them, a python, awakened by those vibrations, revealed itself in an iridescent gliding of its coils.

Suddenly, on the edge of a jungle of bamboo, they stood still. Far off appeared the bastions of a fort, of whitewashed stone, mottled and streaked with green. A flag was hanging limply from the flagstaff.

His two shadows, in bidding him farewell, began to weep, their tears running over the white grease paint with which their cheeks were bedaubed. They turned away with a choking cry:

"Farewell!"

"Farewell!" all the other warriors uttered in unison, fiercely, at the top of their voices. Their howl passed over his head, like a defiance, toward the distant fort.

So Lawrence Teck returned to civilization.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The commandant of the district, a melancholy, flaccid man with a saffron-colored visage that looked like a half-deflated balloon, a martyr to prickly heat, anaemia, and monotony, peered up from under the moving punkah, to inquire of his subordinate in the doorway:

"He is still sitting there alone?"

"In the same position," the subordinate assented.

"I wish now that I hadn't shown it to him," said the commandant of Fort Pero d'Anhaya, the district judge, the chief of the public works, the receiver of taxes, the collector of revenues, the postmaster, the poor exile prematurely aged by the African sun, the sorry "hero on the outposts of civilization."

The subordinate shrugged his shoulders, and retorted:

"They would have told him on the coast."

"No doubt," said the commandant, giving the other a veiled look of animosity, expressing thus a little of that loathing which had gradually come to embrace everything habitual to this pitiless and violently beautiful land. And when the subordinate had withdrawn, he muttered to himself, as he returned to his apathetic contemplation of the papers on his desk, "All the same, an ideal! And I killed it for him a few days before there was any real need."

The moist heat of the equatorial summer penetrated the embrasures of the fort, and made stifling even the dim, whitewashed room where Lawrence Teck was sitting. Dusky from the sun, and seeming more aquiline than ever in his gauntness, he remained like an effigy in the suit of white duck that hung round him in loose folds, without so much as a movement of his eyes. His hand rested on a tattered copy of an English journal.

The commandant had extracted this journal from a pile of newspapers and magazines of half a dozen countries, all thumbed and ragged from perusals that had embraced the most trivial advertisements, and all still precious because by their aid one's spirit could fly home. This London journal contained at the bottom of a page, amid some gossip about music in America, the announcement that "the widow of Lawrence Teck, the explorer," had married the young composer, David Verne.

Raising his eyes at last toward the casement in the embrasure, Lawrence Teck saw, against a glaring turquoise sky, the fronds of a borassus palm, which seemed, like all the rest of nature, to be sleeping. He leaped to his feet, realizing that he was in Africa, still far from the coast, and that at this moment, in another hemisphere—

The walls, the sleeping borassus palm, the patch of sky, all became red.

He walked to and fro, saying to himself in what seemed a jocular tone:

"Didn't wait long. A composer. Think of that!"

He stood still, his bearded face upturned toward the casement. He let out a peal of laughter that froze the blood of the white-robed servants who had been dozing in the stone corridor. They crept beyond earshot of the stranger who, with his hips wrapped in bark cloth, had suddenly appeared on the rim of the safe world against a background of shields painted with the devices of the terrible Mambava.

But Lawrence Teck quickly recovered an external impassiveness. He sat down, and considered:

"How naïve I was. That's when the sentimentalism gushes out, at the end of long journeys, at the novelty of elegance and sophistication. One deifies them then: one gives them a place much larger than they ought to take up in life. How Muene-Motapa would laugh! He, virtually a Neolithic man, never sinks below manly thoughts: his ambitions are never enfeebled by the malady of sentimental love. So when he suffers it is like a man, not like a descendant of medieval mystics and *cavalieri serventi*."

His body relaxed, and he muttered:

"A bit of romance for her in imitation of some favorite play or book. An emotional hour with the man from Africa—and now a musical fellow."

After a sharp expulsion of his breath he resumed that immobility which extended even to his eyes. He recalled the thoughts of her that had filled his captivity, all his memories of their union which had gained, from "the pathos of distance," and from the passage of time, an immaterial, an ideal, nobility, till at last, in the poetic fancy of his lonely heart, she had become more remote and diffuse than the moonlight on the mountain peaks, more intoxicating and elusive than the odors of the equatorial flowers, an influence rather than a woman, a vague hope, a sort of sanative faith.

It was, he reflected, all one with the romanticism that had driven him to those many wanderings, the longing for what was so dissimilar to him and yet intensely congenial—the magical deserts where one suffered from heat and thirst, the gaudy jungles where death lay in wait for one, the woman who concealed beneath an appearance of perfection an incapacity for a decent period of grief. Ah, there was the perfidy more deadly to him than all the plagues and vipers and weapons of Africa!

He felt a profound revulsion from his own nature, which was flawed with this sentimentalism, this jejune expectancy. At nightfall, rising wearily from his chair, he wondered how he was to go on living with himself.

"And after all is it her fault? I was dead. No doubt she shed some tears. Because I loved her I expected too much of her."

Through the casement he saw a world fading away beneath clouds as black as ink. A purplish-gray wall of rain was swiftly approaching the fort. A pink fork of lightning stood out against the clouds: the crash of thunder was followed by a noise like a thousand waterfalls; and everything turned black.

The rolling thunder recalled to him the thunder of the Mambava drums at the Dances of the Moon; and in the darkness he remembered the voice of Muene-Motapa pleading with him to cast off the old, to become a new man, to return amid the black forebears of mankind, kill hope and even conscience,

forget and be at peace. In the turmoil of the storm around the fort and in his breast he even seemed to see the king in apparition before him, and to hear the words:

"Consent, Bangana. Consent."

"Bah! as if anything in life were worth all this. All sound and fury; all pompous silliness like this storm. Presently there will not be an echo or a trace of it."

He found the door, burst out into the corridor, then walked sedately under the flickering lamps toward the commandant's rooms. That yellow-visaged man jumped up from behind his desk, stammering:

"Yes, it's dinner time."

The candles on the dinner table jarred at the peals of thunder; but Lawrence Teck sat impassive. Toward the end of the meal he vouchsafed:

"Have you reported my showing up?"

"I was going to put it on the wire to-morrow morning."

"If it could be arranged I should like to precede the news to America."

The commandant, without knowing why, felt a touch of alarm.

"Then I'll send my report direct to the governor, and mark it confidential at your request."

That night the commandant, lying under his mosquito net, wakeful from prickly heat, was haunted by the face of Lawrence Teck. "She must be very beautiful," he sighed. "Why didn't they print her picture?" And he occupied himself with trying to imagine what she looked like.

By the time he was falling asleep he had decided that she must have yellow hair and large, blue eyes. Just as he dozed off he had a ravishing impression of her—a composite of an Austrian archduchess, whose likeness he had admired in a periodical, and a Neapolitan singer who had overwhelmed him in a music hall at home, long ago, when the world had seemed a place stored with love, fame, and wealth, instead of with prickly heat, malaria, and shiny, black faces.

"My angel!" breathed the poor commandant of Fort Pero d'Anhaya, sleeping for the first time in many a night with an infantile smile on his countenance that suggested a half-deflated balloon.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Hamoud, wearing the blue robe edged with gold embroidery, and carrying in his right hand the Venetian goblet, was half-way out of the living-room when David Verne resumed:

"No, you must really go about more, or you will begin to hate me."

The young Arab paused beyond the living-room door, his handsome head inclined to one side, waiting for the response—not for the words, but for the mere tone of her voice. He heard:

"While you are holding your own, and working so well, I am happy."

Hamoud closed his eyes, in order to let those silvery vibrations occupy his whole consciousness. Then, staring before him, he went swiftly across the wainscotted hall with his lithe, noiseless step, escaping before that other voice could break the spell.

David Verne, in his wheel chair that stood beside a tall lamp, gave her a furtive look, before continuing:

"Is it always happiness that I discover on your face? Is that what you show me when you raise your eyes blankly from some book, or return from the garden after those lonely walks of yours in the twilight? Or is it pity, not only for me, but also for yourself? Is it then that you see clearly what you've let yourself in for—what that divine impulse of yours has brought you to?"

"David!" she protested, her nerves contracting at this threat of a scene that must lacerate both their hearts.

But he persisted:

"I don't disbelieve what you told me about Rysbroek. It's not he that I'm jealous of. I can even believe that there's no other living man in your thoughts. The powers that I can never hope to conquer don't have to exist in the present, in order to frighten me. They have only to exist in the past and in the

future. Of course the man who is dead will always triumph over me by comparison. And some day, since mortals are bound to strive for a duplication of their happiest moments, another will appear to promise you that duplication."

How young he seemed in the light of the tall lamp, despite all his former physical sufferings and his present anxieties! Again there was a look of childish pain on his lips, and in his large eyes humid beneath the brow that harbored thoughts of a magnificent precocity. Again compassion filled her at sight of this weakness, this helplessness. She returned:

"How can you say such things? When I refuse to go anywhere, because you couldn't go with me without being bored——"

"You mean, without feeling my inferiority."

"Is it inferiority to be the great artist that you are? What wickedness! You, with your genius, aren't satisfied, but envy those commonplace men because their bodies move easily from place to place. Can their minds soar up like yours?"

"Perhaps not—nor sink into such depths."

She rose, to approach the long window against which the night had plastered its blackness. He watched her inevitably graceful passage from the light into the shadows, and her nervous attitude, as she stood with averted face, staring out through the lustrous glass. She was glamorous with the material elegance that always ended by deriding him. She was agitated by who knew what secret thoughts in accordance with that involuntary withdrawal—the movement of a prisoner toward the window of a cell.

"Let's not deny the facts of life," he began again. "Or pretend with each other. Pity doesn't make one incorporeal. All your angelic compassion can't transform you from a woman into an angel, especially when you see, at every glance in your mirror, the charms that a moment of generosity has made futile."

She came to him quickly, knelt down beside the wheel chair, and put round him her bare, slender arms.

"Don't you know that I love you, David?"

"There are so many kinds of love," he sighed, gazing at her dark eyes that once had flamed with passion, at her fragile lips that had uttered such words as he was never to hear, at her whole pale-brown countenance that would never express for him what it had expressed for the other.

"I want nothing else," she affirmed, in a voice wherein no one could have found any insincerity.

"Perhaps you believe even that. But when it comes to you, then you'll realize what a trap I've caught you in." He gave her a look of horror. "Why did you go there that afternoon to Brantome's? When you saw me there, sitting alone in the shadows, dying with no weight on my conscience, why didn't you leave me alone? But maybe you had no idea of the effect you were going to produce on me—that your look, and voice, and mind, were what I'd always been waiting for. Or since you had come there why couldn't my conscience die at the moment when you made me live again? But instead of dying, my conscience is becoming more and more alive."

He bit his lips to keep back a groan. She declared:

"You're harming yourself again. You won't be able to work to-morrow."

"What is my work worth, if it dooms you to this?" Presently he said in a quiet tone, "It would be easy to free you."

"Ah, you are horrible!"

"Don't be afraid. If there is anywhere beyond this life, anything in the nature of a heaven, it would seem inferior to this house, where I can see you without possessing the love that you're capable of, and hear your voice utter these incredible reassurances. Yes, my conscience torments me, but not enough for that. While I may, I'll hold on to you and to life, even when I feel sure that your thoughts are turning elsewhere, and even if it comes to pass that your bodily self must follow those thoughts. For as your pity returns, so must you return to me. What a weapon I've found in pity! What a victory it will bring me! Some other man may end by winning yourself; but I, as long as I can keep my grip on life, will cling to this ghost of you!"

"Do you do this just in order to drive me mad?" she cried.

"No, you would understand if you could see into my soul. All its surgings and clashings, its vortexes of pain and joy, the anguish that somehow produces an audible beauty, and the ecstasies that are struck mute by these fears! If I could explain all that, you would forgive me for these moments that are beyond my control. But I can't explain it. Not even in my music. One is always alone with one's heart."

Taking his twitching face between her hands, she showed him her eyes filled with tears.

"But I do understand," she protested.

If she did, it was because she also was alone.

That night, as she was going to her own room, she saw Hamoud in the upper corridor. Something forlorn and lost in his exotic aspect struck through her sadness: she remembered how far from home this exile was, how far removed also from the rank to which he had been born. She hesitated, then asked remorsefully:

"Do you hate me, Hamoud?"

He turned pale, standing before her with the wall light shining upon his face of a young caliph.

"I, madam?"

"Well, for what I've got you into: this service, which must distress you every day. But what was there to do? It offered itself when I—you, too, I suppose—could think of nothing else."

Hamoud-bin-Said, paler than ever, replied in Arabic:

"You are sorry for me because I have lost my heshma, my prestige? It is part of the divine wisdom, the foreordained plan of my life. All things happen for the best. The house is warm, so that one does not feel the winter. There is food, so that one does not starve. Therefore, my body is at peace—" He paused to compress his carnelian lips, before concluding serenely, "And as for my soul, it rests as always in the palm of God, like a bird waiting to be taught its ways."

CHAPTER XL

When Lilla and David went driving through the country, Hamoud prowled all over the house.

He entered the study, to stare at the autographed music framed on the walls, the manuscript strewn over the center table, the open piano. A look of contempt appeared upon his face: for one reason, perhaps, because he belonged to the I bathi sect, who looked askance at music, disdaining even the cantatas about the Birth of the Prophet. He went out of the study in a rage, slammed the folding doors behind him, and stood eyeing the damask-covered chair in which she usually sat.

He recalled the old tales of the lovers, he a Mohammedan and she a Christian, who always fled away on a magic carpet to the safety of Islam.

If it was an hour appointed for prayer, he went up to his room, closed the door, took the Koran out of his Zanzibar box, a carved and brightly painted chest bound with iron and furnished with padlocks. He opened the Koran, but recited the verses from memory, trying to feel behind the words the esoteric meanings expounded in the commentaries. This done, he took out from his bosom the talisman that he wore attached to a silver chain—a silver disc having on one side a square made up of sacred characters, and on the other side the seal of Solomon. The talisman recalled to him the careless days of good fortune; and he became homesick.

Thereupon he produced a little censer, kindled a piece of charcoal, and sprinkled the coal with aloes, gum incense, and musk. Sitting on his heels, with the censer between his small hands, he lowered his face toward the fumes, became drunk with sad memories. His tears hissed on the red coal, and through a glittering film he saw the ancestral house, the blush of the clove trees, the deep blue sea with the dhows slipping out toward Muscat. He dried his eyes, put everything away, concealed in his palm a tiny, empty, square vial of glass enameled with gold. He appeared in the corridor, calm, stately, giving a passing housemaid a look of scorn.

When all was silent he entered Lilla's rooms. Hamoud drew in through his expanded nostrils the unique fragrance of this place, and trembled as he looked round him at the walls of French gray, the faintly orange hangings, all the charming objects that were so artfully arranged. He passed into her bedroom, stood pensive before the dressing table whose mirrors were accustomed to reflect her, reached out to touch the handles of her brushes, as if expecting them to be still warm from her hands. He remembered the tiny empty vial, at the same moment that he heard the car returning.

Lilla, on entering her bedroom, found the air heavier than usual with her perfume. It occurred to her that one of the servants must have been taking some; and she was vexed to think that a housemaid should go to meet a sweetheart wearing the fragrance that a Viennese expert in odors had concocted "to express her special temperament."

CHAPTER XLI

Now and then, craving a glimpse of the gay streets and the shops, Lilla went into town "to see that everything was all right" in the house on lower Fifth Avenue, or else, "to make sure that Parr was comfortable."

One afternoon, at a stoppage of the traffic her limousine came side by side with that of Fanny Brassfield, who persuaded her to look in at a horse show.

She found herself in a box on the edge of an arena, amid a concourse of people whose unrelated movements and chatter combined in a species of visible and audible mist, which encircled the spread of tan bark. In the midst of everything, in the dusty glitter that poured down from the high roof, horses and men were moving like automata. The thud of the hoofs was lost in a great buzzing of voices. The odor of stables was impregnated with the scent of winter flowers and sachets.

Round Lilla there was an accentuated stir. Even across the arena some women were staring through their glasses. The reporters came hurriedly to verify the rumor that it was she. Those who were promenading below the boxes walked more slowly, feasting their eyes on her.

She eat proudly erect, her fur-trimmed cloak drawn round her tightly; and none could have suspected the confusion of her brain after so much solitude.

Fanny Brassfield's piercing voice struck through the fanfare of a bugle:

"Look here, Lilla, I'm giving quite a dinner tonight. You stay in town for once, and have a little fun. We can stop and buy you a perfect gown that I saw yesterday——"

And when Lilla had shaken her head, the blonde, lean temptress exclaimed in exasperation:

"I declare, you're no good to anybody any more!"

A sleek-looking man in riding clothes stepped down into the box. Fanny Brassfield, who had been craning her neck indignantly, disregarded his outstretched hand to give his arm a push, while crying out:

"Go get her for me, Jimmy. Anna Zanidov. There, with those people in the aisle."

The Russian woman appeared before them in a black turban and a voluminous black cloak. Her flat, vermilion lips were parted in a social smile; but her Tartar eyes remained inscrutable. Her face, wedge-shaped, dead white, with its look of being made from some material more rigid than flesh, was as startling as the countenance of an Oriental image, in its frame of glossy black fur. Sitting down, she assumed that close-kneed hieratic attitude habitual to her, which made Lilla see her once more in the barbarically painted evening gown, amid superstitious women breathless from awe.

"Do you care for this idolatry?" Madame Zanidov asked Lilla, in her precise English. "But then after all so few are here to worship the animals. Perhaps rather to be worshipped," she suggested pleasantly, casting her glance over Lilla's face and costume.

All around her, indeed, Lilla could see the pretty women in their slate-gray and rust-colored cloaks, in their rakish little toques from under which their sophisticated eyes peeped out in search of homage. Some had the expression of those for whom love is an assured phenomenon solving all questions. Others seemed to be waiting impatiently for its advent or its departure. But all, Lilla thought, looked assured either of its persistence or its recurrence. Amid them she felt as isolate as a ghost.

The men approached them with confident smiles, long limbed, with leisurely and supple movements, smart in their heavy tweeds or riding breeches that suggested habits of strenuous exertion. When they removed their hats, one saw their close-clipped heads bending forward confidentially toward the fair faces: and their eyes slowly followed the eyes of the women who were contemplating absentmindedly the rippling muscles of the horses in the arena. A band in a balcony began to play Strauss's *Wiener Mad'l*, the strains of music muffled by the dust, the lights, the movement of the audience, the pain in Lilla's breast. And the vague savor of stables and flowers, the statuesque postures of beasts and the expectant attitudes of human beings, were suddenly fused together into one hallucination—a flood of sensory impressions at once unreal and too actual, in which Lilla found herself sinking and smothering.

Anna Zanidov was looking at her intently.

"You do not often come to town, they tell me," the Russian murmured.

"No, why should I?" Lilla returned, as if violently aroused from sleep. She saw beyond Anna Zanidov, on the steps of the box, a man whose visage was lined across the forehead and under the cheekbones, and who showed, under his heavy, mouse-colored mustache, a stony, courteous smile.

It was the new face of Cornelius Rysbroek.

"No, sit here," said the Russian, "I wish to talk with Fanny."

He seated himself beside Lilla, and, after watching a horse clear a jump, remarked:

"Do you know I'm living near you?"

He had taken a house in Westchester County, five miles away from hers. He had been looking for quiet, because he was writing a book about his journey in China—"just for the fun of the thing."

"Yesterday," he added indifferently, "I happened to pass your gates. At least I suppose they were. I had a mind to call."

His hands, clasped round his knee, attracted her unwilling notice. They had become sinewy. He appeared like a hard-muscled elder brother of the listless hypochondriac who in the old days had paid feeble court to her: and strangeness enveloped him, not only because of the changes in his body and character, but also because of the hardships and escapes that he had experienced in the Chinese mountains. Yet in this strangeness Lilla found a disturbingly familiar quality, like an echo of something lost, a vague and diminished reappearance of an old ideal.

"Yes," she said softly, "I wish we could be friends again. But the situation at home is so very delicate."

After a long silence, he uttered, so low that she could hardly hear him:

"Are there no other places?"

The band still played *Wiener Mad'l*.

"It's getting late," she faltered, wondering where she was going to find the strength to rise from her chair.

"Yes, go back to your tomb. Are there any mirrors in it? Do you ever look in them? Do you see in them what's happening to you? Your eyes are losing their luster; you're getting haggard, and in a little while one will see the bones under your skin. At this moment you look like the devil." Without raising his voice, without ceasing to stare as though bored at the old Russian silver box from which he was taking a cigarette with trembling fingers, he pronounced malignantly, "You are losing your beauty, Lilla—all that you ever had to plunge a man into hell. Presently, thank God, there will be nothing to love."

It seemed to her that he had shouted the words at the top of his voice, that the whole multitude must have heard him, and must have seen the look that he showed her for the briefest instant—the look of a damned soul peering through flames that only she could quench.

At the full impact of pity and remorse at last, she felt her spirit stumbling toward his through that inferno.

The promenaders perceived a woman and a man, expressionless though rather worn and pale, exchanging apparently commonplace words, while staring down at the horses.

"I'll phone you to-night—"

"Not the phone."

"With an indolent movement he thrust his shaking hands into his coat pockets, and tried again:

"I'll drive over in the morning. You might be taking a walk—"

Weak and sick, she glanced down at the buttons of her gloves, before rising to her feet. She heard Anna Zanidov saying to Fanny Brassfield, "Well, I've lost those friends of mine. No matter. I'll find a taxi." Pouncing upon this chance to escape, for the moment, from him and from herself, Lilla blurted out:

"Let me give you a lift. Come on."

Cornelius Rysbroek saw her lovely head turning away from him, the swirl of her cloak as she ascended the steps, the flash of her tapering boot heel. He then stood looking round him through his ironical, weary mask, one hand on the back of a chair, however, as if without that support his quaking legs might let him fall to the floor.

CHAPTER XLII

The limousine glided northward. A cold rain was falling. Behind the glistening windowpanes the scene was continually melting from one lackness into another. At each flash of radiance Madame Zanidov was revealed motionless in her corner, muffled in her cloak, with closed eyes.

"Is she reading my thoughts?" Lilla wondered.

No matter: by this time the whole world must know them, released as they had been, into that eager public air, like a deafening cry of confession. "What's to be the end of this?" she asked herself, appalled, as she felt her life being whirled along from one fatal impulse to another, just as she was being whisked by the limousine from darkness to darkness. To check that inexorable progress! to see some constant light!

Anna Zanidov turned her wedge-shaped face toward Lilla, with the words:

"I have thought of you many times."

"I can say the same."

"To be sure," the Russian declared, "I have stopped doing that, you know. I didn't want to end by being shunned."

"I suppose you still have the gift?"

"No doubt."

The limousine halted. Across its path rumbled a street car mistily bright behind the rain, crowded with people who represented a rational humanity aloof from the little compartment in which were shut up these two victims of remarkable beliefs. Then, the limousine moving on, the blurred phantasmagoria closed in again:—and the northern vista took on the ambiguity of Lilla's life, a compound of darkneses and deceptive gleams, stretching away toward what? She uttered:

"Nevertheless, to know the future!" And as the Russian remained mute and motionless, she faltered, "No matter what one learned, the suspense would be over."

"Would it, indeed?"

"I am desperate," Lilla responded in low tones.

After a while Madame Zanidov, with a compassionate austerity, responded:

"Remember, then, that it is you who wished this."

Their hands touched. In the rushing limousine, in this fluidity of lights and darkness, they were intent on the phenomenon that both believed to be a revelation of fate. At last the clairvoyant quietly began:

"I am out of doors, far away."

The glare of passing headlights displayed her closed, oblique eyes, her parted, flat lips, her idol-like aspect, which bestowed on her the impressiveness, the seeming infallibility, of those oracles that were anciently supposed to describe some future mood of the chaotic ebb and surge that human beings call life.

"Very old tree trunks. Great trailing vines. Huge flowers black in the moonlight. It is the very same place. Here is that clearing, and the squatting black men. Their hands are folded; their heads are bowed forward; they are filled with sadness. Near them, on the ground, lies the dead man whose body is covered with a cloth. It is the man who has loved you." She dropped Lilla's hand, protesting, "This is incredible!"

"Incredible?"

"Yes, because this scene appears to be still in the future. Do you understand me? Hasn't happened yet."

The limousine stopped before the Russian's door as Lilla, disgusted by this anticlimax, replied:

"You've repeated your old prophecy because it has haunted my mind ever since you made it that night at the Brassfields'. You've merely gotten back from me the impression that you stamped on my consciousness then."

"Then that is something new. These perceptions of mine have never referred to the past. Besides, I had just now—but how shall I explain it?—a powerful sense of the future. Ah, well, maybe this gift of mine is leaving me, since I've refused to use it. I sha'n't be sorry." As she got out of the car, she amended, "At least, I don't think I'm sorry to have disappointed you."

The door snapped shut on that hope: the world became fluid again: and Lilla was borne away toward another pity and another remorse.

CHAPTER XLIII

Hamoud opened the front door, and told her:

"They are waiting for you."

"They? Who is here?"

"Mr. Brantome."

She stood for a moment staring balefully at the stone knight above the fireplace of the hall, who still raised his sightless face, and brandished his blunt sword, with that stupid appearance of defying everything. Then she tossed aside her cloak and hat, and went straight into the living room, peeling off her gloves, saying in a gracious voice:

"Hello! How nice! But how foolish to wait for me. You must both be starved."

"No, but David has been imagining all sorts of calamities," Brantome returned, with a loud, artificial laugh, and a look of anxiety in the depths of his old eyes. As for the invalid, silent in his wheel chair before the Flemish tapestry, he showed her a frozen smile, a travesty of approval.

They went in to dinner. As soon as they had sat down she began, with an unnatural vivacity, to tell them where she had been. That horse show! It had never seemed so silly to her. The same old stable slang interspersed with the same old scandal. And to-night Fanny Brassfield, instead of falling upon her bed in a stupor of futility, was going to give a big dinner for the very same people. "I'm surprised," she exclaimed, turning her flushed face toward Brantome, "that you weren't dragged into it. They usually sacrifice a captive from the land of art."

David remained quite still, his frail shoulders bowed forward, his head advanced, his eyes intently watching her moving lips. She could not abate that frozen smile of his. Brantome, his portly body thrown back, his white mane and long mustaches shimmering like spun glass in the candle light, seemed still to wear on his tragical old face a look of uneasiness. She had the feeling of sitting before two judges who were weighing not only her words, but her tone of voice and appearance. She wondered what appearance she presented.

"Why don't you eat your dinner?" she asked David.

"I am interested," he replied rather hoarsely.

"At what? I was wondering what right I had to inflict all this on you. I suppose when I came in you were talking of something worth while." She turned again to Brantome. "And *Marco Polo*?"

"The best tone poem since *Don Quixote*," he said, rising and making her a bow. "As far as it has gone. It is not finished yet."

"It soon will be. Won't it, David?"

"Oh, another month with luck," he returned lightly, trying to lift a wineglass, and spilling on the cloth the champagne that had been prescribed by Dr. Fallows.

She caught his wrist. A pang passed through her heart. She showed them a new expression, or else an old one for which they had been hoping, as she exclaimed in alarm:

"You're not so well to-night!"

And, as Hamoud was wheeling David into the living room, she protested to Brantome:

"I can't leave him for a day without something happening."

"Then for God's sake don't, at least till this piece is done." The old Frenchman pulled her back, and whispered, "Why, this afternoon he was nearly beside himself. How can he work——"

"About what?" she ejaculated, glancing down at his hand on her arm.

"How should I know, if you don't?"

In the living room Brantome did not sit down. Flushed from the wine that he had drunk, striding to and fro, he began a rigmarole about "David's future." His voice was nearly ferocious when he prophesied the subjugation of the public, which might be aroused, by precisely the right persuasion, to a tumult of applause. Yes, they must all be conquered, until, as in the case of Beethoven for instance, the name of the genius appeared as though written like a portent in the sky, above the heads even of throngs that knew nothing of music, that would never hear these harmonies, but that would be filled all the same with reverential awe.

He had never before revealed this thirst for indiscriminating homage. They hardly recognized him. The old leonine fellow was transfigured, as though by megalomania. He seemed larger, and slowly made the gestures of an emperor.

He darted into the study, as Lilla said to David:

"The piece will stand up for itself, I think. He's becoming almost too ridiculous."

But in the other room Brantome began beating out fragments of *Marco Polo*. The familiar sounds took on a startling majesty in the atmosphere heavily charged with the player's exultation. One had an illusion that this music was irradiating from the house all over the earth. Then, in the silence, the rustle of the rain seemed a long murmur of enthusiastic comment.

Abruptly Brantome reappeared in the doorway with his mane disheveled, like a lion let out of a cage; but Lilla was too wretched to laugh at him. Now he was bursting with memories of those, since great, with whom he had chummed in his youth, when he, too, had expected to be great. He swept his listeners away to foreign studios, where they saw young men poising for flights amid the stars.

"And here," he affirmed, whirling round to Lilla, "is something better, in humor, in tragedy, in dignity, in richness of invention, in everything."

"I know it," she responded, reaching out to lay her hand upon David's hand.

"Something better," he repeated, in a changed voice, with an effect of shrinking to his usual proportions. His arm fell to his side, and he turned away to hide his altered look. "I'll fight for this boy," he said. "I'll fight the whole world for him."

"You looked," suggested Lilla gently, "as if you were going to fight me, too."

"You? No, you are my ally. Or, if you please, I am yours; for neither of us can do anything without you."

At midnight, when Lilla returned to the doorway of his bedroom, David was not asleep.

She sat down on the edge of the bed. A beam of light from the corridor touched her slender figure wrapped in yellow silk, and her braided hair outlined, round her head, by a narrow golden halo. The rain had ceased, and the breeze from the window was laden with the odor of the saturated earth. Falteringly he asked her if she was chilly.

She was surprised, having been aware for a long while only of this pity and this remorse.

"You have suffered to-day," she said.

He responded:

"The penalty one pays for having acquired great riches is the fear of losing them."

She was silent for a time, then murmured:

"When this piece is finished, or to-morrow if you like, we might go abroad? Over there we could find any number of nice, secluded places. Some Greek island might please you? The climate is very invigorating."

"Would you like it?"

"If it would make you happier."

He uttered a groan:

"How I torment you! It must be some devil in me that prompts me to this ingratitude. All that you've done for me, and I'm not satisfied. You are perfection."

She laughed dismally, raising her face in the gloom of the bed canopy that enshrouded them like the shadows of a catafalque. Perfection! A pitiable heroine, an unstable creature tossed about from one compassion to another, from a contemptible dissatisfaction here to a half-hypocritical idea of reparation there, and now to self-abasement! She was sick from disgust at her ingratitude to this poor invalid, through whom she had become majestic, holding fate back so that beauty, and even life, might miraculously survive. She seemed to have emerged from an ignoble dream; she longed to merit again, at least in her devotion to this supine figure, that word, perfection. Suddenly her bosom swelled not only with compunction, but with love also—since it was she, indeed, who had recreated him, and since without the nourishment of her daily reassurances he must die.

"Help me to deserve those words," she besought him, bending down through the shadows. Her tears moistened his lips, and upon that revelation he stammered:

"At this moment I feel that you're mine."

"Not only this moment. Always."

CHAPTER XLIV

In the morning, when Brantome had departed for the city, Lilla said to Hamoud:

"Please tell the servants that if any one should ask for me I'm not at home."

Soon afterward, while David was at work shut up in the study, and Lilla was trying to read a book in the living room, the doorbell rang. When she heard Hamoud, in the hall, speaking quickly in Arabic, her body relaxed. She thought:

"He has found one of his own people. I am glad. He must have been so lonely all this while!"

She heard another voice, deeper and more vibrant. "Yes, Arabic," she said, smiling contentedly. Of a sudden, for some inexplicable reason, she felt as if she were going to faint.

She raised her eyes from the book, and saw a tall man with a black beard, standing in the hall doorway, watching her.

She was seized with the paralyzing chill that comes to those who seem to be confronted by apparitions of the dead. Her conviction that she saw no living man was strengthened by his physical alteration. His black beard, which covered even his cheekbones, masked a shriveled countenance. His eyes had receded into their sockets; his lips were stretched over his teeth; and the swarthy skin had become sulphurous. The stillness of his attitude, and his blank, attentive look, completed the effect of unreality.

Then she thought, "Perhaps it's I who am dead." Her surroundings melted away. All her obligations related to these surroundings melted also. She began to float toward him, over the floor that she no longer felt beneath her feet, so that her disembodied spirit might be merged with this other spirit. Her half-raised hands prepared to cling to him—as though one phantom could cling fast to another! But abruptly an invisible force seemed to check her progress mid-way; and she stood before him with her arms, that had meant to embrace him, lifted in what appeared to be a gesture of horrified denial.

There was no change in his face disfigured by unhappiness and illness.

The air round them began to tremble with strains of music—harmonies mounting up toward a climax of intolerable beauty. It came, this perfect epitome of love, from behind the closed doors of the study, where David Verne was playing as never before.

"Lilla!"

A profound silence followed the call that neither of these two had uttered. And from behind the closed doors, David, transported by his exultation, cried out again to the Muse:

"Lilla! Lilla!"

Swaying aside, she sank down into a chair. "Oh," she breathed, looking at the rug as though some very precious object had slipped from her hands and broken at her feet. As she sat there, a huddle of coffee-colored fabric and pallid flesh, the sunlight burst through the clouds to smite her all over with its glory, igniting her hair, turning her face into incandescent gold.

Lawrence Teck watched this transformation.

He became natural—ready to fight for this woman, though still believing that he despised everything about her except her loveliness. All at once he was like a man who stands on the edge of a chasm, who has an idea that he may be able to leap across, from a bitterness endured alone to a bitterness shared with another. He took the leap. He put her to the test.

She saw him walking across the living room toward the closed doors of the study.

Noiselessly, as swift as her dreadful thought, she rose, traversed the room, passed him, and whirled round against the door. She flung out her arms in a movement that nailed her against the panels as to a cross. She could not speak; but he read on her lips, as if she had cried it in his face:

"No!"

The music began again, at first soft and simply melodious, soon complex and thunderous. The door at her back vibrated from the sound, and the quivering penetrated her body and her brain. She was filled with a new horror, at the new, miraculous strength evinced in that playing.

And again that voice exulting in the study:

"Lilla? Oh, where are you?"

"Come away from here," she muttered, giving Lawrence an awful stare, snatching at his sleeve, dragging him after her across the room, her feet as heavy as if fleeing through a nightmare. Now, straining at his arm, she was in the wainscotted hall before the stone mantelpiece that bore up the

defiant knight. Now she reached the fernery. The palms leaped back into place behind them as she collapsed upon the red cushions of the settee.

He stood watching her as before, erect, breathing, alive, even though he lay smashed in the depths of that chasm which she had prevented him from clearing.

CHAPTER XLV

"And your idea is," Lawrence inquired calmly, "that he mustn't know at all?" She continued to weep in silence, the tears running quickly down her cheeks and falling like brilliants upon the fur edging of her house gown. He added, "I merely mean, is it practicable?"

Incoherently she started to tell the whole story over again.

"But how can I make you understand? My wits are gone. He was utterly helpless, done for, you might as well say dead. All the life blazing and throbbing round him—and round me, too; for I was as good as dead also. Two dead people meeting and trying to find their way back, through each other, to some sort of life. But he didn't know that he was helping me; that is my secret. Yet it wasn't all selfishness with me. In the end I was persuaded just by pity. Have you seen a sick animal looking at you pleadingly? Pity is a monster! First one tentacle, then another, and finally one is pulled under and devoured. One should never feel pity. But you were gone."

She pressed her fingers to her temples, and closed her eyes.

"Don't you know this will kill him?" she asked. "But how could you know that? It's so, all the same. It's just I who have kept him alive. It's just by holding on to me that he's held on to life."

She gave a cry:

"Ah! This is too much! What am I to do?"

She writhed amid the red cushions of the settee till he commanded sternly:

"Calm yourself. It's time we began to talk sensibly."

She sat still, looking at him in terror.

"Yes," she whispered.

His erect immobility, his emotional self-containment, recalled to her, by contrast, the feebleness and helplessness that had lured her into this trap. Once more she perceived in this man the refuge that her frailty of nerves and tissues had always yearned for; and the miracle that she had accomplished in his absence became the work of a stranger. Ah, to let go of heroism now, to be once more her true self—the fragile complement of this strength! But in the very moment when she visualized the consummation of that wish, she saw with her mind's eye the other sitting at the piano in his wheel chair, his music strewn round him, the air still vibrant with triumph and gratitude, his face turned eagerly toward the door as toward the source of an infallible reassurance, of beautiful accomplishment, of life itself.

The palms, forming an arch above him, cast a greenish shadow over Lawrence's bearded visage, which was shrunken and yellow from the last attack of fever, in the coast town. This head of his, hovering before her in a frame of ragged greenery, seemed about to melt away amid one of her old illusions of the jungle. Gradually she understood that this was not he whom she had married on that night of romance.

All those thoughts of his were what had changed his face into this new appearance, hard and misunderstanding, incredulous and ironical, and crushed with an utter weariness of spirit. And Lilla did not know how to summon back into being the man that he had been; for all her inspiration was dragged down by guilt. She remembered the dusty rooms where even her last tribute of flowers had now turned to dust. She recalled the victorious seductiveness of genius, of egotism, the lure of a world in which a myriad women had seemed to be dancing away from her toward happiness; and then, her moment of complex treason at the horse show. She quailed as she heard again her vow to Lawrence on their wedding night, "Forever!" and that word was blended with the "Forever!" which, a few hours ago, she had uttered in the gloom of David's bedroom.

He felt her sense of guilt, and misinterpreted it. When her protestations became more intimate, a smile, half contemptuous and half commiserating, appeared on his shrunken lips. It struck her silent.

"As I understand it," said Lawrence Teck, "this is your plan, which; seems to me, in the light of common sense, perfectly hopeless. In short, he's not to know. You've refused to let me face him——"

"Ah, yes," she sighed, and quoted, "'Infirm of purpose, give me the daggers.' You'd kill him for me,

wouldn't you?"

"You exaggerate. If he were as delicately poised as that, I shouldn't want his death on my hands. These people who kill one another, and even themselves, for love, exist of course; but to me they're ridiculous. The game isn't worth it. There are too many other things in life. As for me, my work, that part of it out there unfinished, dropped so that I could run back here and clear this matter up——"

"No, I'm the one that you're killing," she returned, bowing her head that was glorified in the sunshine pouring round her, as if with a crown of celestial happiness.

He went on in a deliberate, grave tone, feeling logical and dizzy, replete with self-justification, magnanimity, and horror:

"I managed to arrive in this country secretly. There are only three persons in New York who know that I'm here, or, for that matter, alive. It may help a little if I succeed in slipping away as quietly as I came. You can get your divorce on grounds of desertion. I'm sorry enough to have let you in for this. It's my fault from beginning to end. I shouldn't have appeared then, and worst of all I shouldn't have reappeared now." He hesitated; then, glancing toward the door of the fernery, "No doubt you'll discover how to smooth it out with him. After all, if he were the most sensitive creature on earth, he ought to be satisfied when he understands that though I've popped up alive he is the one you've chosen."

"You are mad," she gasped, giving a convulsive bound amid the red cushions.

He wondered if it were so.

Here she was before his eyes, more beautiful than in any of his dreams, a diffuse vision compressed once more into a tangible form, fragrant and warm, full of coursing blood and tremors, no doubt still capable of those same ecstatic appearances and vocal rhapsodies. All his swarming, jealous thoughts were consuming him, as warrior ants might consume some wretched victim of King Muene-Motapa. He felt that this deliberate farce must end, that he must spring through the door, find the other, kill him with one blow, and then rush away from this woman who, like a fallen deity, lay weeping again, her face between her arms, somehow pathetic under this retribution for the inconstancy that she pretended was pity.

She raised her face, and pronounced:

"There must be some way. But I can't think any more."

"There are two ways. One is for me to go. The other is to tell him."

She sat up and clutched the cushions on each side of her.

"You ask me to go into that room, and you might as well say shoot him through the heart?"

He said to himself, "How she sticks to it! This pretense is all she has to cling to, poor thing, in lieu of saying straight out, 'I can't return to that old adventure now. Too much time has intervened; I'm no longer the same woman. I must stick to this new romance.'" He said to himself, "I shall get away from here this moment." He turned toward the doorway.

"Remember," he told her wearily, "I'm depending on your silence."

Struck by the folly of that caution, he hurried into the hall, as though to escape an outburst of laughter.

He was close to the front door when she appeared in his path, materialized from thin air.

"Wait outside. I'll go with you."

She stood tearing her handkerchief to pieces, looking at him strangely out of her swollen eyes, her cheeks flushed. She went on:

"Why, we must talk. We can surely find the way out. But not here. At the rooms." A film passed over her eyes. She caught him fast round the neck, raised her lips toward his, and whispered, with a distracted appearance that seemed guilty as well as passionate, "You still love me? As much as ever?"

He felt that he and she had reached the depths. This temptation capping the climax of her rejection—this monstrous inversion of the classic triangle! "What is she, then?" he asked himself, "and what am I?" For he caught hold of her as if he were going to crush her doubly perfidious, inexplicable heart, and fastened his lips to hers in a kiss that burned her up, before he thrust her from him with a gesture meant to express all his loathing of her, of himself, of the whole of life.

"Oh, wait!" she cried, as he fumbled with the door.

To hold her off with the first words that came into his head, he cast at her:

"To-morrow!"

She remained facing the closed door, softly repeating:

"To-morrow."

CHAPTER XLVI

Cornelius Rysbroek had just driven up before the house in a blue runabout. Now, sunk down behind the steering wheel, he gaped at the black-bearded man who stood like a rock at the foot of a low flight of steps.

Lawrence Teck put on his hat, gave Cornelius Rysbroek a blind stare, climbed into a hired car. In doing so he showed his aquiline profile; and Cornelius recalled the moonlit terrace of the Brassfields' country house.

"It's he!"

The hired car set out for New York; and behind it, all the way, went the blue runabout.

CHAPTER XLVII

She entered her sitting room, locked the door, threw herself upon the couch. Round lunch time there came a creaking in the corridor, a knock. It was David in his wheel chair, propelled by Hamoud.

"No lunch. And perhaps no dinner. It's only a headache, dear. I shall be all right."

"Your voice sounds——"

"Why not, since I'm suffering a little?"

The creaking sound died away.

At the first glimmer of dawn she was up. An hour later she entered David's bedroom, dressed, hatted, and gloved. Her skin appeared translucent. Her hands, drawing her cloak round her shivering body, seemed almost too weak for that task.

"Why, where are you going?"

"To town. It seems that Parr has fallen ill."

She leaned over him quickly, thinking of all the kisses of betrayal that had ever been bestowed upon the unaware. She went out leaving him dumfounded by her appearance of feverish eagerness, energy, and illness.

On the ride to New York she lay back in the corner of the limousine, her face burning, her lips pressed together. "He thinks I don't love him, it seems!" That was the tender menace she hurled ahead of her, as the car carried her swiftly—yet how slowly!—toward his rooms.

She remembered Anna Zanidov.

"The infallible clairvoyant! All that solemn nonsense! Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

She found herself at the door of his rooms, ringing, knocking, calling his name through the panels. She recollected that she had the key in her purse. The door swung back with a bang, and she ran through the shaded apartment that was filled with the dull gleaming of weapons. She stopped before the bed that had not been slept in. She returned to the living room, and gazed at the withered petals lying round the gourd.

The doorway framed an undersized, obese old man who wore a skullcap of black silesia. He was the janitor.

"Where is Mr. Teck?"

"Mr. Teck!" the janitor exclaimed in a shocked voice.

The words tumbled out of her mouth:

"He was here yesterday, surely. Didn't he leave any word?"

"Mr. Lawrence Teck?" the old fellow repeated, in consternation.

Behind him hesitated, in passing by, a young man with an inquisitive face, who had under his arm a leather portfolio. She slammed the door on them. In the shadowy room the very walls seemed to be crumbling.

She searched everywhere for a note, for some sign that he had been here; but there was no object in the place not covered with dust.

Then, sunk in a stupor, she drove to the little house in Greenwich Village. Her ring was answered by Parr's niece, the woman with the sleek bandeaux. Mr. Teck had been here twice, the second time late last night. On that occasion he had taken Parr away with him.

"Where to?"

"Ah, ma'am, if only I knew!"

Those faded, medieval eyes gazed at the benefactress in a sudden understanding and intimacy; and Lilla thought, "You, too, perhaps in some region far removed from your pots and pans, have had such a moment as this!" And she would have liked to let her face fall forward upon the bosom of that threadbare working dress, feel those toil-worn arms close round her, and utter the plea, "Tell me how to bear such things, to survive, to emerge into that strange serenity of yours."

She drove to Brantome's. The whole world was now tumbling down about her ears.

Brantome rose from his desk, where perhaps he had been sketching out some brilliant appreciation of *Marco Polo*. After one glance at Lilla:

"What's happened?"

She showed him a look of hatred that embraced the whole room; for it was not only he, but also this abode of his, that had entrapped her. In accents that lashed him like whips she told him everything.

The old Frenchman sat down with a thump, and let his ruined face droop forward. She heard the hoarse rumble:

"What shall I do now?"

"Find him!"

She returned to the house in the country.

In the middle of the third night, the telephone beside her pillow gave a buzz, more terrifying than a shout of fire, an earthquake, a knife at the throat. Brantome was speaking. Parr had returned to the house in Greenwich Village. Lawrence Teck had sailed secretly, that day, for Africa.

She replaced the receiver on the hook, rested her head on her hands, and remained thus for a long while. In the end she formed the words:

"That woman."

She was thinking of "the infallible clairvoyant."

PART III

CHAPTER XLVIII

In the early morning, while the trees round the house were still full of mist, Lilla, in her sitting room, at the tall Venetian desk of green and gold lacquer, redrafted for the twentieth time the message that she wanted to send after Lawrence Teck by wireless. The rich scintillations from the polished surfaces before her enveloped her distracted countenance in a new, greenish pallor, as she traced, now heavily, now very faintly, the words:

"If you knew what you've done——"

She paused; for the confusion of her brain made her think of a squirrel frantically racing in a revolving cage. Then, seeing nothing except the pen point, she wrote slowly, "What have you done? What have you done?" And suddenly, in a convulsive hand that sprawled over half the page, "Betrayed!" She stared at these words in amazement.

Hamoud-bin-Said entered the sitting room. He had on the dark blue joho edged with a red pattern. His snowy under robe was bound with a blue and red sash from which protruded the silver hilt of his dagger. His tan-colored, clear-cut, delicately bearded face was expressionless, as he said softly:

"The morning paper."

And she realized that the whole story had been discovered, scattered broadcast.

For a time Hamoud regarded the prostration of her spirit from the heights of fatalism. But presently, as he contemplated that limp pose, which added one more novelty to her innumerable beautiful appearances, the stoicism that had made him look mature gave way to the fervor of youth—his limpid eyes turned to fire; his full, precisely chiseled lips were distorted by a pang. He appeared as before, however, when she raised her head and uttered:

"Burn it."

His reverie had a flavor of commiseration now, as though he were saying to himself, "Who can catch all the leaves before they fall to the ground? Who can sweep back the waves of the sea?" He responded:

"The men who make these things have been telephoning half the night. And now they are here themselves."

"Here!"

"They are sitting on the steps," he affirmed, lost in a gloomy, relishing consideration of the wonders of life. "They wish to talk to you and to Mr. Verne."

He pronounced these words as if he had no idea of their enormity.

Her spirit stirred at this threat. All seemed lost except the phenomenon of David living, by which, in her distraction, she hoped somehow to justify herself. To the amazement of the world one might oppose the fact of genius miraculously unfolding through her sacrifice. But she thought, "The world! What is that?" And thereupon, "All the same it shall not strike down this helpless creature." And the world became a monster, unfeeling, indeed immeasurably malign, lying far off with the teeming cells of its brain all plotting to rob her of her wretched victory, and with the claws of one outstretched paw already touching the threshold of this house.

"You are to drive them away."

She went on groping for phrases as one gropes for objects in the dark, telling Hamoud that henceforth nobody from outside the house was to see David till she had been informed, that all newspapers and letters must come first to her, that the servants must not show by so much as a look — She became aware that among these phrases she was uttering, with an air of calm consideration, others that had no intelligible meaning, no relation to her objective thoughts. She heard herself say, "Perhaps I had better see the servants myself. It would be a queer thing if there were a draft from the pantry. There is a red pillow in the fernery; it must be hidden—the spears, too——" She gazed in perplexity at Hamoud, who appeared to be floating before her at the end of a dark tunnel.

"For how long?" he sighed.

"For how long?" she repeated plaintively.

He seemed to grow taller. His face, which had taken on a blank aspect, resembled the faces of those who, in Oriental tales, stand waiting to fulfil a wish too sinister to have become an audible command. In that instant she saw all problems rushing to their solution, except one; all treasures recaptured, except the peace of conscience. She struggled as one might to awake from some hypnotic spell in which one has been assailed with frightful suggestions. She sprang up and transfixed him with a look.

"Go! Do as I say!"

He bowed and departed.

At once she became so weary that she could hardly reach her couch.

"What am I to do?" she asked herself in a lost voice.

Somewhere, no doubt, there was another Lilla, sane, able to act as well as to think, capable of solving even this dilemma. But that other Lilla remained far away, perhaps in the realm of those who, with an Alexandrian gesture, ruthlessly cut the knot of interwoven scruples, and for a brief season triumphed over the accidents of life! Raising her eyes in despair, she saw trembling on the ceiling a ray of light that resembled the blade of a spear.

There descended upon her the full weight of her forebodings—the superstitious dread that was typical of her emotional defectiveness, and that had its origin, perhaps, in those two unhappy persons who had been her parents. Yet when she moaned, "Ah, Anna Zaidov!" it was with an accent of reproach as keen as though the prophetess of a tragedy must be the cause of it.

The sunshine was dissolving the luxurious room. There came to her, like a dullness from a drug, the fancy that this world had no existence except that with which her credulity had endowed it. "All my life I have been dreaming this dream in which Lawrence and David, Hamoud and Anna Zanidov, America and Africa, are figments. Presently I shall wake and wonder why all these figments gave me so much pain."

She floated deliciously in this thought. She reflected, with a vague smile:

"I must go and restore the appearance of happiness to that poor phantom downstairs."

CHAPTER XLIX

Lilla descended the staircase in the transplendency of the many colored windowpanes. The red of rubies, the blue of sapphires, the green of emeralds, enwrapped her slim body that was still phenomenally moving in its habitual harmoniousness. The serene progress of her person through prismatic light, the smile that passed unchanged through rays of varying resplendence, added another stanza to the poetry of flesh, a stanza differing from all the rest, however, in its ominous quality of strangeness. For now, bathed in the fortuitous magnificence of the stained glass, she shone in herself with an unearthly bloom, as if an abnormality that had always permeated her seductiveness were now at its apogee—as if, with no one to witness, she had reached the utter expression of her loveliness, which blazed forth for an instant completely, before dissolving in this strange element that mingled with it.

The multicolored lights released her. A pale, cold atmosphere closed round her as she traversed the sunless hall and living room. Beyond the doorway of the study this cold pallor rested on the figure in the wheel chair—the phantom because of which that other phantom was traveling toward an exotic semblance of death. He had not heard her footsteps. He remained with his head bowed forward, a prey, no doubt, to such anxiety as ghosts experience. He expressed perfectly that helplessness with which, when she had believed him to be real, he had laid hold of her pity.

The outlines of all objects round her were clear and hard: everything had assumed a look of preternatural density. She stood paralyzed by the thought, "It is not illusion. It is reality."

He was looking at her.

What did he read in her face? Had he, too, heard the command that seemed to have been shouted in her ears, "Tell him! Strike and be free!"

"What is it?" he whispered.

Her lips parted, writhed, and uttered no sound. She was struck dumb, no doubt by the feeling that if she spoke she would blurt out everything, in obedience to that atrocious command.

All at once she seemed to have flames in her eyes. Everything had turned the color of gold. She stood with her head thrown back, her face changed by anguish; then she fled through that golden dazzle. On the staircase the many-colored rays reached out to hold her, to restore her to that exquisite transfiguration; she passed through them in a flash; and indeed they could now have enhanced, instead of beauty, only the triumph of that element which had made her beauty strange. She stretched herself upon her couch, on her back, in the attitude of the dead. She pronounced with an extreme rapidity, in muffled tones:

"I am on the ship—Faster! Faster!"

She uttered a cry that was heard all over the house.

When Hamoud and the servants came running, they found her rigid; but while they were telephoning for the nearest physician the convulsions began. Tossing about, she showed intense fear of all who tried to approach her. The women ran from the room. Hamoud remained, rigid at the foot of the bed, his face a dingy white, staring before him as one who meditates on some immense, intolerable injury. When her cries burst forth, he laid his hand upon his dagger, as if against these invisible forces, these jinn from the Pit, that had taken possession of her.

The physician arrived to find the convulsions ended. Hamoud, now gripping his dagger as if he would presently escape this scene by plunging the blade into his breast, uttered:

"Dying?"

"It will pass," the physician answered, with a movement of reproof.

Hamoud, afflicted by disbelief, by a despair that swept away his fatalism, by a fury that called for revenge, bared his teeth and demanded:

"I shall bring him? We show her to him?"

"Who?"

Hamoud glanced malignantly toward the floor.

"Hardly!"

The physician resumed his contemplation of the patient, who had descended into a stupor that was to last for days.

CHAPTER I

There was a hush over the house amid the old trees. The servants moved softly through the corridors, paused to whisper to one another, then hurried out of sight as David Verne appeared in his wheel chair, slowly propelled toward the sick room by Hamoud.

She seemed hardly to breathe as she lay in the gloom through which drifted the white uniforms of the nurses, amid a dim glamour from all the charming objects that had been meant to please her senses. Her hair was spread out on the pillow to frame her colorless face, which had now attained indeed the look of the "angelic messenger." But the angelic messenger, the bearer of life to him, seemed to David on the point of returning to the source of life.

He sat at the bedside, sometimes unable to extend his hand to touch her hand, as though his strength were wholly a reflection of her strength, so that with the latter's waning the former must flicker out.

"What is it?" he thought, lost in misery and wonder.

The physicians and the nurse looked at him askance, their secret pent in behind their lips.

He felt round him the pressure of this secret. The air was full of thoughts that he could not apprehend. Behind the benignant evasiveness of the doctors he seemed to discern a fact, like a thunderbolt withheld. He recoiled from his conjectures, to cower amid these shadows which he felt might be less agonizing than that flash of light.

There was no reason for alarm, they told him. And instead of being mysterious it was a perfectly defined case of nerves, hysteria, emotional collapse.

Ah, yes; but from what cause?

Even Hamoud, he was sure, knew something that he did not know. The Arab, while apparently as solicitous as ever, was changed. He had taken on, merely in his physical aspect, a new quality: he seemed taller than formerly, and older. Amid all his tasks he moved with a sort of feline restlessness. He took to prowling at night, round and round the bleak garden. The robed figure paced the paths with an effect of stealing carefully toward an enemy. In the light from a window his fine profile appeared for an instant like a presentment of vengeance—with something sensual in its look of cruelty.

Now and then, in the middle of the night, David became aware that Hamoud had entered the room without a sound, to watch him from the deepest mass of shadows. One could make out only the pale blotch that was his white skullcap, and the long pale streak that was the uncovered portion of his white under robe. The eyes, the expression of the face, were lost in blackness.

"I thought you called."

And he was gone.

In his own room, having noiselessly closed and locked the door, he drew from his bosom the Koran. Holding the book reverently in his small, right hand, he raised his head, and stood waiting with closed eyes for inspiration. Presently, opening the Koran, he read:

"The doom of God cometh to pass."

This text was the answer to his prayer for guidance?

He seated himself by the window, and gazed out into the darkness. He considered piously the wonders of terrestrial life, a succession of accidents all foreordained by God, an apparent drifting that was in fact one steady propulsion by the hand of fate. From the rich, ancestral house of coralline limestone across the sea to strange lands. From dignity to abasement. From loneliness to this faint, delicious fragrance in which the heart dissolved. From a dream of freedom to the service of love through the agency of death.

CHAPTER LI

It was twilight. David Verne sat in the study, his chin on his breast. Hamoud, appearing in the doorway, gazed round the room. He had a folded newspaper in his hand.

He looked carefully at the fireplace, where logs were piled ready for lighting over a heap of brushwood and crumpled wrapping paper. Then he regarded the center table, on which stood the Venetian goblet, the caraffe, and the bottle filled with the medicine prescribed by Dr. Fallows. In the expiring daylight Hamoud, motionless in his robes, loomed paler than usual, his handsome face very grave.

The piano attracted his attention. In the shadows it had the aspect of a squatting monster that bared at him the teeth of its wide mouth. As if he had been awaiting this grotesque effect of challenge, he moved toward the hazy windows, and began to curtain them.

David murmured listlessly:

"Has the doctor gone?"

Hamoud gave a slight start. With his hand on the last window curtain, he inclined his head, listening in awe to the tremor of that voice. When he had passed his tongue over his lips he responded:

"Yes."

He drew the last curtain slowly. As he did so, his visage, sharpened by the dying light, was turned toward David; his gemlike lips, without parting, seemed to say, "Look! it is the world of sky and trees, of sunrise and noon, sunset and night, that I am shutting out."

The study lay in darkness.

Through this darkness Hamoud moved silently toward the center table. He tweaked the lamp cord: a gush of mellow rays leaped out to cover the scattered piles of manuscript, the Venetian goblet, the bottle of medicine. Hamoud moved the wheel chair closer to these objects, so that David by reaching forth his hand might touch them if he wished. Then, after stepping back to consider this arrangement with a strained look, he went to the fireplace, lighted a match, blew it out, and laid it on the hearth. David stared at him.

"You have not lighted the fire. It is cold tonight."

Again Hamoud listened in awe to the sound of that voice.

"It is cold," he assented softly, with a shiver.

Still kneeling on the hearth, he contemplated the other as though he were seeing him now for the first time. The feeble, romantic face before him was not so pallid as his face; those enlarged, questioning eyes were not so strange as his eyes. At that stare of undefined alarm he felt, despite all his jealousy, contempt, and hatred, a twinge of weakness; he remembered all the other's helpless attitudes that he had sustained and eased. Of a sudden the habit of protection grappled with his resolve, and might have conquered, for a time at any rate, had he not recalled the sufferings of the beloved.

He rose and approached the wheel chair. The newspaper was in his left hand, half concealed, like a weapon, in the folds of his robe.

He heard a feeble cry:

"What has happened? What has happened?"

"And I who have eaten his bread," thought Hamoud, in sudden shame and horror.

If only some one would come! But the shadowy perspective of the living room remained empty; and there was nowhere any sound except the beating of his heart.

He lifted the bottle containing the solution of arsenic.

"Have not taken any of this?" He pronounced in a tone of suffocation. "Remember must never take it until Hamoud has dropped it."

He set down the bottle. It fell upon its side. But alas! it did not break.

"Hamoud! what has happened?"

In mercy, with a violent gesture, with a sensation of sickness, he thrust the newspaper into David's

hands. "Done! No chance to turn back now!" He rolled the folding doors together behind him and leaned against them, his face beaded with sweat, panting as if in escaping that room he had run a mile. He listened. How his heart thumped! He heard nothing. "Has he the courage, though? Alone with those thoughts!" Leaning against the door, through which came never a sound, Hamoud began to weep, for the man whom he had served, for her, and for himself.

Yes, the Omân stock, cruel and remorseless in its pristine state, had deteriorated in the lax paradise of Zanzibar; the old impulses were there, but in abortive form; and the deed that Hamoud's forefathers would have done less indirectly, and without a twinge, aroused in Hamoud that pity which an ironist has called "the mask of weakness."

Next morning, when they asked him to state his whole knowledge of the matter, he told them that as he had been about to light the fire Mr. Verne had seen, amid the brushwood, a bit of newspaper showing his name in large type. It was there, no doubt, in consequence of the servants' carelessness.

"But you gave it to him," the local chief of police remarked severely.

"Before I knew."

Their indignation was softened by his crushed mien, and by his inflamed eyes. Having arrived at their verdict, they discussed Arabs—or, as they called them, "Ayrabs"—and one honest old fellow even paid the race a compliment, in saying:

"It's said that when they like a person they will do anything for them."

It was Hamoud who told her.

The nurse, stealing a nap on the couch in the sitting room, did not stir as he passed into the bedchamber; but Lilla awoke at the command of his eyes. When he had finished speaking:

"No!" she sighed, as the world burst into fragments, and, like the bits of colored glass in a kaleidoscope, slid swiftly into a new pattern. "Ah, the poor soul! The poor soul!" She saw him more clearly, she understood him better, than in life. "All for nothing!"

No, surely not all for nothing!

At any rate, these were tears of convalescence.

CHAPTER LII

A fortnight later, as she sat in a deep chair in the living room, Hamoud presented himself in the doorway, to announce:

"He is here."

Parr crept into her presence.

The little, grizzled fellow advanced a few steps, limping on his cane, then halted, frightened by this thin, white-faced woman who, her chin in her cupped hand, sat staring at him with the cold eyes of a queen about to condemn a malefactor to death. She was wrapped in a negligée of peach-colored silk from the flowing sleeves of which long tassels trailed on the rug. The morning light, as though lured from all other objects in the room by this motionless, fine figure, accentuated her appearance of iciness. She spoke, too, in the voice of a stranger, in accents that thrilled with a force produced incongruously from so emaciated a body.

"Come closer. I want to look at you."

He resumed his tremulous advance very slowly, because he was so heavily burdened by his loyalty to the beloved master and his treason to this once gentle benefactress. Casting down his eyes, he stood before her abjectly leaning on his cane. His honest, deeply lined face twitched painfully; for he could feel her scorn passing over him like a winter blast. He faltered:

"I was helpless, ma'am. I only did as he ordered. He thought it best. He believed it wouldn't leak out. We took all precautions." He told her how Lawrence Teck had taken him from the Greenwich Village house to an obscure hotel, where they had found a strange gentleman, slender, with a fatigued, nervous face, almost too fastidiously dressed to be another traveler, smoking constantly, saying nothing. This gentleman's name—it was altogether a disjointed, feverish business anyway—had never been pronounced in Parr's hearing. The stranger had seemed at once a torment and a comfort to Mr. Teck. Occasionally, when Parr entered, it was as if he had interrupted a distressing scene. Mr. Teck had then jumped up with a queer smile, knocking against the chairs as he went to look out of the window. There the strange gentleman would join him, to put his hand on his shoulder, soothe him in a low voice. Then one morning Mr. Teck's rooms were empty; and the hotel clerk handed Parr an

envelope containing some banknotes and the scrawl, "Good-by. God bless you. Remember, keep quiet."

"Here it is, ma'am."

She snatched the note from him, pored over it fiercely, and thrust it into the bosom of her gown. Her lashes wearily veiled her implacable stare.

"You fool. You should have seen that he wasn't in his senses. Where is he now?"

"He should be there," Parr quavered. "By this time he might be inland."

She saw a stream of men flowing in through the jungle, a human river doomed to roll at last over some tragic brink. She clenched her hands, seemed about to rise and rush out, as she was, in pursuit. She said:

"You are going with me."

His jaw sagged. Gaping round him, taking the whole room as witness to this folly, he cried out, "Where to?" When she began to speak he sagged forward over his cane, drinking in the verification of her incredible desire. Her attitude did not change; her face remained cold; her lips hardly moved; but he was aware of a tremendous force behind the words, of something inflexible, invincible, grand—perhaps of a flame without heat that filled her empty heart with an unearthly coruscation, like a radiance thrown back from the walls of a cavern of ice.

"Do you want to die, ma'am?"

"I?" Her voice expressed in that syllable such arrogance as youth feels at the thought of death; yet she did not look young—she looked as old as eternity, and as passionless and overpowering.

He bowed his head beneath the pressure of this will, and the weight of his obligation. He perceived the uselessness of describing to her the dangers that she would run there, especially at the season that was beginning. Still, for a moment he pondered the trouble he would have in taking his broken body on that pilgrimage. "And this time it will get me: just one or two little chills," he reflected, thinking of black-water fever. The thought came to him, however, that his life was no longer worth much, even to himself. This sitting with folded hands, a cane between one's knees, in the tidy little house that she had given him—and but for her it might have been the crutches!

Besides, if he lasted that long, he might fill his nostrils once more with the smell of Africa, see the little fires of the safari flickering against the green cane brakes, hear the songs of the march and the crooning of the camp and the voices of the jungle under the crowded stars.

CHAPTER LIII

She crossed the Atlantic, traveled swiftly down from Cherbourg to Marseilles, embarked on a ship that steamed through the Mediterranean toward the Orient. At last she saw Port Said, Suez, and the red and purple lava islands of the Red Sea, splendid in a sunset of extravagant hues.

The heat was intense.

But the ship emerged from the Gulf of Aden into a still greater heat; and suddenly the air was saturated with moisture. The walls and the ceiling of her cabin were covered with drops of water; exposed objects were defaced by rust and mildew overnight; while the human body seemed to be deliquescing in a torrid steam. A sickly breeze, filled with the odors of a strange world, hardly rippled the languid sea.

On the right, beyond a heat mist through which flying fish were darting, loomed a new coastline. Yellow beaches appeared, interrupted by lagoons where the slow waves abruptly spouted high into the air—white geysers against somber forests and jungles. From these dark green fastnesses, ascending threads of smoke inveigled the gaze far upward into space, to where, above a belt of hazy blue that one had taken for the sky, mountain peaks revealed themselves, unrelated to the earth, and half dissolved, like a mirage.

Night fell. The velvety blackness of the heavens was powdered with star dust; in the wash of the ship there gleamed a profound phosphorescence, as from a decaying ocean. The coast hung like a mass of inky vapor above the fitful shimmer of the surf from which was wafted a faint, interminable booming that suggested the roaring of lions and the thunder of savage drums.

Lilla emerged from her cabin, crossed the deck, and laid her hands upon the softly quivering rail. Close beside her the darkness gave up a ghost—Hamoud, who also stood silent, gazing toward the coast. His robes exhaled an odor of musk and aloes.

"Africa, madam," he uttered at last in a voice that lost itself in the clinging darkness and the

smothering heat.

And soon a languid ecstasy stole over him.

His heart swelled as he drank in, at the same time, the exhalations of his native land and the faint fragrance of her hair. In the darkness he perceived with his mind's eye both her beauty and the well-remembered beauty of the spice isles. The palm-crowned hills encircled the lapis-lazuli harbor of Zanzibar, on whose waters he saw himself sailing, with this mortal treasure, in a handsome dhow, the tasseled prow shaped like the head of the she-camel sent from heaven to the Thamud tribesmen, the mast fluttering the pennants of ancient sultans. Then the dhow with the camel prow became a panoplied camel, on which he and she were being borne away to Omân, the land of his fathers, which he had never seen. There, in those rugged mountains, he would become, as his ancestors had been—vigorous of will, fierce and great, triumphant in war and love.

For a long while he stood there trembling gently in unison with the ship, thought linking itself to thought, and image to image, his fancies growing ever more bizarre yet ever more distinct, as though he were inhaling, instead of the faint perfume of her hair, the smoke of hasheesh.

But she had forgotten him.

CHAPTER LIV

In the thick sunshine, below the cloudlike mountains, sandbanks unrolled themselves between the mouths of the equatorial rivers flanked by mangrove forests. At last, in the depths of a bay of glittering, brownish water, the port town appeared, a mass of red-tiled roofs spread along the gray seawall that suggested a fortress.

Through sandy thoroughfares bordered with acacia trees rode hollow-eyed Europeans in little cars, which half-naked negroes pushed along a narrow-gauge railway. The languor of those recumbent figures was abruptly disturbed, at the apparition of a woman clad in snowy linen, who advanced between a tall, young Zanzibar Arab and a small, limping white man, with the step of a convalescent, but with eyes that were filled with an extraordinary resolution. That evening, at the club house, one brought word to the rest that she was Lawrence Teck's wife.

There was a chorus of profane surprise in half a dozen tongues; for this was the end of March, the climax of the rainy summer, when the land was full of rotting vegetation and mephitic vapors, of mosquitoes and tsetse flies, malaria and fever.

"Is he coming out, then?" said one. "Where is he this time, by the way?" "All the same," another remarked, "I'll wager that he isn't aware of this. Looks as if she were planning a reconciliation by surprise!"

"She seems ill already. She'll last in this place about as long as an orchid in a saucepan."

"But, my friend, she wants to go in after him, it appears. She's with the governor now."

At that moment, indeed, the governor was patiently repeating his remonstrances to Lilla.

They sat in a large, white room with shuttered windows, beneath a punkah that kept churning up the dead air, beside a carved table on which stood a tray of untouched coffee cups. The governor was a studious, sick-looking gentleman with a *pince-nez* over his jaundiced eyes, and with long mustaches frizzed out before his ears. He wore a white duck uniform adorned with gilt shoulder straps, an aiguillette, and a bar of service ribbons brilliantly plaided and striped. Anaemic from malaria, and harassed by fever, he showed while he was talking to Lilla a look of exhaustion and pain. Now and again, after puffing his cigarette, he gave a feeble cough and rolled up his eyes. Then, in a monotonous, dull tone he began again to express his various objections.

Mr. Teck had gone in from a northern port a month ago. He had passed by Fort Pero d'Anhaya, telling the commandant there that he was bound back for the region in which his principals might presently seek a concession. He was, no doubt, at present in the gorges beyond the forests of the Mambava. He had with him a strong safari and a gentleman friend.

"What friend?" asked Lilla, who had been listlessly waiting for this monologue to cease.

"I don't remember. But I can, of course, find out."

"It's not worth while. All that I want is——"

The governor raised his hand, which trembled visibly.

"Pray let me finish, madam. Mr. Teck is in a very dangerous place. We have never conquered the Mambava; they are a ferocious people, and the man who enters their country does so at his own risk.

Had it not been that Mr. Teck's venture, because of his peculiar relationship to King Muene-Motapa, might end in winning over the Mambava to peaceful labor and trade, we should never have given permission. As for you, madam, such a journey is not to be thought of. I say nothing about the climate at this season. But, if you will pardon me, as I look at you the idea of your traveling inland on safari at any time of year—in fact, I ask myself——" He stared round him at the mildewed, white walls, and explained, "I ask myself, indeed, if you are real."

For even in her white terai and belted suit of white linen she was a vision appropriate only to the far-off world that this man had left behind him at the call of duty—a world of delicate living and subtle sensations, of frail flesh in luxurious settings, of sophistication that would have shrunk from every crudity, and exquisiteness that would have shriveled at the touch of hardship. This studious-looking, fever-stricken soldier, a nobleman under a bygone regime and in his youth a great amateur of love, had known well many women of whom this suppliant was the virtual counterpart, fragile, complex, too sensitive, too ardent, the predestined prey of impulses and disabilities that none but themselves, their adorers, and specialists in neurasthenia, could conceive of. In the present woman he discerned the same lovely and neurotic countenance, the same traces of mingled fastidiousness and desperation, the same promises of exceptionally passionate and tragic happenings.

"Ah, yes," he reflected, coughing feebly, so as not to make his head ache, "ah, yes, she is fatal. Twenty years ago I would have killed men for her with pleasure," he told himself, watching her pale, golden face. "Fatal! fatal!"—but he did not ask himself what fatality had brought her here. He knew her story, as by this time every one knew it who had ever heard of Lawrence Teck, or David Verne, or her.

"So it is this one that she really loves?" he thought, contemplating rather dismally her bitten lips, her lowered eyelashes, the throb of her throat, the working of her slim fingers. "I know: now she must find him quickly, quickly, quickly. She cannot sleep; she cannot eat; but she can drink, because she is always burning; and she can think, yes—but one thought, only. Ah, the lucky man!" he sighed, while beginning to shiver from his evening chill.

As though she had read his mind, or at least had discerned his capacity for understanding her, she leaned forward, laid her hand on his sleeve, and murmured:

"You have told me why I must not go. Now give me permission."

"Do you then wish to risk death just at this time? I should have thought——" He shook his head. "No, I will telegraph to Fort Pero d'Anhaya; the commandant there will send messengers to the border of the Mambava country; the Mambava will telephone your message through their forests by drum beat, and in one night every village will have the news. They will find him and tell him, and he will come here to you."

"Too much time has passed already. Even now I may be too late. Besides, he must not come to me; it's I who must go to him." She blurted out in a soft voice, "On my knees, all the way——" She recovered herself; but two tears suddenly rolled down her cheeks, and she faltered, "Look here, you know, if you prevent me you'll be doing a terrible thing."

He got up to pace the floor. He was of short stature, and his shoulders were rounded by desk work and the debility from the tropics; yet in the lost paradise of youth fair women had shed tears before him and made him wax in their hands. He came back to the table, absentmindedly drank a cup of tepid coffee, and said indignantly:

"Nevertheless, you look far from well at this moment."

"I have never been so strong," she retorted.

"She dares everything, and no doubt all the while she fears terribly what she dares. She is sublime! Who am I, a lump of sick flesh in this fever trap, to interfere so strictly with this thing of white flame?"

He said to her:

"Listen. I will give you permission to travel on safari as far as Fort Pero d'Anhaya. Beyond that point I cannot promise you protection; so beyond you are not to go. Mr. Teck must come to you there. To-morrow I will see these people of yours, to make sure that they are competent men, able to take all possible precautions for your welfare. Now, then, tell me at least that I am not as cruel and as stupid as you thought."

When she had gone, a young man in a white uniform entered with a sheaf of papers. The governor smothered a groan.

"The summary of the hut tax, Excellency. The post-office reports for last month. The reports of new public works—by the way, the new bridge at Maquival has been finished."

"Ah," said the governor profoundly, staring into space, "the new bridge of Maquival has been finished!"

CHAPTER LV

The equatorial wilds spread before the safari its wealth of extravagant hues and forms, all its perfidies veiled for the allurement of mortals who would trust nature in her richest manifestations. The sun shone on a rain-drenched world; the earth steamed; and through a mist like that which prefaced the second Biblical version of creation the splendor of the jungle seemed to be taking shape for the first time, at the command of a power for whom beauty was synonymous with peril.

Nevertheless, the safari men were singing.

Askaris led the way, Somalis in claret-colored fezzes and khaki uniforms, bare legged, with bandoliers across their chests and rifles over their shoulders. Their small, dark faces were sharp and fierce; they marched with the swing of desert men; their glances expressed their pride, their contempt for the humble, melodious horde that followed after them.

Four negroes, naked to the waist, supported a machilla, a canopied hammock of white duck that swung from a bamboo pole. They were Wasena, specially trained for this fatiguing work, maintaining a smooth step over the roughest ground. Lilla reclined in the hammock. Her face, half concealed by the fringe of the awning, appeared opalescent in the filtered sunlight. Her tapering figure had the grace of Persian queens and Roman empresses floating along in their litters on ripples of dusky muscles.

So this delicate, white product of modernity, this embodiment of civilization's perceptions and all that it pays for them, was borne at last into the primordial world on the shoulders of savages.

Behind her streamed a hundred porters balancing on their heads the personal baggage, rolled tents, chop boxes, sacks of safari food. They were men from Manica, Sofala, and Tete, some of pure strain, others with Arab and Latin blood in their veins. Their bare torsoes were the color of chocolate, of ebony, or even of saddle leather; but all their foreheads bulged out in the same way, all their noses were short and flat, all their chins receded. On their breasts and arms were charms of crocodiles' teeth and leopards' claws, to keep them safe from beasts, rheumatism, arrows, pneumonia, snake bite, and skin diseases. In the distended lobes of their ears were stuffed cigarettes, horn snuffboxes, or flowers from the port town.

They were followed by the camp servants in long, white robes, Beira-boys and Swahilis, driving before them a little flock of sheep. Parr, at the head of another squad of askaris, brought up the rear, riding a Muscat donkey. He raised his head, and his withered mouth, emerging from the shadow of his helmet, showed a melancholy smile.

He was drinking in the smell of Africa, and listening to the song of the safari.

At times the song died down into a hum. But soon a quavering falsetto was heard formulating a new motive, expressing a new thought. Other voices joined the leader's; a minor refrain swept up and down the line; and abruptly the climax swelled out in a diapason descending far into the bass. So that every one could sing, the improviser had phrased his thoughts in Swahili, the inter-tribal language of Africa. He sang of the Bibi from afar, her skin like a bowl of milk, who was traveling as a bride to Fort Pero d'Anhaya.

"She is rich. She is the daughter of a sultan. She is ill, but she will be well. She is sad, but she will be happy. We shall eat much meat at her wedding."

The deep chorus rolled out to a banging of sticks on the sides of the balanced boxes.

"Wah! This Bibi is rich! We shall eat much meat at her wedding!"

"They sing of you," said Hamoud, turning his limpid eyes toward her face which was veiled by swaying fringes of the awning. She unclenched her fists; her body slowly relaxed; and a look of incredulity appeared in her eyes, as she returned from afar to this oscillating world of steamy heat, throbbing with aboriginal song, impregnated with the smell of putrefying foliage and of sweat. From under the feet of the machilla carriers a cloud of mauve butterflies rose like flowers to strew themselves over her soft body. It was as if the machilla had suddenly become a bier.

"God forbid it!" Hamoud muttered, averting his face from that sign.

He wore a tight turban of many colored stripes cocked up over one ear; he had bared his legs, and bound sandals on his small feet; and round his waist, over the sash that held his dagger, he had fastened a web belt sustaining a bolstered pistol. He never left the side of the moving machilla.

They soon put behind them the mangroves of the coast. They passed through brakes of white-tipped feathery reeds, beyond which expanded forests whose velvety foliage was mingled with gray curtains of moss. On their left a little river kept reappearing. From the islands of marsh grass that floated down the stream, egrets and kingfishers flew away. On sandbars some dingy, log-like shapes, beginning stealthily to move toward the water, were revealed as crocodiles.

In a bend of the river cashew trees overshadowed the thatch of fishing huts. Beyond fields of lilies one made out, flitting away, sooty wanderers clad in ragged kilts and carrying thin-bladed spears. Then

marshes spread afar: the transparent stalks of papyrus trembled above the bluish pallor of lotuses. As the declining sun poured its gold across the world, the air over the marshes was jeweled from a great rush of geese, ducks, heron, ibises, and storks.

They camped on the clean, white sand beside the stream.

The luxury that had always been her atmosphere still clung round her here, taking on an Oriental quality from this host of unfettered slaves, these dusky armed guards, these scurrying, white-robed servants who, in the light of the sunset, composed with the speed of enchantment her habitation for the night. The green tent, its fly extended like an awning, awaited her entrance. The floor sheet was strewn with rugs; the snowy camp bed was made; her toilet case stood open on the folding table. The tent boys, their faces obsequiously lowered, were pouring hot water into the canvas tub.

Bareheaded, but wrapped in a tan polo coat, she emerged from the tent to find the dinner table ready under the fly. They offered *hors d'oeuvres*, a jellied soup, a curry, fruit tarts, and coffee. She shook her head, and continued to stare at the candles on the table. Fluffy, white moths were burning themselves in the flames.

Parr protested that she must eat. In this climate one did not fast with impunity.

"I sha'n't collapse," she replied, that stony look returning to her face.

Night fell like the abruptly loosened folds of a great curtain. The air became vibrant with the shrilling of insects. Fireflies filled the darkness with a twinkling mist, so that the immense spangle of the purple sky seemed to have invaded the purple ambiguities of earth. But along the river bank shone the fires of the safari—points of flame that outlined, like a binding of copper wire, the silhouettes of squatting men, or turned a half-inchoate face to molten bronze, or illuminated, against the lustrous blackness of the water, the fragment of a muscular back, the crook of an arm, a stare of eyeballs, a display of teeth that seemed to be swimming there unrelated to a head.

The babble of the camp—a continuous chattering, crooning, and guffawing, blended with the indignant cries of monkeys. It was, she thought, all one threnody of purely natural creatures, of which one species, by some accident of structure and unplanned immunity, had enlarged its powers of experiment and imitation to this point of triumph—the kindling of fires, the eating of cooked food, the gradually enhanced capacity for suffering.

"Are you religious, Parr?" she asked the little man who sat huddled in a faded ulster, sucking at a cold pipe. What she meant was, "Do you believe, poor traveler, that you have a soul—some spark that these black savages share with you perhaps, but that those chattering monkeys lack?"

His pinched, gray countenance took on a timid look.

"I hope so, ma'am," he stammered, and tried to assume an expression of befitting dignity.

"So you can pray without laughing at yourself!"

Her cold voice was replete with the bitterness of those who have got from suffering nothing except rancor, as if at some vast hoax.

Parr was frightened by this glimpse into her disillusionment; and prayer, which he himself had abandoned in his childhood, seemed suddenly worthy of his timid championship. He mumbled something about faith; he had, it appeared, seen some of its achievements. He recalled the faith of strong men, which had accomplished prodigies; the confidence of youth—

"And when one is old and weak? So it is all a physical phenomenon?"

When she had slowly and relentlessly flung this retort at him, for want of a better object for her scorn, she turned her head away. Her eyes fell upon Hamoud who, sitting on his heels near her chair, was watching her face by the light of the talc-sided lanterns that dangled from the tent-fly. But Parr, not utterly crushed, proffered faintly that he knew he could not argue with the likes of her, being without education, having taken life as it came, mostly obeying orders—

"Like Hamoud," she commented. "Hamoud has taken life as it came, obeying the orders of fate. What is your word for resignation, Hamoud? The word that brought you across the ocean into Mr. Verne's service, and then back across the ocean into this place?"

"Mektoub," he vouchsafed, after lowering his eyes so that she should not see the flames in them. "And why not, since none can hope to escape his destiny? We—this whole safari—are here in the palm of God's hand. None knows what God has prepared for us; yet every footprint that we make has been marked before our feet."

On these words, his handsome, lightly bearded visage was touched with a look of beatitude, as though speaking in his sleep he was dreaming of some unrevealed delight.

"Then our will is nothing?"

"Ah, if our will is victorious it is the will of God."

As she made no response, and since the hour called "Isheh" was approaching, he rose and departed to pray.

"Will!" she thought. "No, there is nothing else. Will is the Thing-in-Itself."

The tent curtain fell behind her. She heard Parr's voice call out the command for silence. His words were taken up by the askaris on guard. The camp noises ceased; one heard only the scolding of the monkeys, the drumming of partridges, and the far-off roar of a lion that had eaten his fill. The earth seemed to tremble slightly from that distant sound.

She lay on her bed, under the muslin mosquito net through which strained the pearly gleam of a lantern. Once more it was all an illusion which must be allowed to endure till reality could be gained. For Lilla, the only reality was comprised at this moment into one more meeting with him, in the sight of his living face, in the sound of his voice pronouncing words of forgiveness, of love, perhaps even of remorse. Should she reach him too late for that—find this longing also part of the illusion? The prophesy of Anna Zanidov had gained a still greater power from those deep forests, those sudden apparitions in vaporous clearings of men armed with gleaming spears, and now from the greenish infiltration of the moonlight.

Another lion roared in the depths of the night.

"Why should one fear even these strange forms of death? What has my life been that I should find it precious? What does anything matter except one hour with him? I really ask only a moment. No, all that I fear is death before I find him, before I've won from him a last kiss of understanding and pardon. Will! That shall be my strength and my immunity all the way!"

At last she dozed, to dream that Hamoud had confronted a lion just as the beast was about to pounce upon Madame Zanidov, who, wearing the dress of oxidized silver barbarically painted, crouched in a moonlit clearing. "No, Hamoud, let him have her!" Hamoud, with a smile, stood aside. Then she saw Lawrence approaching, his face and body wrapped in a white cloth. "Too late," he uttered, and was unveiling his face when she sat up in bed with a scream.

Instantly the curtain let in a flash of moonlight. Hamoud stood at the bedside, his hand on the hilt of his dagger. From behind him entered the voices of the guards calling out to one another. Then a murmur of other voices broke like a wave.

"There is nothing here," Hamoud said gently, when he had looked round the tent. As she made no reply, he was about to withdraw; but, kneeling down, instead, he raised the weighted hem of the mosquito net, to take her hand and press it to his brow.

"Sleep always without fear. Till Hamoud is dead no harm shall come to you."

"And dreams?" she moaned, letting her hand go limp in his frozen grasp. "Oh, Hamoud, and dreams?"

In the pearly light, beneath the cloudy net, in the air that was fragrant with the odors of soap and cologne, her upturned countenance and swelling throat gave forth a gleam as if of flesh transfigured by love instead of grief. He felt himself falling through space into a bottomless anguish. He clutched at the thought, "Yet who knows His designs?" and hung in that void alive, his secret still locked in his breast, the delicious pain of her daily condescension still assured to him.

"Ah, if you were of my faith you would have heard that life is all a dream, that there is no reality except paradise and hell."

He rose, and stole away from paradise to hell.

CHAPTER LVI

In the dawn Parr hobbled down the line of yawning porters, checking the reapportionment of burdens. The machilla men, still nibbling at chunks of cold porridge, approached with the hammock swinging from their shoulders.

The safari resumed its march.

Its course was northwest, through jungles of bamboo, round the rims of marshes, past forests filmed with the blue and yellow of convolvulus. The mountains remained apparently as far away as ever, now indistinct behind the heat mist of the lowlands, now disappearing beyond the rainstorms that swept across the plateaux like the robes of colossal gods.

The safari passed leopard traps, graves decked with broken pottery and little banners of rags, then, circling fields of maize, entered a village. The huts stood in a ring inside a rude stockade. The village

headman advanced, bending forward from the waist and scraping first one foot and then the other. He made obeisance before the machilla, in which men of his own kind bore up a delicate, pale prodigy, an incredible creature from another aeon or planet.

He was a wizened, old man with shreds of white wool on his chin. His eyeballs were tintured with yellow. His right shoulder was a mass of long-healed scars from the claws and teeth of some beast. Behind him, against a solid wall of his people, young girls with shaved heads, awe-stricken, held gourds of beer as pink as coral and as thick as gruel.

The village headman revealed the news of the wilds, which had been transmitted from tribe to tribe by native travelers, or by the far-carrying beat of wooden gongs. A safari, passing to the north, had penetrated the land of the Mambava. In that safari there were two white men and many askaris. They had now journeyed through the forests of the people of Muene-Motapa. They were in the granite gorges of the waterfalls.

He pointed toward where the floating mountains rose in a peak that was lightly silvered with snow.

Parr, on the Muscat donkey, looking more haggard than ever in the sunshine, demanded:

"Is it the white man who is called the Bwana Bangana?"

That was the name that had accompanied the news.

The safari marched faster than before, toward the exalted masses that trembled behind the heat. They emerged upon rolling plains remotely dotted with herds of zebras and antelope. In the blinding sky they saw kites, buzzards, and crows, rising from the carcasses that had been left half devoured by noctambulant beasts of prey. At nightfall the lightning flashed above the mountains in yellow sheets or rosy zigzags. Thunder rolled out across the plain in majestic detonations.

Lilla, watching the storm from the doorway of her tent, told herself that he, too, must hear these sounds; that she had come near enough to share with him at any rate this sensation—unless her dread had already been realized, and he had sunk into a sleep from which even such noises could not wake him.

Hamoud appeared at her side. He quoted from the *Uncreated Book*:

"He showeth you the lightning, a source of awe and hope."

Her heart swelled; she turned to that fervent, handsome face beneath the turban a look of peculiar tenderness like a sword thrust, and responded in liquid tones:

"What should I have done without you?"

CHAPTER LVII

Lawrence Teck was not in the gorges of the waterfalls.

While marching in through the lowlands he had been seized with a fever that he had failed to shake off on the plateaux. Every day he had grown a little worse, indeed, till finally the choice had seemed to lie between resignation of his work and serious illness. Turning back toward the coast, he had now regained the forests of the Mambava. Here, in his second night's camp, he had suffered a collapse.

He lay abed in his tent. On the waterproof floor cloth squatted a Mambava warrior, a messenger from King Muene-Motapa.

"Give the word, Bangana. Give the word, Brother of the King. We will carry you to the King's town on a litter as soft as the clouds. The wizards shall work their charms to make you well. The Dances of the Moon are about to begin: it is the time of answered prayers. Your medicines have failed; now try ours. One word, Bangana! Gladden the heart of the King!"

The messenger's almost Semitic visage, upturned in the lamplight, was smeared with ambassadorial signs in yellow paint. On his head he wore a bonnet of marabout feathers that floated like a tiara of gossamer; his arms and legs were armored with copper bangles. In his voice there throbbed a tenderness and pathos, as if he were making vocal the very essence of the king's desire. His eyes even swam in moisture, as he repeated the conjuration:

"Speak! Speak the word!"

Lawrence Teck returned:

"Say this to Muene-Motapa. The medicine that might cure me is far beyond the sea. I thought I might do without it; but see what the lack of it has brought me to. A little chill, a headache—the strong

man rejoicing in the world shakes his shoulders and they are gone. But death in one of its multitude of forms stands at the door of the heart that has ceased to take pleasure in life."

His voice was feeble. His bearded face, bending forward under the net, was blank from exhaustion and unnaturally flushed. His teeth clashed together, as he concluded:

"There is no medicine in this land to cure this sickness."

The messenger groaned, and said compassionately:

"It is sad to see the great deserted by their gods. Yet our gods remain!" He pressed his palms on the floor sheet and leaned forward, his filmy headdress drifting over his glittering eyes. "Surely, Bangana, now is the time to renounce the old, to embrace the true! To cast the spear of scorn and come in behind our shields till you are strong again. We will make you forget! Give yourself up but once to our ancient mysteries! Have you forgotten the Dances of the Moon?"

There rose before Lawrence Teck a vision of an inferno deep in these forests, red from great fires that devoured the moonlight. The scene was peopled by thousands of beings too dreadful, surely, in their appearance and actions, to be human—beings that danced in regiments with foaming lips, that howled out their frenzy amid the roar of drums, that fell right and left, convulsed, insane, cataleptic, while the witch doctors, impassive in their masks, emerged through the smoke of the fires with bloody hands. It was the reign of nature in its densest stronghold; it was that which hovers like an echo over the suave, ordered landscapes of civilization; it was the seductive horror that invades the modern brain in dreams, or in some moment of utter bitterness and despair.

For a moment he still leaned forward, peering into those glittering, dark eyes, though what he saw was something beyond that face—the destruction of all the toil of fifty thousand years, the suicide of a soul. With a shudder he lay back upon the bed.

"Return to the King."

For five minutes the messenger sat motionless; but Lawrence Teck did not speak again. Rising at last, in a fluff of his marabout plumes, he armed himself with his spear and his oval shield covered with an heraldic design.

"The King will weep," he said. "And the little sisters of the King, and all those who loved you, oh, dead man."

He raised the curtain, and stalked away through the camp, clashing superbly between the fires, while the clustered askaris and porters regarded him dismally.

A white man in a fleece-lined coat, who had been waiting in the open for the messenger to depart, entered the tent and sat down beside the bed.

He was Cornelius Rysbroek.

"Shall you try to march to-morrow?"

Lawrence Teck did not reply. There was no strength in him even to move his hand, after that gesture with which he had put from him, though half lost in fever, the ultimate temptation. Cornelius Rysbroek, believing that he saw here defeat instead of victory, smiled.

In his eyes appeared, perfected, the light that had made them exceptional for years, a flash from that psychological lake of fire and brimstone in which his heart had so long been burning up. For the tables were turned at last: the weak one, the inferior, had become the stronger, the better. A thousand wounds seemed to heal themselves in him as he contemplated the prostration of the enemy whom he had hated, just from premonition, even before his appearance. There was true madness in that look, arising from the long privation, the interminable jealousy, the consequent monomania of revenge. "He will die," he reflected, gloating with half-shut eyes, his face, that had once been puerile, now dignified by triumph. "He will never leave this forest," he sang to himself, curling up his mouse-colored mustaches as if at a mirror before sallying out to some pleasure in which there was no sting. But suddenly he remembered that this prostrate rival was still his conqueror, had won what he had not been able to win, would recall, no doubt, in his last moment of consciousness, that love in all its details.

Out of the silent night the spirit of Africa crept into the dim tent, completing his madness.

To one of the little fires came softly Lawrence Teck's tent boy, a turbaned Persian, lemon-hued, with the beak of a parrot and the mouth of a cruel woman. He sat down close beside a Swahili gun bearer, who was frying a mess of white ants.

"Our Bwana has fallen asleep," he uttered in a voice that would have been inaudible to white men. "The other Bwana is sitting by the bed." He waited till the ants were cooked to a turn, then murmured, in a tone like aeolian harp strings caressed by the faintest zephyr, "If our Bwana does not die of the fever the other Bwana will kill him."

The brown Swahili, his pan half raised, turned his face which seemed to have been smashed flat, and gave the speaker a slow, fierce look of inquiry. The Persian breathed:

"With our Bwana's own pistol. As if he had killed himself. I peeped through the curtain. The pistol was hanging from the tent-pole. When he looked at it, and then at our Bwana, I read everything in his mind. But if this also is the will of God it will not happen until some hour when the camp is still—when we are all asleep."

CHAPTER LVIII

The safari that was seeking him marched and camped, marched and camped, marched and camped.

Every afternoon the northeastern monsoon wafted in its sticky moisture, releasing in the jungles the nauseating sweetness of incredible flowers. Smoky-brown flies were seen on the necks of the sheep. The beasts began to sicken and die. The porters ate fresh meat.

But the porters no longer sang. The Wasena, who bore the hammock, muttered to one another dolefully as they shuffled along. All knew by this time that they were not headed for Fort Pero d'Anhaya. Avoiding that last outpost of civilization, they were approaching the country of the Mambava, which lay behind the steamy sunshine, below the blue and lavender battlements of granite, in the uplands covered with forests.

The askaris alone, the lean, khaki-clad Somalia, remained indifferent to this atmosphere of disquiet that was more debilitating to the porters than the fever-laden mists. For these fierce, restless men from the northern deserts were of a breed that found its true contentment in danger and violence. They were cheered, perhaps, by the possibility of bloodshed, sustained by the automatism resulting from their faith, and, despite their disdain of women, inspired by their admiration of this frail personage who was always urging more speed toward the fabulous regions of peril.

As for her, she no longer saw anything except that deep green zone which quivered behind the heat.

"I shall find him not in the gorges, but in those forests."

For the scene of Anna Zanidov's prophecy was laid in a forest.

She lay in the machilla like a tightly drawn bow. Her skin, now ashen, now bright from a touch of fever, stretched over a visage of apparently new contours: round her cheekbones and jaws were suggestions of previously unsuspected strength. Her tender lips had assumed an almost cruel aspect; her sunken eyes, growing ever larger in her diminishing face, were harder than gems. She was the personification of will.

And Parr, sagging, shivering, softly groaning on the back of the Muscat donkey, and Hamoud, ever pacing beside her, and the askaris with their rifle barrels glinting against their fezzes, and the porters and the camp boys, were only the instrument that her will had welded together. They were wraiths obediently advancing her dream of one fleeting moment of triumph over fate. They were nothing, since she had summoned them out of the void of this world by an imperious cry. They were everything; for without them her dream would fade.

Sometimes the green zone of the uplands was lost in a blur not of heat, but of fever. Sharp pains stabbed her temples, and, when the dream became distinct again, she saw black men walking like giants, their heads in the white-hot sky. But just as she had conquered fear, so, by a supreme resolution, she conquered her vertigo, the burning of her emaciated limbs, the quaking of her body which a moment before had been bathed in moisture. At sunset she descended from the machilla to give Hamoud a look of astonishment, while replying:

"No, I am well."

Yet she cast a look of dread at the rising tent, thinking of the hours of sleeplessness, of appalling thoughts on the borderline between nightmares and flashes of fever.

Now and then, as she escaped shivering from the hot bath, she lost hold of her new strength.

"If you knew!" she whimpered.

The lost, safe life rose before her. She saw against the green tent walls the painting by Bronzino, the jeweled perspective of Fifth Avenue at night, Fanny Brassfield's necklace sparkling in the blaze of the opera house. The music of waltzes mingled with the strains of David's tone poem; and she smelled at the same time the tanbark of the horse show, the pastilles at Brantome's, and the flowers surrounding the marble warrior and the marble nymph. She was seized with panic, on realizing the remoteness of security.

"Where am I? Africa! But why?"

She stood motionless, aghast at her inability to remember why she was here.

Hamoud's voice came to her from beyond the curtain:

"There is going to be a shauri, a talk with these porters of yours."

"Ah, my God! What is it now?"

Hamoud cast back at her through the curtain, in a tone of bitterness:

"Rebellion."

She wrapped herself in her robe and cowered on the bed.

Half an hour passed. Hamoud's voice was heard again:

"Madam, all is ready."

She emerged victorious once more, her face stony, her lips compressed, her eyes as cold as ice.

On each side of her tent a clump of askaris stood leaning on their rifles. Over against her chair the porters were aligned in a great semicircle, tribe by tribe. The intervening flames of a camp fire shone richly on the massed bronze bodies and the brutish faces that had turned, for once, inexpressive. As Lilla sat down in her chair, a low murmur passed through their ranks and lost itself in the gilded fronds of palm trees that hung stiffly, like the scenery of a theater, above this spectacle.

Amid the shrilling of crickets a Wasena, the leader of the machilla bearers, spoke first. He was a thin mulatto with filed teeth; the sores on his shoulders were smeared with an ointment made of charcoal and oil. His voice rose explosively, in a sort of childish defiance, persisted for a long while, then suddenly died away. One heard from the depths of the jungle the tittering of a hyena.

An askari spat to the left contemptuously.

The leader of the porters from Tete sprang forward with a cry of exasperation. For this occasion he had bound round his waist the pelt of one of the slaughtered sheep, and had made a head-dress of dragged turaco feathers. He waved his sinewy arms, crouched, postured, tossed back his head. His oration was less coherent than the Wasena's, but more dramatic.

"The first moon since the rains! The season when the Mambava hold their great dances! It is now that their forest will be full of music, while their warriors gather in the place that they know of, to dance to the moon. We will not enter the country of the Mambava while they dance to the moon!"

A hoarse outcry rose toward the multitude of stars:

"We will not enter the country of the Mambava when they dance to the moon!"

The askaris, their fezzes cocked jauntily, impatiently shuffled their sandals of giraffe hide, and hitched up their belts in which were thrust broad-bladed Somali knives.

"They are rabbits," the askaris affirmed. "Even this lady shames them. They are less than women." They turned their fierce eyes toward Lilla, calling out to her, "Here we stand, Ya Bibi!" There was a savage insinuation in that cry.

In order to respond, Parr sat down in a chair, the immemorial symbol of authority. He spoke in Swahili. After each sentence he paused, so that his words might be translated by the headmen of the porters into their tribal dialects. His voice rose faintly, almost ineffectually contending against the sounds of the insects. He looked very small and ghastly in the firelight; he was sick to his bones, feeling just as he had felt before the black-water fever. The great semicircle of hostile eyes perceived all his weakness. In the opinion of his antagonists his face bore the seal of death. This representative of the white-skinned super-race was revealed as weaker than they—no trace of the white man's conquering will was to be discerned in his feeble countenance. Why listen any more?

Their leaders no longer troubled to translate his words.

He went on, however, with the last of his strength holding fast to the thought of paying his debt in full.

In that land, he declared, none would dare to hurt the friends of Muene-Motapa's friend. They should return telling how they had passed unharmed, even honored, through the country of the Mambava. He promised them double pay—while groping for some further argument, he seemed to be sinking in upon himself. His face drooped forward.

From the horde of porters came scattered shouts:

"Enough! The shauri is over! In the morning we return!"

"What do they say, Hamoud?"

"They say that in the morning they will return to the coast."

She sat stunned.

The orator from Tete moved with a kind of spasmodic dancing gait toward Parr. Never thus had the white man's genius lain prostrate before him. He was the symbol of a race abruptly exalted from inferiority to dominance. There came over him a frenzy of pride and malice; it was the realization of the dreams that burn the brains of all the dark people of the earth. "Do you hear?" he howled, and brandished his fists as though about to strike that lowered head.

An askari glided forward reversing his rifle. There was a cracking sound as the gun butt struck the orator from Tete in the middle of the forehead. With a drowsy look the smitten man sank down as gently as if falling into a mound of feathers, and deliberately composed himself in sleep, his brown face against the brown earth.

In all that throng there was suddenly not the slightest movement, and no sound was to be heard except the trill of the insects.

She was standing, staring from the prostrate body to the mass of porters, whose eyes were fixed upon the victim with one look, of mournful awakening. Then they saw her whom they had forgotten, or, in their transport, considered negligible. But when they had read her face it was they who were frightened.

"You! You! To stop me!"

And a homicidal gesture completed her appearance of fury.

"Wallahi!" the askaris called out to one another. "She has given the order!"

They spread out to right and left with a clicking of their rifle locks; they drove the porters together, close to the fire. A soft moan arose from the huddled crowd. They had seen the whips of hippopotamus hide, long and flexible, translucent in the firelight like streams of amber.

As the lash described a flourish above the first outstretched back she turned away to her tent. Hamoud was before her, raising the curtain. He said:

"They will speak no more about the coast when we are through with them."

CHAPTER LIX

At dawn he came to tell her that Parr had the black-water fever.

The sick man was unconscious when they sent him off, in the machilla, toward Fort Pero d'Anhaya, with three of the askaris and fifteen of the porters. They soon disappeared into a jungle of spear grass, above which the sunrise was spreading its bands of smoky gold and rose. The chosen porters forgot their lacerated bodies; a song floated back from them to those who must still press onward.

"I have killed him, Hamoud."

"Who knows? It is true that he is old and has had this fever before. But we do not need him. Maybe he has fulfilled his destiny. And we have not." In the glory of the sunrise he turned to meditate over her thin, tortured face. He observed, with a lyrical sadness, "What is life? A running this way and that after mirages. A thirsting for sweet wells of which one has heard in a dream. Does one ever taste those waters? Are they sweet or bitter? Perhaps this is the secret—that to taste them is death."

The safari marched on. She rode the Muscat donkey, which was dying from the bites of tsetse flies.

CHAPTER LX

Next morning she marched afoot in the blaze of the sun. Trailing thorns pierced her ankles; the stipa shrubs showered her with little barbs, and from another bush was detached an invisible pollen that penetrated her clothing and burned her skin. At the noon halt they made a hammock of tent cloth, in which she was carried all the afternoon by four porters. At nightfall they saw, across a valley, the edge of the Mambava forests, the towering tree trunks banked with huge thickets and bound together by nets of vines.

They camped in the valley, where a stream flowed through a tangle of indigo plants. The warm bath steamed in her tent; the fresh evening garments were laid out; everything was the same in this canvas

ark that proceeded farther and farther into the wilds with its atmosphere of rude luxury intact. When she emerged from the tent, in her polo coat and suede mosquito boots, the table glistened with its china and glassware.

She sat looking at the black forest.

"He is there!"

But she was very tired.

Ah, to lie down, grope no longer for her will, drift away into a region where there was no love or remorse, sleep forever! Why should she feel like this with the goal so near at last, unless from a premonition that all her efforts were useless?

Never before had this land and its phenomena appeared so cruel, so perfectly the manifestation of a superhuman force that clothed its malignancy in a primordial splendor. Here, she reflected, was the quintessence of earthly beauty inextricable from the quintessence of horror; here was the source of all that she had trusted elsewhere in countless perfidious disguises and refinements.

Poisonous in some subtle element behind its visible vapors, it corrupted not only the flesh, but also the souls that had emerged elsewhere into forms of affection and compassion. Two nights ago even she had greeted the crack of the whips with the furious thought, "Strike again!"—and now there stole into her brain, together with the light hallucinations of fever, a hatred of these cringing black men who for a moment had dared to stand before her as antagonists. The evening breeze brought to her, from the porters' fires, the odor of savage bodies that had labored and been beaten for the cause of love; and her disgust was tinctured with the fierce intolerance of all those impressionable beings from what is called civilization, whom Africa had debased—or else, made "natural" again.

Through the buzz of insects there came from the forest, gradually blending over wide distances, a gentle throbbing. The porters lifted their round heads beyond the fires. The sharp profiles of the askaris were motionless. A wail floated over the camp:

"The drums of the Mambava!"

The throbbing died away. But soon it began again in the north, then in the south, and swelled to a continuous rumbling.

On the edge of the sky the moon appeared, blood red, nearly full.

There was a rush of feet, a scuffle in the bushes, and two askaris advanced into the firelight, dragging between them a creature that they seemed to have plucked out of some grotesque dream.

He was an albino. His gray skin, because of its lack of pigmentation, was splotched with eczema; his wool was a dirty, yellowish white; his features were permanently distorted because of his lifelong efforts to keep the light from paining his pink eyes. The askaris threw this monstrosity upon his face before Lilla's chair. He lay moaning and feebly moving his hands, as if he were caressing the earth.

Suddenly he sat up on his haunches. His body jumped from the beating of his heart. He fixed on Lilla a look that was the utmost caricature of terror and entreaty.

An askari let out a neighing laugh:

"So this is one of the dangerous Mambava!"

But the albino was not one of the Mambava.

He was a man of the Manyazombe, who dwelt in the north—an exile, a solitary wanderer, a lost soul. Who knew what aversion, what indefinable dread, his dissimilarity had produced in his own people, what village calamities he had been blamed for, what persecutions he had suffered? For some reason he had fled from his own tribe, to be greeted at the outskirts of alien villages with showers of spears. He had learned to reciprocate the horror of mankind. Then he had dwelt in the jungle, joining the furtive beasts. But still, moved by an obscure, invincible need, he crept in thickets from which he might watch the life of human beings, feasting his eyes on the fire-splashed bodies of men and women, listening to the songs and the laughter, filling his nostrils with the savor of his kind, as a damned spirit might creep back to the warmth of life from a desolate hereafter.

But what did he see now? Was she who sat before him human or divine—one of those who must be placated by strict deeds, by charms or the blood of animals and captives; some spirit of the jungle that had made herself visible, in her marvelous pallor and uncanny costume, amid a retinue of mortals inured to her magic?

"Tell him that he is safe," she said, with a movement of loathing.

Falling forward, he embraced her boots with his hands.

A porter who understood his language was summoned to question him. The albino had just now crept through the country of the Mambava. He had not dared to linger there; for on all the forest trails bands of warriors were moving in toward the rendezvous where, as soon as the moon was full, they

would hold the dances. Yet in the midst of those forests he had seen the camp of white men.

"He has seen it!" she cried, leaning forward to devour with her eyes that hideous and precious instrument of fate. "Hamoud, he has seen him! He can guide us there!" And with a look of tenderness she murmured, "You will show us the way? Ah, I will give you—I will give you——"

She saw herself pouring gold over the pariah.

He bowed his head till his dirty, yellowish poll nearly touched his gray knees that were covered with callouses. Amid the close-packed, silent audience a smothered phrase rose to the ears of the interpreter. Hamoud, turning away his face, cast forth the words:

"Too late."

For the albino, while creeping round that camp in the Mambava forests, had heard of a strange thing, of the shooting of one of the white men in the night. Those discussing the matter had not known how it had happened, since they had all been asleep. The white man was then dying. By this time, no doubt, he was dead.

She sank back as if she, too, had received a bullet. But after a time, during which that dark throng had not stirred, she rose and entered her tent. There Hamoud found her standing, swaying slightly, with closed eyes. An invisible hand had brushed across her countenance, effacing the last traces of her beauty.

"Do we still go on?" breathed Hamoud.

Without opening her eyes she returned, in a loud voice:

"He shall not die till I get there."

Hamoud's look of sadness gave place to a look of peace.

CHAPTER LXI

At daybreak the safari entered the forest.

Two askaris went first, guarding the albino. Next, since the forest trail was too narrow for hammock travel, Lilla came afoot with Hamoud, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling no physical weariness or pain. Behind her the rest of the askaris herded along the porters.

The huge tree trunks sprang up toward a firmament of somber green, from which descended dense festoons of vines. Through this twilight flitted birds of brilliant plumage and long-haired monkeys. The place had a morose, nefarious beauty, like the forest in the prophecy of Anna Zanidov.

Now and then a glade appeared, hung with flowers of mustard yellow or diaphanous purple. Then again the tunnel-like trail, the green twilight, the flapping of carmine wings, and a shaft of sunshine piercing the canopy to rest upon the gnawed bones of a forest deer. Here and there stood clumps of brown reeds, without twigs or buds, as though a band of warriors had buried their spear blade down in the earth before vanishing into the thickets. But one saw no faces except those of the monkeys.

They camped in a glade beside a spring. The drums filled the night with their throbbing, which seemed part of the throbbing in Lilla's feverish head. The askaris kept double guard; but at dawn eleven of the porters were missing.

Ahead of the marching safari, in a clearing spotted with large, dirty-white blossoms, six black men sat motionless round the ashes of a camp fire. They were watchers posted here to see that no strangers entered their land at the season of the dances.

Although they could not take part in those mysteries they wore the full dance regalia. They were crowned with towering shakoes of black-and-white monkey hair, fastened under their chins with beaded straps, and bristling with egrets. Their bodies were smeared with indigo and blotched with large discs of white paint; their faces were painted white, but their noses were covered with soot. They wore not a scrap of clothing; but around their necks and on their arms and legs they had a wealth of talismans—tiny figures fashioned from clay, from iron, from copper and from stones, in which one might discern the characteristics of Phoenician images debased by thousands of years of savage inspiration. In their painted, plumed, bedizened immobility they appeared inhuman, or perhaps less than human—the personifications of Africa's blind and vivid soul, the full efflorescence of this gloomy, white-spotched clearing.

They raised their heads as a seventh, crowned and painted as they were, stood forth from a curtain of vines. On his left arm he wore a shield covered with black-and-white patterns; above the shield rim glittered the blades of three spears.

He described what he had seen.

He told of a train of dark-skinned men, guided by one with unexceptional features, but with yellowish wool and a skin that resembled the belly of a dead fish. These intruders served a personage such as had never been seen. For she—if indeed a woman—was tall, with a face the color of the highest mountain peaks, and eyes gleaming like strange stones. She walked as if in a trance; but in her trancelike face was a cold grief, or maybe a cold fury, like that of some goddess whose taboos had been broken, and who was marching to vengeance.

They sat awe-stricken, filled with that dread of the supernatural which possesses the savage who is confronted with anything unheard of. Besides, the spell of the dances was upon them, remote though they were from that scene—the far-off frenzies that were preparing had begun to trouble their nerves. But at last their leader rose. Moved by the mysticism of the season, when every act must take on a liturgical quality, he chanted the question:

"Who is the woman with the cold face who enters our country at the time of the Dances of the Moon?"

All his companions repeated his question in a low, singing tone, touching their amulets, and raising their whitened visages toward the interlaced branches and vines.

The leader's high, tremulous voice was heard again:

"Is it a woman of flesh and blood; or is it the Lady of the Moon?"

It was the genius of the ancient Phoenicians, the spirit of Astoreth, surviving distorted through all these ages in the depths of the jungle, exerting its spell.

But a look of cunning entered his blood-shot eyes; and his flexible mask of white was creased by a smile. He cried out in a new voice:

"If she is the Lady of the Moon our spears will not hurt her!"

He bounded into the air, stamped his feet, shook his headdress, and crouched in an attitude of war.

"But if she is flesh and blood our spears will tell us so!"

All leaped to their feet. Their brandished spears made nimbuses over their heads; and this time their response was like the baying of hounds. Then, one by one, stepping lightly, they slipped through the curtain of vines.

CHAPTER LXII

Trees, trees, trees. They were colossal, draped in moss and lichen, ferns growing from the crooks of their limbs, above the impenetrable thickets of broad-leaved plants from which came the tinkle of rills. Here and there had fallen across the narrow corridor a tree trunk riddled by ants; as Lilla stepped over it blue scorpions scuttled away.

Hour after hour there floated before her the fezzes and khaki-covered backs of the two leading askaris, trim, narrow, jaunty backs flanking the leprous shoulders of the albino. Now and again Hamoud, a robed figment always beside her, addressed her in an unintelligible language.

"Dying. Dying. Dying."

Too late, perhaps, even for that last embrace of glances, that moment of pardon and love which was all that she had asked. Closed eyes, sealed lips, a simulacrum to mock her will, left behind by the spirit that had gone where she and the safari could not follow.

"All the same, I shall not be far behind you! My spirit, when it has shaken off this flesh, will travel faster than yours, on the wings of a supreme necessity. I shall find you!"

She stopped short, bewildered by a new hallucination—a flash of silvery light across her face. She saw one of the leading askaris kneel down and stretch himself upon his face, as if trying to press against the ground a thin shaft that seemed to be lying crosswise under his chest. Then she heard an explosion, and perceived a film of smoke full of horizontal gleams—the blades of flying spears.

She had a fleeting impression of Hamoud, his arm outstretched, his hand spitting fire. Beyond him the albino vanished in mid-air. The second askari, his rifle lowered, was staring in vague surmise at his breast, from which protruded a piece of polished wood. At that moment she found herself surrounded by khaki-clad forms all moving with catlike grace. The dark faces under the fezzes were changed by the fervor of battle; the bared teeth shone out beside the locks of the rifles. These thin, hard bodies, buffeting her about, formed round her a rampart from which the blades of steel were answered by

blades of flame.

Hamoud rose from the ground at her feet, drawing his dagger. An askari grunted and sat down with a thud. Then she saw that they were in the midst of a glade. Among the bushes flitted the pattern of a shield, a clump of egrets, a whitened visage that seemed to lack a nose. The askaris' rifles rose, spouted fire, sank down with a click, rose, crashed again. Silence fell.

The blue veil of smoke rose slowly, all in one piece.

Then, without warning, came the charge.

She became aware of an incredible apparition—a sort of naked harlequin, magnified by a towering headdress, sailing high, twisting over his shield like a pole vaulter over a pole, coming down asprawl in a bed of crimson flowers. Another followed, crouching—or else this was only a swiftly advancing shield, topped by a tuft of egrets. But from one side of the shield darted out along, indigo arm, releasing a spear: an askari leaned against Lilla, coughed, and slipped to the ground. The advancing shield doubled up, to reveal a warrior who, with a somersault, a rattle of amulets, a blur of broad polka dots, lay flat, his face blown away.

More shields were rushing upon the guns, however.

The Mambava, shot through and through, feeling death upon them, maintained their momentum long enough to drive their weapons through the khaki jackets, or, at the least, to go down with their teeth buried in the riflemen's necks, as if that draught of blood might reanimate them. The wrestlers sank to earth inextricably mingled, a fist perhaps sticking up above the tangle and slowly relinquishing a broad-bladed Somali knife.

One remained apart, some dozen yards away, shot through the hips, but still dragging himself forward. From his open mouth, yawning black in the whitened face, issued roars like those of a crippled lion, as with a lion's courage he still came on, his legs trailing, his body scraping the soil, a spear in one clenched paw.

Lilla stood paralyzed, alone before that inexorable advance.

For the rampart of askaris had become a circle of dead men, expressing with their last gestures a deep desire to be remerged with this rich, dark, ancient earth.

But all at once, as though a bit of blue sky had fallen into the glade, there appeared between Lilla and the crawling warrior, a figure of trailing blue robes, bent double, running. It was Hamoud, his turban gone, his cheek smeared with loam, one shoulder of his robe stained a deep violet.

Clapping his sandaled foot upon the spear blade, he seized the Mambava by his plume of egrets. The painted head was dragged back. The Zanzibar dagger shone through the ribbons of smoke.

Her mouth twisted in abnormal shapes as she struggled to cry out. "Hamoud!" she screamed at last, raising her arms as high as she could, and trying to tear her gaze away from that spectacle. The Arab's pose, as he bent over his enemy, was a frightful burlesque of solicitude. How many times had she not seen him bending thus over David, maybe to smooth his pillow? And now, against the colonnade of gloomy trees, there was something sacrificial in that tableau—the blue robe, the wet dagger, the plumed head pulled back, with glazed eyes fixed on the woman who stood rigid, her arms upstretched, transformed from the giver of life into the giver of death.

She fled, stumbled, stood still in the entrance to the back-trail. In that leafy tunnel, as far as the eye could see, was no one living or dead. The porters, the tent boys, all were gone in a stampede for safety. The baggage lay scattered among the fern beds. She saw bundles of green canvas, chop boxes, rags, bursting sacks of grain. Beside a mossy rock lay her dressing case smashed open, its mirror, brushes, and vials trampled into the mud.

"Ah, my mirror is broken."

She wandered through the wreckage, uttering peals of laughter.

CHAPTER LXIII

The light of the full moon, penetrating the high canopy of leaves, illuminated the contorted vines that hung motionless in mid-air like pythons of silver. Here, miles beyond the place of battle, apart from the trail, in a covert that seemed made for them, the woman and the man sat resting, she on a mound of moss as soft as a pile of velvet cushions, he at her feet. A moonbeam rested on her loosened hair and her dress that was torn to tatters. She raised her head as the sound of the drums came to her from far away.

To-night there was a new accent in that throbbing, a wilder cadence, a suggestion of tumult, a hint of the infernal. In her fancy she perceived a multitude of naked, painted figures dancing in the glamor of great fires.

A shudder passed through her from head to foot, as she said:

"Now you will confess that we have come into a place where God does not exist."

He cast round her his blood-stained robe. Through a rent in his white kanzu, which was glued to his body, his shoulder appeared, covered with a black encrustation.

"Wherever we turn," he answered, "there is the face of God."

"So you still believe? You could even pray, perhaps?"

By way of response, casting up his dark eyes, he pronounced the Fatihah, his low voice mingling with the mutter of the drums:

"In the name of God, the Compassionate! Praise belongeth to God, the Lord of the Worlds, the King of the Day of Doom. Thee do we serve, and of Thee do we ask aid. Guide us in the straight path, the path of those to whom Thou hast been gracious, not of those with whom Thou art angered, or of those who stray. Amen."

"Delusion!" she moaned.

His gaze embraced her in pity. His precisely modeled face, still so youthful despite his delicate beard, and almost spiritually handsome in the moonlight, yearned toward her as he returned, with a caressing gentleness:

"Yes, surely this present life is only a play, a pastime. This world, and all in it, are shadows cast upon the screen of eternity. But God is real. Everything may go to destruction, but not the face of God. Ah," he sighed, "if only the Lord had opened your heart to Islam, had willed that you might feel the Inner Light! No matter what may happen, there is peace." He dreamed sadly for a time, then said, "Fair-seeming to men are women; but God—goodly the home with him!" And he averted his head from her, as though from a temptation to apostasy.

Something moved in the bushes. Hamoud raised a rifle from the moss into his lap. Amid the leaves two balls of green fire appeared and disappeared. It was a leopard that had peeped out at them.

The drum music swelled through the forest.

"To-morrow they will find us," she reflected.

"Meanwhile we live in this flesh, subject to its beliefs, still able to trust in its seeming powers of delight."

So, after a long hush, he took from his bosom a little glass bottle of square surfaces enameled with gold, uncorked it, and held it out to her. There came to her nostrils the odor of her own perfume, which she had worn in a lost world.

"Clothe yourself in this sweetness," he whispered. "Touch it once more to your temples, your hair, your lips. Let it float about you like a veil that covers a beauty remembered from old dreams. These rags will become cloth of gold on the body of the Sultana of Sultanas. I shall sit while still alive in those gardens beneath whose shades the rivers flow—those charming abodes that are in the Garden of Eden. This, and not Paradise, shall be the great bliss."

She poured the few drops of perfume into her palms, and held out her hands.

"Ah, Hamoud—"

"Do not speak," he protested, catching her hands in his. "It is this moment for which I became a servant, did things that you will never know of, and followed you here."

She sat in the blood-stained robe, in the dark forest vibrating from the drums and rustling with stealthy beasts, lost, bereft of beauty and faith, yet aware of one more miracle—realizing that even now, out of her poverty, she could still bestow happiness.

CHAPTER LXIV

At daybreak they went on.

With his shoulders bowed under a distended sack and a canvas water bottle, and with his rifle at

trail, he guided her feeble steps along the path. Now and then he besought her to rest. She shook her head.

Bees hummed above them in the festoons of flowers. Purple parrots with scarlet crests went fluttering away. At noon they paused, ate some biscuits, then pressed ahead, she driven by her obsession and he, as he believed, by the purposes of Allah.

Just as a rosy warmth was invading the upper foliage, Hamoud pushed her from him, and struck at the ground with his gun butt. He had stepped upon a puff adder.

He sat down to examine his ankle, on which four tiny pinpricks were visible. He looked up with a fixed smile.

There it lay, a little, crushed reptile, a trivial fragment of matter, its triangular head flattened out, its scales of pinkish gray, black, slate, and lemon yellow already turning dull. Yet the man, a rational being, with power for good as well as evil, for love as well as hatred, was even now dying from it. But his face expressed the fortitude that was at the same time the blessing and the curse of his religion, as he said to her:

"Go. I do not wish you to see me die this death."

She knelt down to peer at those almost imperceptible punctures.

"From that?"

As she spoke he seized his leg above the knee, to choke back the first excruciating pang. Rocking backward and forward, he began to repeat scattered texts from the Koran:

"The recompense of the life to come is better, for those who have believed and feared God——" With a groan he let go of his leg and clutched at his abdomen. He gasped, "Adorned shall they be with golden bracelets and with pearls, and their raiment shall be of silk—— Go! go! Oh, my star, I do not want you to see me die this death!" He arched his back, then lay flat, his skin colorless, bedewed with a sudden moisture. "Praise be to God, who hath allowed release from all this, my Master, the Knowing, the Wise! Into gardens beneath whose

CHAPTER LXV

Night was falling: it was the time when the beasts of prey begin to stir from their lairs. Sitting beside the semblance of Hamoud, she examined in the last of the twilight the well-worn Koran. She hurled the book from her. It was swallowed by the gloom. "You have won," she thought, regarding the murky thickets that were hung with morbid blossoms, the trees that remained a labyrinth even while they dissolved in the night.

In her progress hither she had cast off, one by one, all her repugnances and terrors, all her proud and luxurious impulses, all her charms. Nothing had remained except a love that expected and desired no physical rewards, and a power of will that she had conjured up apparently out of nothing.

Now both will and love lay vanquished.

The drums were not yet beating. Silence filled the forest that should have been alive with little furtive noises. Nature, of which this place was the core and utmost manifestation, seemed to brood with bated breath.

She began to speak, urgently, seductively:

"When they come you will wake up and protect me, Hamoud? You love me, and I once read somewhere that love can be stronger than death. But now sleep; get back your strength. I'll keep watch. I'm not afraid; for I have only to reach out my hand to touch you."

She touched the cold forehead and muttered, "How chilly you are!" and threw over the body of the martyr the torn joho, which she had been wearing round her shoulders. There was long silence. The whole forest sighed softly, as if weary of waiting.

"What did you say, Hamoud? A play of shadows? And above it a permanence that you call the face of God? What queer things your God must see in this shadow play of ours!"

She laughed indulgently, then caught her breath. The darkness was filled with an amazing sight.

Before her a great pyramid of bodies rose toward an apex surrounded by flashes of pink lightning—the seething bodies of all humanity, and of all the animals and reptiles of the earth. Each struggled to extricate itself from the rest, to surmount its neighbors, to wriggle toward the apex. The bare breasts of women, whose handsome ball gowns were torn and covered with mud, strained to be free from the

enwrapping trunks of elephants, and the coils of pythons. The torsoes of dusky savages and the limbs of white men writhed under the fangs of lions and hyenas, which were transfixed by spears, or lacerated by wounds that they had inflicted on one another. The countless faces exposed on that quaking mountain of flesh, male and female, light and dark, fair and hideous, brutish and sensitive, expressed one look of stupid and yet agonized desire—all eyes were turned upward toward the summit wreathed with lightning. There those who had just gained their goal, lightly touched by the tips of the rose-colored bolts, sank back inanimate, went tumbling down the slope with astonishment frozen on their faces, scattering broadcast from their hands a cascade of treasures—jewels, scraps of paper, purses, images of gold and ivory, wreaths of laurel or of lilies, scepters, and objects in which no one could have discovered any meaning or any worth.

But what was the goal toward which this mass of flesh was striving so frantically? Above the apex of the pyramid, amid the sheen of the lightning, was revealed a vast figure, naked and indeterminate, dim and yet seeming of a denser texture than the most abysmal beasts, a figure at the same time human and serpentine, that twisted in attitudes of human anguish, yet appeared, like a maddened serpent, to be stinging itself to death.

The whole vision vanished.

"Hamoud! Hamoud! Now I'm afraid!"

But she could not wake the protector. She was alone.

"God, then!"

And in one last flash of distracted irony:

"If I called God in Arabic?"

She had an idea that the silently brooding forest was smiling in the darkness.

Yes, she felt, alone; since even the God of Hamoud could not be aware of this world, in which everything desired by the senses, or apprehensible by them, was going to destruction—so futile a tragedy, so contemptible a fleeting dream, a nothingness of which the miserable woman seemed to see herself, at last, as the most insignificant part.

"But I have cast it off, left it all behind me! You must hear me! You shall hear me!"

When her voice, a thin blade of sound, pierced the silence of the black forest, without a premonitory thud the rumble of the drums began, as though the roused spirit of the jungle were trying to drown out this cry. The drum music swelled louder and louder in the breathless night, its mingled rhythms combining into a thunder. But once more the cry, "Hear me!" rose to contest with that demoniacal uproar.

When she had remained motionless for a while with upturned face, weariness rolled down upon her like an avalanche.

The moonlight, creeping through the tangles, covered her prostrate body. She was dreaming that Anna Zanidov stood before her in the barbarically painted evening gown. She sat up with a bound. Hands had embraced her feet. A grayish form crouched before her.

The albino had heard her.

CHAPTER LXVI

Sitting back upon his heels, hugging against his breast a small bow and a handful of arrows, the albino scrutinized the fallen divinity. Yes, by some pass of magic she had been changed into a helpless human being, full of human despair. The poor pariah contemplated her in her abasement from an eminence of pity.

He rose with an uncouth gesture of invitation. He guided her through the mottled labyrinth. Stumbling over the roots, bursting her way through the vines, she pressed after the bent figure whose very loathsomeness now seemed precious to her.

He had found the lost path. He crept forward more quickly, halted at last, and pointed. Ahead there expanded a wide sheen of moonlight, in the midst of which she discerned a man standing like a statue, a fez on his head and a rifle over his arm.

The albino was gone.

A challenge rang out as she stood forth on the edge of the clearing. Beyond the sentinel she saw red embers and tents, rising black skulls, and agitated fezzes. But in the midst of a broad pool of

moonlight was spread a tent cloth through which appeared the outline of a body.

She sank down upon her knees, turned back the tent cloth from the inscrutable face.

It was the face of Cornelius Rysbroek, who, in the dead of night, beside his sleeping rival, while drawing the pistol from the holster, had been shot in the back.

She perceived, on the curtain of a tent before her, a hand that thrust back the folds, a hand that moved, that lived. Under the tent fly emerged a man cadaverous from fever, to gaze at another chimera, of tatters and gaunt pallor, in which he found at last a resemblance to the woman he had loved. Though Lawrence was sure that this could not be reality, life bubbled up in him as she drew nearer. He found somehow the power to stand firm, to hold her fast when she sagged down in his arms.

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